

The Growing of America 1789–1848

SECOND EDITION



RAYMOND H. ROBINSON

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The Growing of America:
1789–1848

SECOND EDITION

Vincent P. DeSantis
General Editor

To the memory of
my father and mother
and
for Jane, Norbert, and Ted,
who know why

Author's Preface

America grew in the years from 1789 to 1848. From a tiny republic of thirteen states that hugged the seaboard, the nation became one of thirty states with boundaries touching the Pacific as well as the Atlantic. At the same time population increased more than five-fold. Territories acquired by peaceful means and as a result of war awaited organization and statehood.

The nation's government, managed by political parties, grew also — in structure and program. What it did satisfied all of the people some of the time, but the days of dissatisfaction were frightening and threatening to Unionists. As the period closed, new anger augured unwell for the future of the young republic.

This book, one of a series of six covering the history of America, traces the political life of the people in the first five chapters. The next chapter focuses on American society, its composition and its institutions. Four regional chapters follow, each one emphasizing the economic complexion of the sections. The book concludes with an examination of the sources and manifestations of the national spirit, which held the Union together as centrifugal forces tried to tear it asunder.

Revising a book which I wrote in 1971 has been more pleasure than pain. I was pleased to be able to correct a few errors which had eluded the copy editor and me, but not my students who read the book closely enough to uncover deficiencies. I had opportunity to add fresh material to the tale of America in the nearly sixty years after 1789. And, most of all, I could examine the flood of books which appeared in the nearly two decades since I put finishing touches to the original manuscript. My two graduate assistants, MaryAnn Campbell and Vincent Brady, helped me plow through twenty years of reviews to compile significant titles for the bibliographic updating. The departmental secretaries, Dian

Boutilier and Jane Heine, cheerfully typed portions of the new manuscript.

I dedicate this second edition to the memory of my parents and to Jane S. Mervine, Norbert L. Fullington, and Theodore L. Doherty III. The first was my teacher and mentor in a Pennsylvania high school during the Second World War; the second has been my colleague at Northeastern University since 1955; and the third was my student in several courses in the 1980s. All are special friends who bring me great joy.

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The Federalist Decade

On 30 April 1789, ten months after the Constitution was ratified, George Washington was inaugurated as first president in a simple ceremony in New York City. Months before, citizens of the states had elected members of the House of Representatives, and state legislatures had selected senators and determined how members of the electoral college were to be chosen. In some states the legislatures chose electors; in others popular election by district or general ticket occurred. When Congress counted the electoral votes, Washington was certified as the unanimous choice, and John Adams, the rotund lawyer from Braintree, Massachusetts who had nominated Washington to lead the Revolutionary armed forces fourteen years back, was named vice-president.

The college's verdict surprised no one, including Washington. He had already listed arguments against his becoming president — age, a desire to improve Mount Vernon's productivity, and his decision to retire from public life — but obedience to his country's call sent him from the beloved plantation on a week-long triumphal tour to New York.

Another week elapsed before the inauguration took place, and Washington filled his days with visits to members of Congress. Pennsylvania's Senator Maclay noted that Washington was the "greatest man in the world," but later in the week the legislator's

democratic sensibilities were pricked by Adams' silly concern for protocol at the inauguration, and when finally he watched the new president deliver his address, Maclay qualified his earlier testimony about greatness with diary entries about Washington's trembling and ungainly gesturing.

With the first president properly installed in office, Congress next faced the task of creating the first three executive departments. State and War came first, indicating the significance of foreign relations, and the Treasury Department was charged with collecting and keeping moneys needed to support the new federal government. In the fall Congress established the offices of postmaster general and attorney general, but departments of the Post Office and Justice appeared much later in the nineteenth century. The first Congress also formally established a Supreme Court and circuit and district courts as well.

For the eleven men to fill the principal executive and judicial posts, Washington turned to New York for the chiefs of Treasury (Hamilton), Post Office (Osgood), and the Supreme Court (Jay); to Virginia for the secretary of state (Jefferson), the attorney general (Randolph), and an associate justice (Blair); and to Massachusetts for secretary of war (Knox) and another associate justice (Cushing). Pennsylvania and the two Carolinas each provided an associate justice (Wilson, Iredell, and Rutledge). Almost all of the appointees had favored ratification of the Constitution — Iredell had led the fight for approval in North Carolina, and Hamilton and Jay (along with Madison) had authored *The Federalist*. Madison, who had done so much to make the Constitution a reality, was named to no executive or judicial post, but he served for a time as Washington's chief lieutenant in the House of Representatives.

Though the heads of departments were responsible to the president, the secretary of the treasury was required by law to submit reports to Congress. Shortly after assuming his duties Hamilton prepared a report on the public credit, which he presented to Congress in January 1790. To start fresh Hamilton urged an exchange of new federal bonds for old securities of the Continental and Confederation Congresses held in America and abroad. He further suggested that the national government assume the debts of the states, thereby attaching the states and their creditors to the new government. James Madison's arguments against funding the old

national debt questioned the wisdom of a plan that rewarded speculators and forgot the original holders, but Hamilton's views prevailed in August. At the same time Congress agreed to assume the state debts, promising to move the national capital to the South to placate states that had paid most of their debt.

Late in 1790 Hamilton presented a second report to Congress. He urged Congress to charter a bank that would be a mixed enterprise. Fundamentally private in ownership and operation, it would be partly capitalized and directed by the national government. Authorized to serve as a depository for private customers and for the government as well, it could use the deposits as the basis for loans in the form of bank notes. Opponents of the Hamilton bank built their case on constitutional grounds that Congress lacked power to charter corporations, but the Hamiltonians countered by relying on the "necessary and proper" or "elastic" clause in the Constitution. After two months of debate the Bank of the United States was chartered for twenty years.

The third report, presented early in 1791, evoked little debate, and Congress followed Hamilton's suggestion when a bimetallic monetary system of silver and gold at a ratio of 15 to 1 was authorized in 1792.

Hamilton's final report — on manufactures — fared less well. Convinced that the extractive-commercial economy of America needed development, Hamilton called for federal programs to stimulate the rise of manufacturing industry. Foremost of the proposed measures was his call for a protective tariff, which would replace the purely revenue features of earlier legislation. Agrarian sentiment in Congress prevented passage of the plan to make the nation more urban and industrial.

Revenues gathered by Hamilton's Treasury Department to pay for goods and services needed by government included tariff and tonnage duties legislated before the secretary took office and an excise tax and a new land act proposed by Secretary Hamilton himself. Shortly before the first Congress ended, the tax on whisky was passed, amid a storm of protest from back-country farmers who doubled as manufacturers when they distilled grains into alcohol. The excise tax seemed very like the hated Stamp Act passed by Parliament a generation before. When taxed farmers refused to pay the duties, President Washington ordered the "rebels" to cease their

activity and accompanied militia called into service by him part of the way across Pennsylvania. Hamilton went all the way, acting in his dual role as head of Treasury and War (after the resignation of Henry Knox). When the army reached western Pennsylvania, the rebellion evaporated, but Hamilton was convinced that dangerous individuals and groups were plotting the republic's downfall.

Modifications of the Confederation's land ordinance established a credit system and doubled the price of the real estate. Congress passed the new land law of 1796 several months after the young but tired Hamilton had retired from public service to practice law. The first chief of the Treasury was also one of the ablest ever to serve. His imaginative plans to make the national government strong and the national economy diversified and prosperous became the principal features of Washington's domestic policy.

Problems of domestic nature were matched by irritating and perplexing foreign problems that gave Washington and his advisers no rest. Indians, treated as "nations" since the days of British rule, were restive as whites advanced to the frontier. Britain, still smarting under the defeat of 1783, tested and tried even the pro-English sympathies of some of Washington's ministers. France, involved in revolutionary matters since the year of Washington's inauguration, forced Americans to put aside pleasant memories of French aid during America's own Revolution. And Spain, in control of both banks of the Mississippi at its mouth, caused anxious days at the seat of government.

The most difficult Indian problem arose with the tribes in Ohio. When Indians reacted to raiding parties by Kentucky frontiersmen, Washington ordered General Josiah Harmar to pacify the natives in the fall of 1790. Harmar's defeat led to renewed but equally unsuccessful efforts by General Arthur St. Clair, the governor of the Northwest Territory, a year later. Not until the summer of 1794 were the Indians defeated at the hands of General Anthony Wayne in the Battle of Fallen Timbers; a year later, in the Treaty of Greenville, they surrendered most of Ohio. The Indian cession cleared the way for white advance that brought Ohio into the Union in 1803.

Difficulties with Indians also played a part in some of the diplomatic tangle with Great Britain. By the terms of the Peace of Paris of 1783 the British had promised to evacuate posts on American soil. Despite American protests British troops continued

to occupy the forts and, Americans believed, used them to encourage Indians to demand the creation of a "buffer state." The British, meanwhile, denied the charge but refused to leave on the grounds that Americans had violated terms of the Paris settlement. These matters stood when Washington became president.

Another grievance against England was commercial. After acknowledging American political independence, the British government sought to encourage economic independence as well by cutting the commercial cords binding Americans to the empire. Trade between the United States and parts of the British Empire was forbidden.

Impressment was a third American difficulty with England. Terrible conditions aboard British naval vessels led to wholesale flights, and some deserters sought better employment on American merchant ships. Especially hard-pressed in times of war, British naval officers boarded and searched private American vessels, first in British ports and later on the high seas, for deserters. Finding them, the British pressed the sailors back into duty in the fleet. Often enough the British took native-born Americans or naturalized citizens, claiming all the while that they were either deserters or British subjects needed by the Royal Navy. British refusal to recognize naturalization of Englishmen by other nations complicated the situation further. Americans considered the impressment practice a gross violation of sovereignty and honor.

After 1793 came a fourth complaint against Britain as violator of American neutral rights. President Washington proclaimed neutral status for the United States in April 1793 after war broke out between France and Britain. Shortly after Washington's inauguration the French Revolution had broken out, and during his first administration the new limited monarchy in France had given way to an experiment in republicanism. Revolutionaries determined to end not only the monarchy but the monarch as well; they executed the deposed Louis XVI in January 1793. Several days later the French government declared war against Britain and her allies. With some intermissions the war raged to 1815, and all the while it perplexed the makers of American foreign policy.

All of Washington's advisers urged a neutral policy for the United States; Jefferson thought that Congress, vested with the power to declare war, ought to declare peace; but Hamilton

prevailed, and the president proclaimed neutrality without mentioning the word. He called on the nation to be "friendly and impartial toward the belligerent powers" and forbade his countrymen to carry articles deemed contraband by the "modern usage of nations" to any of the belligerents. Though he focused on neutral duties, he undoubtedly believed that neutrals had rights as well, including the right to carry noncontraband to all places not effectively blockaded. The Washington proclamation remained operative until replaced in June 1794 by Congress' first neutrality act.

Washington had more to fear from violations of American neutrality by belligerents than from his fellow citizens. Scarcely was the ink dry than American cargoes and vessels began to be seized. Britain, in control of the seas, was first to violate, and the House of Representatives passed a nonintercourse bill that failed to clear the Senate in 1794.

To secure settlement of the prevailing quarrels with Britain — occupation of the northwest posts, refusal to allow empire trade, impressment, and confiscation of cargoes and vessels — Washington sent Chief Justice John Jay to England. The jurist went abroad without a full deck, for Hamilton had in effect thrown away some of Jay's diplomatic cards when he told the British that the United States would not associate with the Armed Neutrality, an alliance formed by Scandinavian powers to uphold the rights of neutrals.

After months of negotiation the Jay Treaty was signed in November 1794. The Americans gained none of their demands regarding impressment and neutral rights. They were granted the privilege of trading with the British East Indies and some minor concessions in the West Indies, but the latter were stricken from the treaty by the Senate. The provision most satisfying to the United States was a promise that the British would evacuate the northwest posts by June 1796 in return for which the American government promised to pay debts of Americans to Englishmen as determined by a future joint commission.

The government kept secret the details of Jay's treaty until after the Senate gave its approval in June 1795, but the text was leaked to the press, and wild discussion and debate ensued. Jay was burned in effigy, and Washington had grave doubts that the treaty deserved ratification. Finally, he agreed to sign, and opponents thereupon

turned to the House of Representatives to stage the next attack. Since appropriations were required under the terms of the treaty, opponents demanded that Washington submit information to the House about the negotiation of the document. After seeking advice from his cabinet and from Hamilton who had left government service, Washington refused to comply, noting that the treaty-making power was vested in president and Senate. Ultimately, the House agreed by a tiny majority to execute the treaty.

While Americans and others waited for the publication of the Jay Treaty, speculation developed, especially in Spain, that Britain and America might be forging an alliance. An American agreement with Spain's ancient enemy threatened Spanish possessions in the western hemisphere, the Spanish believed, and they hastened to mend fences with their American neighbors by coming to terms in a treaty that proved to be Washington's greatest diplomatic triumph. Thomas Pinckney, the American minister to Britain, was sent to Spain to settle outstanding grievances. The Pinckney Treaty, signed in the fall of 1795 and ratified the following March, solved for the time at least all problems with Spain. Agreeing to the thirty-first parallel as the northern boundary of Florida, the Spanish enlarged American territory. The United States also secured the privilege of navigating the Mississippi through Spanish territory to its mouth and the further privilege of loading, unloading, and storing commodities in Spanish New Orleans, a town located on the east side of the Mississippi. The good terms of the Pinckney Treaty as contrasted with the drearier terms of Jay's said less about the relative skills of the two diplomats than about the relative positions of the two nations, Spain and Britain. Spain needed, or at least felt that she needed, a cooperative United States; England bargained from circumstances of greater strength.

Washington was least successful in negotiations with France. The treaties of alliance and commerce, forged in 1778 during the American Revolution, were operative when Washington became president and proved embarrassing for the United States throughout the decade of the 1790s. The treaty of alliance promised American aid to France when that nation was engaged in defensive wars. Hamilton saw no problem in as much as France had declared war against Britain and the others in 1793. Clearly, thought Hamilton, there was nothing defensive about the war. Moreover, the United States would

have to wait to determine if the new French government would endure. Jefferson thought otherwise; treaties were made with people or nations, not with governments. So American obligations under the treaty pertained regardless of alterations in the form of the French government. For the time Jefferson thought it best to avoid a decision about the offensive or defensive nature of the war.

Washington set aside debate about the validity of the new French government when he received Edmond Genet as minister from the French Republic in May 1793. But he refused to allow Genet to fit out privateers in American ports and ultimately demanded the recall of the energetic and obstinate minister. Genet feared to return home, however, since a more radical faction, the Jacobins, had gained control of the republican government. He secured permission to stay in America as a private person. Meanwhile, the Federalist Gouverneur Morris was replaced as minister to France by Democratic-Republican James Monroe.

Personnel changes in the diplomatic offices did not improve relations between France and the United States. Washington complained that the French were violating American neutral rights by capturing cargoes and vessels; the French, now under the Directory, accused the United States of bad faith concerning the treaty of alliance. As Washington's administration ended, relations between the nations were at a breaking point.

Washington was glad enough to see the eight presidential years draw to a close. The second term had been especially stormy; the combination of internal insurrection and foreign war had given no peace. As he pondered retirement, Washington prepared with the aid of the young elder statesman, Hamilton, a valedictory to the American people. Published in September 1796, the Farewell Address called attention to two dangers: foreign alliances and political parties. The address was not an isolationist document. Washington urged commercial intercourse with the world; he even trusted "temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies." While he urged "perfect good faith" toward all existing alliances of a more permanent nature — the one with France — he cautioned against any new alliances of a permanent nature. "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?" he asked. The "primary interests" of Europe were of little or no interest to America; America's "detached and distant situation" encouraged independence of action.

Political parties were as dangerous as foreign alliances. Whether founded on sectional or any other grounds, parties tended to agitate the community, to enfeeble public administration, and to open the door to "foreign influence and corruption." Ultimately, political parties would destroy liberty, said Washington.

The outgoing president's plea against parties fell on deaf ears, for the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans were at that moment busily in quest of office in the elections of 1796.

Neither aggregation of people and ideas was a fully developed political party in 1796, but such organization was well on the way. The administration group had begun to refer to those in its ranks as "Federalists" for two reasons. First, the name reminded the people of the contest for the adoption of the Constitution less than a decade before. Federalists had been the advocates of ratification. Hamilton and others hoped to convince the voters that direct connections existed between the Federalists of 1788 and those of 1796 — and that the Anti-Federalists of old were the new opposition. Such argument violated fact, but there was political power in the idea. A second reason for the adoption of the name had to do with the definition of the word. Federalism meant that powers were divided between central and state levels of government. At a time when the opposition claimed that the Hamiltonians were too ardent centralizers or consolidators, it was practical if not precise for them to advertise themselves as the party that recognized and respected local authority.

Opponents of the Federalists were guilty as well of choosing nomenclature carefully. Most often calling themselves "Republicans," they hoped to convince the voters that the Federalists were monarchists. In fact, both groups agreed that republicanism was best for America, just as both agreed that federalism was right. But there were differences. Federalists were republicans, but for them the adjective "aristocratic" had to modify the noun "republican." They believed in government by the few who were the best; and the best, in Hamilton's view, were the rich, the well-born, and the able. They comprised an economic, a social, and an intellectual elite. The Jeffersonian opposition to Federalists believed in a broader base. The adjective "democratic" ought to modify "republican." Not all Jeffersonians liked the democratic emphasis; they feared the consequences of Federalist claims that tyranny of