

Guiding Timid Reason:  
The Politics of Revolution and the Public Sphere in Late Eighteenth-Century America

Jacob N. Gaba

First Reader: Lisa Jane Graham

Second Reader: Bethel Saler

April 22, 2022

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
Public Opinion and the Fall of the Ancient Regime	4
American Print Culture during the 1790s	6
Reason and the Passions	6
Using France and Haiti as a Backdrop for Discourses of Reason and the Passions	11
<b>AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON REASON AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: NOAH WEBSTER AND JAMES SULLIVAN</b>	<b>16</b>
Revolution and Public Reason in France	16
James Sullivan: Public Opinion in a Liberal Society	18
Noah Webster: the American Condition and the Danger of Oratory	23
<b>CITIZEN GENET AND RATIONAL POLITICAL AGITATION</b>	<b>27</b>
Genet's Arrival in the United States	27
The Implications of the Genet Affair	40
<b>THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION AND THE RACIALIZED PUBLIC SPHERE</b>	<b>46</b>
Revolution Spreads to Saint Domingue	46
The Saint Dominguen Refugee Crisis	50
Slavery and the Public Sphere	53
<b>ECHOES OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION IN THE UNITED STATES</b>	<b>62</b>
A Captain, Lieutenant, and Ensign	62
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>72</b>
Primary Sources	72
Secondary Sources	74

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my family, my teammates and coaches, and my professors for supporting me throughout this project. I would also like to thank Professor Bethel Saler for her expertise and guidance. I would especially like to thank Professor Lisa Jane Graham not only for her advice and support, but also for putting so much energy into pushing me to make this project the best that it could be.

## ABSTRACT

The American, French, and Haitian revolutions would not have been possible without the force of public opinion. Wrought by Enlightenment notions of the rational individual citizen, natural rights, and liberty, both rational political deliberation and the “passionate” (or emotional) mob contributed to the overthrow of the ancient regime. Yet even as public opinion presented a vehicle for change, it also threatened the very revolutions predicated upon it. While under the proper conditions public opinion could topple despots, it was also fragile, potentially irrational, and open to manipulation. Americans were forced to confront these potential insecurities with public opinion during both the French and Haitian revolutions. Their responses to domestic political agitation and unrest during the revolutionary 1790s reveal a young republic grappling with how to balance freedom of opinion and democracy with political stability. The pressure of the two revolutions, and the fissures which they drove deep into the American political arena, created an atmosphere in which Americans competed to define their own revolution. With exploding literacy rates and the advent of political factions, newspapers provided the playing field for these debates over the Atlantic revolutions. This thesis will examine how, during revolutionary times, early American political commentators dealt with how to balance reason and the passions in their discourse, guiding a public sphere that could be open yet resistant to emotion and the instability that it could bring.

## INTRODUCTION

### Public Opinion and the Fall of the Ancient Regime

“If it be true that all governments rest on opinion, it is no less true that the strength of opinion in each individual, and its practical influence on his conduct, depend much on the number which he supposes to have entertained the same opinion. The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone, and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is associated... When men exercise their reason coolly and freely on a variety of distinct questions, they inevitably fall into different opinions on some of them. When they are governed by a common passion, their opinions, if they are so to be called, will be the same.”<sup>1, 2</sup>

Though James Madison, in the midst of the American constitutional convention, could not foresee the bloody battles of the French and Haitian revolutions, his assessment of the rational individual foreshadows the collective passion, or emotions, of the revolutionary mob.<sup>3</sup> If men fell under the common spell of emotion, they would arise from the mob and form an immovable majority capable of destroying constitutional order by installing a new force of tyranny. “Common passion,” or common emotion, indeed reigned over the Atlantic world from the 1770s through the turn of the century, as the Americans, French, and Haitians all revolted against the ancient regimes of monarchy and slavery. The force of emotion was, in this sense, integral to American independence; Madison himself admitted this in Federalist Paper 49 when he wrote that unity occurred in “the midst of a danger.”<sup>4</sup> This danger awakened the passions in Americans, unifying them against the British and leading them to victory. The passion of the Revolutionary War overshadowed the political differences that would later arise. Similarly, in France and Haiti, common experience united the rebelling groups against the traditional authorities, be it king or

---

<sup>1</sup> James Madison, “Federalist No. 49,” February 5, 1788.

<sup>2</sup> James Madison, “Federalist No. 50,” February 5, 1788.

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2009), for a discussion of mob violence during the French Revolution.

<sup>4</sup> Madison, “Federalist No. 50,” 49.

slave master. Americans, who experienced their revolution over two decades before the French and Haitians, looked to these nations to understand their own revolution in a pivotal time of nation building—a time not only for the creation of traditional government institutions, but also for the formation of a national culture and public sphere.

As the American public sphere developed under the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention grappled with how to prevent the common passions. The Constitutional Convention indeed partially arose to prevent what was seen by leaders like Madison and Hamilton as too much democracy. If the common passions took over, they would extinguish rational debate, eliminating an essential element of republican society. Whereas the common passions united the colonies against the British, the new American system needed protections against factions to keep the nation together. Many Americans feared that without protections, democracy might destroy itself.<sup>5</sup> To prevent the tyranny of the majority, which Madison addressed in Federalist Papers 49 and 50, the rational side of man would need to be fostered, while the passions in him “regulated” or repressed. By regulating the passions, the enlightened individual could realize his role as a citizen. He could contribute to the public discourse that guided governance. Reason and the passions thus were the sources of hope and apprehension for a republican project grounded in “public opinion.”<sup>6</sup> As Hannah Arendt reflects, the republic needed to be protected against the tyranny of the majority while simultaneously defending freedom of opinion.<sup>7</sup> This tension necessitated a reliance on the rational individual citizen that some, for fear of the common passions, were unready to concede. The Americans who this thesis will examine, both traditional “framers” of the Constitution and the less familiar newspaper printers and political commentators

---

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Madison, “Federalist No 49.”

<sup>7</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Penguin Classics, 2006), 217.

who built the American public sphere, propelled a public debate that defined both freedom and the limits of reason amidst the emergence of the American public sphere.

### **American Print Culture during the 1790s**

Following the ratification of the Constitution, American printers and politicians benefitted from an exploding print culture. In the United States, starting with the French and Indian War (1756-1763), and coinciding with rising literacy rates, public interest in current events intensified. Americans demanded access to news at a higher rate than ever before. At first, people traveled to taverns or other public venues to hear the newspaper read.<sup>8</sup> However, by 1800, the U.S. experienced literacy rates of over 90 percent in some regions, provoking a spike in demand for newspapers.<sup>9</sup> Whereas in 1783, six years before the beginning of the French Revolution only 35 newspapers were published in the United States, the 1789 revolution spurred demand for print media. By 1800, one year after the French Revolution's close, the United States experienced a daily circulation of 145,000 across 234 total newspapers.<sup>10</sup> Barker and Burrows contend that the rise in print culture swept up not only the expected populations of white "middle-class merchant or elite, educated planters, lawyers and politicians," but also began to include people of color and women.<sup>11</sup> Print culture reached past the religious interests that had previously dominated print media and ventured into newfound political curiosities like international affairs. The popularity of newspapers and of reading in general allowed for a robust public discourse in which printers and political leaders began to respond to and shape public opinion.

### **Reason and the Passions**

---

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, eds., *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 143.

<sup>9</sup> Barker and Burrows, *Press, Politics and the Public*, 141.

<sup>10</sup> Barker and Burrows, *Press, Politics and the Public*, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Barker and Burrows, *Press, Politics and the Public*, 141.

Madison, for one, fancied himself as a man of letters like the *philosophes* who inspired him. Importantly, though, he also prided himself on being a man of action.<sup>12</sup> In that spirit, his Federalist Papers, written with Alexander Hamilton during the Constitutional Convention, were not only an instrument of public persuasion but also a guidebook for the establishment of an enduring republic. On the issue of reason and the passions of the enlightened public which would govern the republic, Madison wrote that there was a great

“danger of disturbing the public tranquillity [sic] by interesting too strongly the public passions... But it is the reason, alone, of the public, that ought to control and regulate the government. The passions ought to be controlled and regulated by the government.”<sup>13</sup>

Here, Madison introduces one of the most perplexing problems faced by those working to establish republican government in America. If public participation by the citizenry required the use of reason, such use should be desired and enforced wherever possible. The passions, which had the potential to override or impede reason, might lead the public down the path of political instability or anarchy like the looming fates of France and, to an extent, Haiti.<sup>14</sup> Yet when Madison and Hamilton wrote the Federalist Papers, they could not have predicted the violence in France. The problems with public opinion which they identified had yet to be tested in the young republic. Madison, and the other actors in this thesis, were the products of an era that exalted reason and drew on the contemporary philosophy of European intellectuals like Immanuel Kant.

It was not uncommon for both the traditional “framers” of the American constitution, but also, importantly, printers and political commentators, to read both classical and contemporary philosophy. Kant’s 1784 essay *What is Enlightenment* is a good example of this phenomenon. It

---

<sup>12</sup> Lynne V. Cheney, *James Madison: A Life Reconsidered* (New York: Viking, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Madison, “Federalist No 49.”

<sup>14</sup> Simon P. Newman, “American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans,” in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 72–90.

solidified, for American readers, new Enlightenment notions of individuality central to the West's move toward representative governments in the eighteenth century. Kant wrote that:

“Enlightenment is the human being's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding [reason] without the guidance of another. This immaturity is *self-incurred* if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. *Sapere aude!* [Dare to be wise!] Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding [reason]! is thus the motto of enlightenment.”<sup>15</sup>

Insofar as monarchs or religious authorities, and often combinations of the two, prescribed certain constructions of the world to the general populace, Kant broke from tradition by encouraging individuals to think independently. Such an understanding, Kant wrote, required the use of reason. For Kant, humans were naturally rational. However, they were not necessarily inclined to utilize their reason, evidenced by his encouragement: “Dare to be wise!” Kant—in daring his readers to have the “courage” to break free of societal restraints on individual rational capacity—set the stage for an age of revolution in which individuals proposed new, radical forms of government that prioritized natural rights and equality.

If individuals were endowed with, as the American Declaration of Independence stated, “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,”<sup>16</sup> then the eighteenth century individual was necessarily, as historian Dror Wahrman elucidated, “left to their own devices to make sense of their world in their own terms.”<sup>17</sup> Now an individual capable of creating for oneself a greater meaning or understanding, or, again, as the Declaration of Independence stated, “happiness,” the self became a new vehicle for rational expression. To build a society based on the ideas in the Declaration of Independence would mean treating the individual

---

<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals: And, What Is Enlightenment?* Second edition, revised., The Library of Liberal Arts 113 (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription,” National Archives, November 1, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (Yale University Press, 2006), 201.

as a rational being. As Wahrman proclaims, the “resonance” of the very idea of natural rights depended on “relying on an autonomous active individual to claim these rights.”<sup>18</sup> The individual, endowed with reason, would then be able to make informed political decisions as a participatory member in republican society.

These new propositions for republican society centered on the development of what sociologist Jürgen Habermas coined the “bourgeois public sphere.”<sup>19</sup> In the bourgeois public sphere, individuals came together to discuss the “privatized but publicly relevant” issues of economy and politics.<sup>20</sup> In other words, while the ancient regime individual was a subject, the new Enlightenment individual was a citizen capable of participating in the governing process. To Habermas, who borrows from Kant, the primary mechanism for this participation was “people’s public use of their reason.”<sup>21</sup> In the eighteenth-century club or salon, men gathered to discuss economic and political issues; in these spaces, they realized their collective power as agents of mediation between the state and society.<sup>22</sup> The ideal of the republic, defined by this kind of mediation between the public and the state, was thus based on the “political confrontation” that the realization of public reason connoted.<sup>23</sup>

As many historians have pointed out, Habermas’ vision of the public sphere was founded in narrow definitions of public reason and who could possess it. Habermas contended that it was mainly property-owning men who were driven by a desire to protect their property from the state who initially participated in the public sphere. He writes that the “political task” of these men was

---

<sup>18</sup> Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, 308.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Sixth Printing edition (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>20</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Richard J. Bernstein, “The Normative Core of the Public Sphere,” *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 768.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas, 27.

“the regulation of civil society.”<sup>24</sup> However, as critics like Richard Bernstein and Amy Allen point out, while class features heavily in his analysis, Habermas forgets to explicitly mention women as excluded from the public sphere as a constitutive element of its construction.<sup>25</sup> And, as Jane Mansbridge points out, Habermas insists on the “centrality of reason” in the “legitimation of the state.”<sup>26</sup> In doing so, Mansbridge contends that Habermas’ model is only useful for examining the formation of a “general interest” in society rather than conflicting interests where, in a democracy, compromise may be necessary.<sup>27</sup> Reason, according to Mansbridge, would be limited in its capacity to resolve disputes between individuals, or, as Madison feared, partisan groups. Passions, which falls outside of Habermas’ analysis, might play an immense role in regulating reason. This thesis aims to examine not only the development of public reason but also the efforts to understand and tame the passions in the Young Republic within this paradigm of partisan conflict.

Perhaps it was Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume who best articulated this greatest perceived weakness of reason. In his 1739 *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume wrote that

“we speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”<sup>28</sup>

If humans were endowed with reason, they were also beset with emotion. Seen as competing forces, Hume worried in his treatise that passions, or emotions, were more powerful than reason. If public opinion, based in man’s capacity to reason, lay at the foundation of republican government, then republican government was inherently fragile if the passions of the public could

---

<sup>24</sup> Habermas, 52.

<sup>25</sup> Amy Allen, “The Public Sphere: Ideology and/or Ideal?,” *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 822.  
Bernstein, “The Normative Core of the Public Sphere.”

<sup>26</sup> Jane Mansbridge, “Conflict and Commonality in Habermas’s Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,” *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 789.

<sup>27</sup> Mansbridge, 790.

<sup>28</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739, 415.

be manipulated. For many Americans, the developments in France and Saint Domingue helped confirm these suspicions.

### **Using France and Haiti as a Backdrop for Discourses of Reason and the Passions**

In the midst of such nation building, Americans faced domestic and foreign issues spurred by revolutions not too unlike their own in France and Saint Domingue. Americans were forced to confront these potential insecurities with public opinion during both the French and Haitian revolutions. Their responses to domestic political agitation and unrest during the revolutionary 1790s reveal a young republic grappling with how to balance freedom of opinion and democracy—which encouraged greater political participation by the masses—with political stability. The pressure of the two revolutions, and the fissures which they drove deep into the American political arena, created an atmosphere in which Americans competed to define their own revolution. While some saw the efforts of the 1770s as tied to the events in France and Haiti, others viewed the American Revolution as a unique event predicated on specific capacities of the American individual.

Indeed, the new sense of self brought by the Enlightenment—that of the “autonomous active individual” who stood to claim his own natural rights—complicated the endeavor of revolutionary reflection in America. It was precisely the degree to which this individual could be trusted with public opinion, in a government formed by “the people,”<sup>29</sup> that proved problematic for the framers, public officials, and commentators of the day. Who had the capacity to reason? When did emotions hinder public discourse, and could such hindrance be avoided? Could emotion in political discourse be combatted? By examining the revolutions of the 1790s together, this thesis will

---

<sup>29</sup> “The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription,” National Archives, November 4, 2015.

explore the ramifications for American public discourse and nation-building with the different issues that each revolution brought to the fore.

Whereas Habermas' main focus was on the bourgeois public sphere of Europe, this thesis aims, insofar as it examines debates on public reason in the American press, to expand his notion of the public sphere to a larger definition of "public" while simultaneously accounting for the complications brought to public reason by the passions. In combination with Habermas and his critics, this thesis draws on the work of scholars like Marcus Daniel, Ashli While, Hannah Barker, Simon Burrows, Will Slauter, and Michael Warner, who study early American print culture. This thesis will add to their scholarship on American print culture during the revolutionary 1790s by melding their notions of intense partisan political society with revitalized Habermasian notions of the public sphere. This vantage point provides room to examine the tensions between reason and passion in the developing American public sphere. By relying on the study of contemporary events that Daniel, White, Barker, Burrows, Slauter, Warner, and more cover, this thesis adopts a study of metadiscourse to understand the issues of reason and passion not in an abstract philosophical sense, but in a sense tangibly tied to the issues of the day.<sup>30</sup> Within newspaper debates over the French and Haitian Revolutions lie discussion about discourse itself.

By examining American reactions to the French and Haitian revolutions, I strive to understand early American political discourse in a time of intense reflection on what it meant to participate as a rational individual in public opinion. These two revolutions, inseparable both in their ideologies and histories, present a unique opportunity to examine public opinion in a new light. While the scholarship of the late twentieth century—emanating from Habermas's idea of the bourgeois public sphere—contributed to the history of public opinion, historical scholarship on

---

<sup>30</sup> "Metadiscourse: What Is It and Where Is It Going?," *Journal of Pragmatics* 113 (May 1, 2017): 16–29.

Haiti and France has turned, in more recent years, from issues of public opinion toward examinations of racial and class issues in a greater transatlantic sense. I aim to utilize the newer sense of transatlantic history that has arisen in recent years alongside the now older conceptions of public opinion's history. In this sense, my work is a refocus of the study of public opinion with a transatlantic frame.

Indeed, the French and Haitian revolutions were inherently tied. The language of liberty and equality reverberated throughout the rhetoric of both revolutions. Free people of color from Saint Domingue sent delegates to the signing of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen to ensure their inclusion.<sup>31</sup> The 1794 abolition of slavery on Saint Domingue was an act of France under its new government. So, while France drew on lessons from the American Revolution to institute its own republican efforts, free people of color and ultimately black slaves would fight for their own freedom and independence from the white colonial monarchists remaining in Saint Domingue while taking cues from France. Many of these monarchists from Saint Domingue would end up in the United States as refugees, where they contributed to the public sphere through their own newspaper publications.<sup>32</sup> From these Saint Dominguen commentators to their American and French counterparts, debates over the two revolutions were widespread in the United States. French agitators like Ambassador Edmond Charles Genet would enter the political fray, while Haitian leaders like Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines published their speeches in American newspapers.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the transatlantic framework aligns seamlessly with an analysis of the Atlantic revolutions of the 1790s.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Smithsonian Magazine, "The History of the United States' First Refugee Crisis," Smithsonian Magazine, accessed February 10, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Hoboken, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011).

To engage with my questions about public opinion, my work focuses on metadiscourses of rationality during the American coverage of the two revolutions. First, I will examine the state of the American public sphere at the outset of the French Revolution in 1789, followed by an investigation of American theories about revolution and rationality. I will focus, in this first section, on James Sullivan and Noah Webster, who provide, respectively, Republican and Federalist viewpoints. Their perspectives capture the partisan divide during the 1790s that not only served as a backdrop for political conflict over the two revolutions but also defined what constituted reason in public discourse. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, these authors were a sort of American version of France's earlier "men of letters," writing their philosophical ideas into print for public consumption. Their ideas set the stage for my later analysis, which will examine the implications of the events in France and Haiti for the American public sphere.

The next section analyzes the Genet Affair (1793), where the French ambassador to the United States met with adulation and resistance. After agitating crowds of Americans and inspiring many to fight for France in its growing conflict with Great Britain, the press debated over the meaning of his visit. Genet's political agitation in the United States raised questions about emotions in politics, thereby nudging American commentators to examine the extent to which reason could be trusted in discourse. This section will then turn to an examination of coverage of the Quasi War with France, which forced Americans to confront their own revolutionary ideals in the face of political stability and nation building. Like the Genet Affair, the Quasi War forced Americans to define new boundaries and expectations for reason in political discourse.

Finally, the last section will focus on the Haitian Revolution, the ensuing refugee crisis, and the reverberations of that revolution in America's racially mixed cities. A study of the mounting domestic racial tensions brought by the Haitian Revolution sharpen the focus on

American debates over inclusive democracy and how those debates related to issues of public reason. These revolutions, in their propagation of a new sense of self—a new way of understanding and rationalizing politics—forced deep changes to the way that Americans and the entire Atlantic world thought about public opinion and public discourse. Such changes would evolve slowly but surely over the next two centuries, forming an America defined by a fight to balance political stability and the expansion of liberty with natural rights for all.

**AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON REASON AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: NOAH  
WEBSTER AND JAMES SULLIVAN**

**Revolution and Public Reason in France**

During the summer of 1791, Maximilien Robespierre proclaimed to the French National Assembly that “the freedom of the press, one of the greatest avenues of liberty, can only be limited by despotic governments.”<sup>34</sup> The French Revolution was in full swing, with leaders like Robespierre setting the stage for new and radical reforms like freedom of the press; these freedoms were paramount to securing, as Robespierre suggested, a new system distinct from the Ancient Regime of censorship. In the United States, these early stages of the French Revolution represented a manifestation of the “political confrontation” Americans experienced in 1776.<sup>35</sup> Contemporaries discussed political issues in salons and clubs, which opened to the wider dissemination and debate of political opinions through the press.

According to Habermas, whether orally or in print, this new use of reason in public space gave birth to public opinion. During the 1790s, the free, commercialized American press provided the foundation for a more rational public opinion. Reading and debate could spread reason, aiding in the creation of a new “thinking” citizen who would eventually undermine ignorance and prejudice.<sup>36</sup> Historians recognize this notion of the thinking citizen—like Wahrman’s “autonomous active individual” who clamored for his natural rights—as a foundation for the American, French, and Haitian revolutions.<sup>37</sup> And, as Kant wished, the press encouraged and enabled the individual citizen to think for himself and with others. The press, along with rising literacy rates and the

---

<sup>34</sup> Charles Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech* (Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2009), 51.

<sup>35</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 27.

<sup>36</sup> Margaret C. Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 234.

<sup>37</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 27.

subsequent interest in public affairs, provided a new sphere for opinion to circulate and thus encouraged the thinking citizen to utilize his or her reason to its fullest capacity.

Yet even as public opinion presented a vehicle for change, it also threatened the very revolutions predicated upon it. While under the proper conditions public opinion could topple despots, it was—as Hume suggested—also fragile, potentially irrational, and open to manipulation. If the faculty of reason underlined the functioning public sphere, then Hume’s concerns about reason might come true, with emotions taking over and leading to anarchy. Indeed, Robespierre turned on his initial support for freedom of the press, instituting the Reign of Terror (1793-1794) and violently suppressing any opposition to his regime. France devolved into a state of fear as every citizen became subject to the “despotic” rule that Robespierre once denounced.<sup>38</sup> Censorship and surveillance returned—this time in defense of the republic.

The Reign of Terror thus weighed heavily upon America’s growing public sphere. The concept of a more open public opinion grew fraught in the United States as its benefits became potentially impracticable in the face of accounts of the September 1792 massacres in France and their threats to political stability. In France, as one biographer of James Madison wrote,

“savage mobs had stormed the Tuileries and slaughtered hundreds of the king’s Swiss Guards... Rampaging crowds had broken into Paris prisons and killed indiscriminately, piling the corpses of prisoners, clergymen, common criminals, and children into bloody heaps.”<sup>39</sup>

King Louis XVI was tried and executed, which further excited mob violence and alarmed Americans. Liberty and equality were valiant aims, ones which Thomas Jefferson and James Madison vehemently recognized and supported. However, in their view, the violence in France

---

<sup>38</sup> Walton, *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution*, 51.  
Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment*, 236.

<sup>39</sup> Cheney, *James Madison*, 239.

went too far.<sup>40</sup> The Terror—representing the most irrational threads of public opinion and public action—hardened the American pursuit of public reason over public opinion. Similarly, the Haitian Revolution alarmed Americans to risks of slave insurrection while also forcing them to weigh just how inclusive democracy in American should be. It alerted some to the fragility, if not the inhumanity, of the slave system. Emboldened by the events in Haiti, Questions about the balance of passions and reason in public discourse weighed even heavier on free blacks who attempted to participate in public discourse.

Ultimately, if reason was easily corrupted, public opinion could not be trusted. Thus, it was imperative, in the view of some nation-builders like Webster and Sullivan, to bolster or even guide public reason. To institutionalize mere “freedom of opinion” was insufficient.<sup>41</sup> And, as James Madison suggested in *Federalist No. 50*, insofar as freedom of opinion stimulated the public’s natural inclination to its passions, it was counterproductive to protect it.<sup>42</sup> Instead, the encouragement of reason over emotions in the public sphere was paramount to political stability in a republican society. The public needed guidance to preserve the rational public sphere necessary for political stability in a free society. In the emerging American public sphere of the 1790s, whereas oral persuasion rendered audiences vulnerable to the ills of theatrical, emotional manipulation, the newspaper encouraged public reason by filtering emotions out of political deliberation.

### **James Sullivan: Public Opinion in a Liberal Society**

Americans like James Sullivan (1744-1808) were fascinated by the French Revolution and looked to it for lessons about republican government. Sullivan served as Attorney General of

---

<sup>40</sup> James Madison, “To the Minister of the Interior of the French Republic,” April 1793, Papers of James Madison, Congressional Series.

<sup>41</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 217.

<sup>42</sup> Madison, “Federalist No. 50.”

Massachusetts from 1790-1807, during which time he wrote *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*. Sullivan and many other Americans initially supported the French Revolution. However, when word of the Louis XVI's execution reached American shores in March of 1793, Americans—especially Federalists—questioned their support for the new French government in the face of extreme political violence.<sup>43</sup> While he was a Republican, Sullivan's views were less radical than Jefferson's: while Jefferson could stomach a hearty amount of violence in revolutionary times, Sullivan's taste for political stability was stronger. Sullivan also took a more overtly anti-slavery stance than Jefferson.<sup>44</sup> Sullivan's political outlook might ultimately have derived from his residence in the Federalist stronghold of New England, for to survive politically there, Sullivan could not embrace the most divisive of Republican ideas. *An Impartial Review* comprises nine letters that trace and critique the French Revolution from its outbreak to Robespierre's fall from power in July of 1794. The letters "were not intended for the press, but were proposed as instruction for two or three young gentlemen."<sup>45</sup> The professed didactic nature of the letters opened up—in the spirit of the Enlightenment—philosophical considerations of the French Revolution to a more general reading public. Sullivan's letters took advantage of expanding American print culture to encourage debate and influence views of the French Revolution. The French Revolution reignited debates about the nature and limits of liberty and press freedom.

In letter I, Sullivan wrote that "Perfect Liberty" was "found on a point far beyond the reach of civil society... There the man has no law, but his own will; is driven by no force, but that of his

---

<sup>43</sup> John A. Dennehy, "James Sullivan and the Birth of Massachusetts Republicanism" (Boston College, 2011), 108.

<sup>44</sup> Philipp Ziesche, "Exporting American Revolutions: Gouverneur Morris, Thomas Jefferson, and the National Struggle for Universal Rights in Revolutionary France," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 462. Thomas C Amory, *Life of James Sullivan*, 1859, 114.

<sup>45</sup> James Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution* (Boston, MA: Benjamin Edes, Kilby Street, 1798), 3.

own passions.”<sup>46</sup> Sullivan, perhaps drawing on Hobbes, believed that man in the state of nature was a selfish creature. Without government, he acted out of pure self-interest; his passions, or his emotions, reigned supreme. The consequences of such passions are an uncivil society devoid of order; in other words, “anarchy.”<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, Sullivan took slavery to be

“the extreme opposite of [anarchy]... Where one of the human race exists without a capacity to hold property... where he is, himself, but the chattel or property of another, who can dispose of his life at pleasure, and with impunity.”<sup>48</sup>

To be a slave meant to be both devoid of property and to *be* property itself. Sullivan’s conception of liberty, then, was inherently tied to property ownership. To Sullivan, societies that did not define nor create such property ownership were uncivil. His ideal society was shaped “by civil government” formed “between these dreadful extremes.”<sup>49</sup> Paradoxically, the government also functioned to restrict liberty, but within the two extremes that Sullivan laid out, a sacrifice of some liberty was necessary for the collective good. This view represents a social contractarian methodology marked by the consent and sacrifice of the governed for the greater collective protection of individual liberty and property rights.

For Sullivan, “public opinion” played a fundamental role in a republican society.<sup>50</sup> Public opinion was necessary to keep the government—which could both protect and restrict liberty—accountable for its actions. Public opinion was, then, for Sullivan, a liberty in and of itself, inextricable from republican society. It was also a check on authority, a protection for the liberty which it exemplified. An examination of slavery helped Sullivan elucidate this point: a slave could not “derive” any “advantage” from “public opinion,” for without “person or property,” public

---

<sup>46</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 5–6.

<sup>49</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 6.

opinion “does not exist for him.”<sup>51</sup> To engage with public opinion, one needed to be considered a person and hold property. Without either of these conditions, a slave could not benefit from public opinion. Without personhood and property, he had no individuality or views worthy of protection. In his chains, the slave could not consent to be governed. Therefore, he could not participate in the public that forms in a civil society.

Likewise, anarchic societies lacked the social contract necessary to foster true public opinion. Indeed, Sullivan thought liberty rested on “constitutional or legal establishments” that take part in “limiting and defining the various powers of the government.”<sup>52</sup> To create such a public space required a civil government to delineate what was private and what was public. It also demanded the government's protection of concurrent private and public rights. In a slave society, such legal mechanisms fell short of limiting governmental abuses of liberty. Conversely, under anarchy, there was no government to protect liberty. For Sullivan, then, while American slavery represented one end of a spectrum with two liberty-deprived ends, revolutionary France epitomized the other extreme: anarchy.

At the heart of Sullivan's hypothesis on the failure of the French Revolution was emotion. He contended that the French people grew “enraged” as the revolution progressed.<sup>53</sup> Disparate groups coalesced under the common goal of ending royal government; out of “necessity,” they desired to kill the King and Queen, leading to incredible “horror” in France.<sup>54</sup> In letter XI, Sullivan argued that “mankind, when enraged, are blind to reason, and deaf to prudence.”<sup>55</sup> Sullivan identified rage as the most powerful and dangerous emotion, for it impeded the use of reason

---

<sup>51</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 32.

necessary to institutionalize the protection of liberty. Instead, The Terror institutionalized such rage and deployed it toward political ends. Sullivan writes later in letter XI that

“the Frenchmen huzzaed for liberty, but they had no competent ideas reflecting it. Their minds had never been engaged in contemplating the subject, for as it depends upon the lines and principles of the civil national compact, and as the French had no acquaintance with a system of that nature, they were only offering sacrifices to a deity of which they had but lately heard, whom the voice of nature loudly proclaimed, but of which they had at that time, no perfect image in their minds.”<sup>56</sup>

Sullivan identified, here, man’s natural desire for liberty. Because the French people had lived under a monarchy for centuries, they had no experience with liberty. Their inexperience with liberty predisposed the French to deeper challenges concerning establishing liberal democracy. Their passion for this new system was strong, for the American Revolution demonstrated its potential. Their passion was equally dangerous, for it allowed the French to overlook the precarity of the system they desired. Sullivan took on, here, the popular perspective that the French needed more time to adjust to life without monarchy.<sup>57</sup> Whereas American political culture developed at a distance from absolutism, and colonial assemblies gave way to constitutions and federal representative government, both temporal and geographic proximity to monarchy rendered the French incapable of quickly producing a lasting republican state. Sullivan lamented the speed of the French Revolution, for it took man’s natural desire for liberty and spun it to the opposite extreme of anarchy.

If the French had truly understood the nature of liberty—if they had moderated their passions like the Americans had and had taken the revolutionary transition slowly—they would have been able to set up a government that could define and protect liberty. Instead, the fast movement to anarchy stoked existing passions among the French masses, reinforcing a cycle where anarchy and

---

<sup>56</sup> Sullivan, *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Dennehy, “James Sullivan and the Birth of Massachusetts Republicanism.”

terror bred more fear and rage. That rage, in turn, clouded the French vision for a post-monarchal society; their vision of liberty was too abstract and therefore too weak to be institutionally protected. Written at the outset of the Federalist censorship brought by the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, Sullivan's position on the institutional protection of public reason reflected similar Republican attitudes: to protect public reason, some form of freedom of opinion must be protected.<sup>58</sup> The Alien and Sedition Acts brought press censorship that frustrated Republicans like Sullivan. However, Sullivan did not respond with a call for absolute freedom of opinion. Instead, he gestured his readers toward a version of such freedom that would insulate the public sphere from the rage and violence that plagued France.

### **Noah Webster: the American Condition and the Danger of Oratory**

Federalists saw similar flaws in the French Revolution. They too bemoaned the impact of its provocation of emotion. One glaring flaw which they identified rested in oratory. Noah Webster (1758-1843), a newspaper editor and famous lexicographer, provides an example. It is useful, first, to explore his views on the nature of the American public sphere. They will contextualize his beliefs regarding the susceptibility of the French public to emotional manipulation. In his *American Minerva*, first published on December 9, 1793, Webster professed that

“most... [Americans]... are not only acquainted with letters and able to read their native language, but they have a strong inclination to acquire, and property to purchase, the *means of knowledge*. Of all these means of knowledge, newspapers are the most eagerly sought after, and the most generally distributed.”<sup>59</sup>

Webster was correct, for newspapers had grown exponentially over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, stemming from public interest in the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and then

---

<sup>58</sup> Wendell Bird, “Passing Laws against Internal Enemies,” in *Criminal Dissent*, Prosecutions under the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 (Harvard University Press, 2020), 31–52.

<sup>59</sup> “The Editor’s Address to the Public,” *American Minerva*, December 9, 1793, America’s Historical Newspapers.

the French Revolution.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, Webster saw in Americans a unique propensity to seek out “the means of knowledge.” Newspapers formed the primary conduit for such knowledge, for they were well suited to what Webster correctly identified as an increasingly literate and publicly interested society. Webster trusted the politically engaged public to express “civility of manners, that love of peace and good order, and that propriety of public conduct.”<sup>61</sup> Such civility and propriety “characterize” for Webster, “the substantial body of the Citizens in the United States.”<sup>62</sup> Such sweeping classifications of the American people demonstrate Webster’s conviction that they were special regarding their high treatment of their own political engagement. However, a willingness to engage in public debate was not enough. Because Webster believed that “the body of the people are often ignorant,” he worried that they were vulnerable to emotional, speech-driven propaganda.<sup>63</sup> Webster identified this propagandistic, emotional manipulation as a central flaw of the French Revolution.

One year after the publication of *American Minerva*’s first issue, Webster frantically wrote to President George Washington concerning the Terror in France. This letter, adjoined with a pamphlet entitled “The revolution in France, considered in respect to its progress and effects,” warned the president that the political violence in France could easily spread to the United States:

“At the perfect critical juncture of our political affairs, it appears to be the duty of every good citizen to use his influence in restraining the violence of parties & moderating the passions of our injured fellow-citizens. For this purpose a just estimate of the Revolution in France, & the danger of *faction* may not be without its effects in this country, in determining the people to resist any intrigues that may be hostile to our government. The enclosed is intended to aid the cause of government & peace.”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> Barker and Burrows, *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*, 148.

<sup>61</sup> “The Editor’s Address to the Public.”

<sup>62</sup> “The Editor’s Address to the Public.”

<sup>63</sup> “The Editor’s Address to the Public.”

<sup>64</sup> Noah Webster, “To George Washington from Noah Webster, 20 April 1794” (University of Virginia Press), accessed March 24, 2021.

To Webster, the greatest danger arising from France was the political violence wrought by the passions of its populace. Emotions, for Webster, led to increased partisanship and instability.<sup>65</sup> Here, Webster expanded upon his idea of a good citizen outlined in his “Editor’s address to the public.” He argued that a good citizen should work to limit political violence by attempting to moderate the passions of his fellow citizens. This emphasis on the moderation of passions underscored Webster’s belief that ignorance bred political instability. Armed with knowledge, citizens could moderate one another. The press, on the national scale, was thus seen as a vehicle to filter the passions out of political discourse by providing that knowledge.

The problem of the French Revolution, then, for Webster, was that instead of providing the ignorant populace with knowledge, the revolutionary leaders took advantage of the French people. In the pamphlet attached to his letter to Washington, Webster wrote that the

“numerous and ignorant populace were to be amused, united, won to their party, and fired with enthusiasm for liberty. These people, who little understand the principles of government, were to be rendered subservient to the views of the republican party; and as their reason could be little affected by arguments, their passions were to be roused.”<sup>66</sup>

Webster implied here that the revolution’s leaders manipulated the ignorant populace to follow the revolutionary cause. Following such manipulation, no argument could influence the public's ability to reason. Its passions, which both Sullivan and Webster held as overriding of reason, were stoked for political ends. Webster continued:

“As the most of them cannot read, particular persons were employed in the towns and villages to read to them, the inflammatory writings which flowed from the Parisian presses. These readers collected the people in crowds, read to them such pieces against the king, queen, nobility and clergy, as were calculated to irritate their passions and inspire them with implacable hatred against these orders. They

---

<sup>65</sup> In 1794, the Federalists and Republicans, were not full-fledged parties in the modern sense. They were more so political coalitions than organized efforts. Efforts at organization would begin by 1800, when Thomas Jefferson defeated John Adams for the presidency.

<sup>66</sup> Noah Webster, *The Revolution in France, Considered in Respect to Its Progress and Effects. By an American.*, 28053 (George Bunce, 1794).

were taught to believe them all tyrants, traitors, and oppressors. These public readers would also harrangue extemporaneously on the same subjects: such artifices had a prodigious effect in changing the attachment of the people for their king and their priesthood, to the most violent aversion.”<sup>67</sup>

Webster saw the French people as particularly susceptible to such manipulation because of their illiteracy. Whereas the Americans sought out knowledge and debate, Webster viewed the French as more susceptible to their passions precisely because of their inability to access their own sources of knowledge. Because they relied on public readers and oral transmission to present them with information, they were beholden to the readers’ message. Reading could allow citizens to digest information and reflect on it in the competitive marketplace of the partisan press. On the other hand, oral news and fiery speeches eliminated the time for reasoning and triggered the passions. The plethora of available newspaper sources meant that no American would become reliant on any given source like the French public became reliant on readers.

Furthermore, Webster’s preference for newspapers over speeches underscored the idea that auditory media impeded the use of public reason. The comparison of different viewpoints across newspapers meant that reason, instead of passion, could be employed in political thinking, thus promoting a more rational and deliberative public sphere than that of France. When French Ambassador Edmond Charles Genet arrived in the United States in April 1793, a diplomatic crisis arose. This crisis challenged the young country on the international stage while also shaping new notions within the upper circles of government and print media regarding rational political agitation.

---

<sup>67</sup> Webster, *The Revolution in France*.

## CITIZEN GENET AND RATIONAL POLITICAL AGITATION

### Genet's Arrival in the United States

“It is expected that [French Ambassador Edmond Genet] will be received with a salute of cannon, and by the companies of light infantry, under arms, as the first mark of our fellow citizens, and the interest they take in the noblest of all causes, the success of our French allies, who are giving up all that is near and dear to them for the general interests of human nature.”<sup>68</sup>

Such fanfare was planned in anticipation of the arrival of Edmond Charles Genet, the newly minted French Ambassador to the United States. Genet landed in Philadelphia on May 16, 1793. A large crowd treated him to a hero's welcome. The press anticipated Genet's arrival: in the preceding weeks, Genet had grown controversial for his apparent rejection of President George Washington's Neutrality Proclamation. Genet's violations of American neutrality—he recruited Americans to fight as privateers for France in the Atlantic—tested the Washington administration's resolve to establish and defend American global interests. Perhaps more importantly, Genet's violations of American neutrality, later known as the Genet Affair, served as a proxy for debates about the French Revolution. While Federalists were suspicious of Genet and his activities, Republicans supported his objectives. Eventually, however, many rejected the means Genet used to achieve those goals.

Press coverage of the Genet Affair reveals an America wrestling with the notion, as James Madison wrote in Federalist paper number 55, that “passion never fails to wrest the sceptre from reason.”<sup>69</sup> Could the emotional overtones of revolutionary discourse be subdued in the face of mounting concerns over American independence and political stability? Indeed, reactions to the Genet Affair shaped American discourse in two major ways. First, debates focused on matters of strict foreign policy as the United States fought to preserve its independence, and second, they

---

<sup>68</sup> “From a Correspondent,” *National Gazette*, April 10, 1793, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>69</sup> James Madison, “The Federalist No. 55” (University of Virginia Press, February 13, 1788).

homed in on control over domestic affairs derailed by the political agitation of a foreign agent. On one hand, the Genet Affair manifested the Websterian concern that public speeches could corrupt public reason. On the other, it represented solidifying notions in the young republic that Americans possessed a superior capacity to use reason to participate in an enlightened public sphere defined by rational debate and discourse. Defining Genet's behavior as representative of the French revolutionary Terror proved paramount to winning the debate over his actions.

A citizen "equally distinguished for his abilities and his patriotism," Genet drew the attention of the American public even before his arrival in the United States.<sup>70</sup> He represented what the Republican *National Gazette* identified as the noble causes of the French.<sup>71</sup> To Republicans, the French and American revolutions were inherently tied, and Genet represented the next chapter in the link between the two allies. Starting with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, and later amplified by French figures such as the Marquis de Lafayette, the Americans and the French experienced close ties throughout the 1780s following their alliance during the American Revolution. Louis XVI's execution on January 20, 1793 threatened the relationship between the United States and France as Federalists like Alexander Hamilton argued that the codified alliance between the two countries was null in light of the agreement's formation under the now-defunct monarchy. Genet's mission was to smooth over these tensions and bring the Americans back into the French camp.

Genet came to the United States brandishing the "noble interests of human nature:" the goals of "liberté, égalité, fraternité" (liberty, equality, and fraternity) expressed by the French Revolution. Genet not only stood to strengthen the bond between the two new republics, but also possessed the will and capacity to spread republican principles beyond the two nations. For some

---

<sup>70</sup> "From a Correspondent."

<sup>71</sup> "From a Correspondent."

Americans, this goal of spreading the French Revolution was, as the *National Gazette* proclaimed, “the noblest of all causes.”<sup>72</sup> These sentiments about republicanism as a natural form of governance echoed Thomas Paine’s influential 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*. Paine argued that “nature disapproves” of the “folly of hereditary right in kings... For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have the right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others forever.”<sup>73</sup> Equality among men was thus the natural order of things, persuading both American and French revolutionaries to adopt the language of natural rights in their founding documents. To support Genet was to support the French Revolution and the form of government that established and protected natural rights. The *Gazette* framed this as the most rational and noble path. For Genet, beckoning the Americans toward supporting the French not only meant fighting for republicanism but also signified a career-defining moment for a minister awash in his own partisan battles back in France.

On November 28, 1792, France’s Girondin-led National Convention chose Genet as ambassador to the United States.<sup>74</sup> The new ambassador, who preferred the title “Citizen Genet” to bolster his republican credentials, had previously served as French foreign minister to the Russian Empire. Genet arrived not in Philadelphia, the American capital, but came ashore in Charleston, South Carolina, to inaugurate his ambassadorship to the United States. At this moment, the French Revolution experienced Jacobin partisan infighting between moderate Girondins (Genet’s party) and radical Montagnards (led by Robespierre). While the former wished to keep

---

<sup>72</sup> “From a Correspondent.”

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Other Works by Thomas Paine* (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: Lerner Publishing Group, 2019), 16.

<sup>74</sup> Wesley J. Campbell, “The Origin of Citizen Genet’s Projected Attack on Spanish Louisiana: A Case Study in Girondin Politics,” *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 533.

King Louis XVI alive, the latter preferred his execution. The Montagnards would prevail: Louis XVI was executed in January of 1793.

Following Louis XVI's execution, war erupted between France and its continental rivals of Great Britain, Spain, Prussia, and Austria. These European powers were outraged and terrified by Louis XVI's execution. They joined forces to preserve monarchy on the continent and contain the revolutionary fervor. Facing immense military threat from all sides, France needed and desired proper funding for its defense. One of Genet's primary goals in the United States was to secure advance payments on America's Revolutionary War debt. Genet, who somewhat rashly misunderstood the American system of government, assumed that he could directly collect from the executive government the over two million dollars France requested, when, in fact, the act of debt collection required Congressional approval.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps more importantly, however, Genet sought to recruit Americans to fight alongside the French as privateers while also publicly campaigning for American support for the French revolutionary cause. He also attempted to recruit volunteers in Kentucky to sail down the Mississippi and fight the British-allied Spanish in New Orleans.<sup>76</sup> The second two items of the Genet missions split the Washington Administration and then the American public, a public which already stood divided over the conflict in France.

Shortly after his arrival in Charleston, Genet embarked on the latter of his two illicit assignments. Because of the city's proximity to Spanish Florida and the Caribbean, as well as a palpable republican fervor in support of the French Revolution, Charleston was well-suited for Genet's mission. The French Revolutionary Wars' Atlantic theater was the intended home for the privateers recruited by Genet, who would serve independently under the American flag with

---

<sup>75</sup> Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission*, [1st ed.], The Norton Essays in American History. (New York: Norton, 1973), 21.

<sup>76</sup> Campbell, "The Origin of Citizen Genet's Projected Attack on Spanish Louisiana," 515.

unofficial protection from the French.<sup>77</sup> Genet's decision to land in Charleston—instead of the capital, Philadelphia—was controversial in and of itself because new ambassadors were traditionally supposed to present their diplomatic credentials to the president upon arrival to the country.

In addition to the recruitment of privateers to aid the French in the Atlantic, Genet embarked on a speaking tour, endearing himself to the republican masses while enraging the Federalist and even Republican establishment in Philadelphia. Genet sought, from these speaking engagements, to rally support for the French revolutionary cause at a time when—in the face of heightened radicalism in France—American support was waning.<sup>78</sup> On the eve of the Reign of Terror, which began in the fall of 1793, Genet's work was vital for securing American support for the French Revolution as it headed towards its darkest days. Americans from both political persuasions condemned the Reign of Terror, which must be examined in order to contextualize the discussion of rational discourse over Genet's mission within the greater frame of the French Revolution's impact on the American public sphere.

One newspaper article entitled “Direct from Paris and Translated for the Minerva,” purports to be a direct account of the events in France. Though written a year after Genet's arrival, the editorial represents the Federalist viewpoint on the Terror. Published in Noah Webster's Federalist *American Minerva*, the allegedly French source gave weight to the facts of discussion, perhaps aiding in the persuasion of the American public. The source addressed violent factionalism, Jacobinism, censorship, and the difference between duty and passion. It not only

---

<sup>77</sup> Charlie Williams, “Explorer, Botanist, Courier, or Spy? André Michaux and the Genet Affair of 1793,” *Castanea*, 2004, 99.

<sup>78</sup> Simon P. Newman, “American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans,” in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, ed. David P. Geggus (University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 74.

provides a Federalist view on the events in France but also presents a more general partisan framework (insofar as both sides utilized it) for newspaper coverage of the Atlantic revolutions of the 1790s.

While accusing Jacobins of turning toward their “passions,” the author purported to write out of a “duty” to the French Revolution and its principles.<sup>79</sup> He spoke as a “friend to truth,” and remarked that he will “brave all hazards for the sake of disclosing the truth.”<sup>80</sup> This truth was an exposure of the Jacobins, for while the author agreed with the original principles of the revolution, he denounced Jacobinism as the “cradle of a new aristocracy.”<sup>81</sup> To the author, Jacobinism was a fraud. He dismissed it as a mechanism to secure power for a select few rather than as a movement for freedom and equality. If Jacobinism concentrated power in the hands of the few, then it would threaten the survival of the republic. This technique attempted to meet readers with opposing views on their own terms by accepting the readers’ end goal (republican rule) while attacking the opposite faction.

This characterization of Jacobinism is exemplified by the author’s view on the Jacobin control of public opinion. He wrote that the Jacobins, “once being masters of the public opinion, the people were despoiled... of their liberty; elections were dictated to them, and always in favor of the pensioned tool of the managers of the Mother society.”<sup>82</sup> Here, the author framed Jacobinism as a threat to the original revolutionary goals of “liberty and equality”<sup>83</sup> by demonstrating the lack of liberty given to citizens in terms of public expression. Without freedom of thought, Jacobins

---

<sup>79</sup> “Direct from Paris and Translated for the Minerva,” *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>80</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

<sup>81</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

<sup>82</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

<sup>83</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

controlled the populace and maintained their power through fear. The author argued that liberty and equality could only be achieved in a society that valued and protected freedom of expression.

The other notable aspect of the editorial is its use of revolutionary language to establish legitimacy and win over its readership. The author purported to be a “true friend of his country” who detested “tyrants, under whatever denomination they spring up.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, the author despised the Jacobins for reproducing the tyrannical rule that preceded them. He continually reinforced his position as a true friend of the revolution, proclaiming that “those who love the revolution sincerely, who cherish liberty and equality, who see a brother in each of their fellow citizens, should open their eyes to the light.”<sup>85</sup> Perhaps, here, the “light” which the author spoke of was the light of reason, or the Enlightened perspective of the rational, informed public. By invoking the principles of the revolution, the author laid claim to its stewardship. He castigated the Jacobin opposition as a faction ready to “domineer” instead of establish freedom and equality.<sup>86</sup> The use of revolutionary language, along with the invocation of authentic care for revolutionary values, marks a tactic employed by both Federalists and Republicans during the turmoil of the 1790s. To establish oneself as performing a “duty” rather than enacting “passion” established the editorial as a legitimate source of reason and truth rather than as a factionalist and emotional (and therefore dangerous and misleading) offering.

The American fervor over the Terror exemplified by the editorial in the *Minerva* set the backdrop for Genet’s arrival in the United States. To support Genet was a dangerous endorsement of the irrational threads of the French Revolution. These irrational threads were symbolized by what many characterized as a new type of tyranny: the tyranny of the National Convention in the

---

<sup>84</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

<sup>85</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

<sup>86</sup> *American Minerva*, December 3, 1794.

wake of Louis XVI's execution and the beginning of the Reign of Terror. To some Federalists, France devolved into tyranny while Genet sailed to the United States, leaving Genet's mission inseparable from the devolution of the events in France.

Whether a convenient cover for an Anglophilic foreign policy or a genuine concern about emotions' effects on political stability, Federalists mounted a hard campaign against Genet for the remainder of 1793. "Alfred," an anonymous writer for the Federalist *Gazette of the United States*, penned a strong letter to Genet that September. Alfred carefully navigated his criticism of Genet, characterizing his actions as ones of "ignorance" and not of bad "intention." Alfred continued:

"That you should err in your ideas of the American public, is a misfortune, against which an extensive acquaintance with the history of departed empires, or with the actual state of society in Europe, could not, alone, completely secure you. In the United States, sir, the human character has assumed a form superior to whatever authentic history has recorded of Greece, or Rome; countries in which ferocious manners characterized a rigid aristocracy, and profligate populace, who struggled for domination, and alternately outraged the law of moral order."<sup>87</sup>

Alluding to Genet's misunderstanding of the American system of government, Alfred indicated that the United States was in the midst of forming a republican character: one superior to that of ancient Rome and contemporary France. Like Webster, Alfred assumed that some embedded aspect of the American character would promote republican stability in the United States. To Alfred, Genet misunderstood these important differences in character.

Genet thus miscalculated the extent to which Americans craved greater political agitation, for in Alfred's eyes, American society was defined by equal adherence to principles of liberty and to the rule of law based in a heightened moral aptitude and desire for societal order. Further enforcing this point, Alfred continued to write that

"the American passion for liberty is not the Roman pride of domination; a criminal pride, that claims liberty for one nation, and denies it to a conquered world. No!

---

<sup>87</sup> "For the Gazette. to the Sieur Genet, Minister of France," *Gazette of the United States*, September 11, 1793, America's Historical Newspapers.

The American citizens are friends to the cause of universal liberty, which, in their estimation, is inseparable from the equitable empire of law... While [Americans] exult in the hope of the universal funeral of monarchy, they recognize, within the circle of their own empire, no sovereign but themselves.”<sup>88</sup>

Thus, for Alfred and the Federalists, Genet’s lawless action outweighed his desire to spread republican revolution. Under the philosophy espoused by Alfred, lawlessness in and of itself threatened republicanism because the laws of the United States rested on the consent of the people to be governed. Such sentiments track closely with Sullivan’s notion that the protection of liberty necessitated the collective sacrifice of some rights. An independent America was more important than the spread of worldwide republican revolution. The instability which more fighting could bring might threaten the freedoms won by Americans during their own revolution.

The Federalist desire for global independence, and the fear caused by Genet’s disregard for it, becomes clearer later in Alfred’s letter. There, and more forcefully than before, he claimed that “the people of the United States want no foreign interference: and our fair swords will never permit him, or any other man, in this country, to be arbitrarily accused, arraigned, and ordered to death by a tyrant who bears the name of National Convention.”<sup>89</sup> Just as Webster’s *American Minerva* would describe a year later, Alfred saw tyranny and abuse in the operations of the National Convention. To recruit Americans to fight on behalf of the French would render those American citizens subject to French power. Rhetorically, Alfred reinforced the notion of popular sovereignty here by claiming to speak on behalf of the American people. He even stated at the outset of his letter that he spoke “in the character of one of the people.”<sup>90</sup> This proclamation allowed Alfred to counter Genet’s efforts to undermine American sovereignty with the force of public opinion. Here, Alfred joined Webster and other American commentators by professing the superiority in the

---

<sup>88</sup> “For the Gazette. To the Sieur Genet, Minister of France.”

<sup>89</sup> “For the Gazette. To the Sieur Genet, Minister of France.”

<sup>90</sup> “For the Gazette. To the Sieur Genet, Minister of France.”

public character of the American people to explain the differences between the American and French revolutions.

At the same time, Republicans employed a competing notion of national character to unite the public in favor of Genet and against the Federalist government. When local Federalist officials decided to limit the fanfare of Genet's arrival in Philadelphia, the Republican press was outraged. "A Freeman" derided these limitations in his April 22 column entitled "To the Freemen of Philadelphia," exclaiming that "as we are well acquainted with the principles of some of the gentlemen at the head of our affairs we need not be surprised at such a determination."<sup>91</sup> Because Genet represented, to the Freeman and to his reading public, the drive for republican revolution, it was important to receive him in the new American capital city with appropriate pomp and circumstance. The Freeman denounced the curbing of such ceremonies as an ideological decision. This decision was not necessarily based in the rupture of relations with Genet himself over the course of April 1793 but reflected the ideological stance to protect elite interests at the expense of republican values. The Freeman continued:

"France is not only waging war against the despotism of monarchy, but against the despotism of aristocracy, and it would appear rather uncommon to freemen welcoming the ambassador of republicans who are warring against their *darling* aristocracy."<sup>92</sup>

Again, we see the Freeman blame the restriction of the ceremonies on ideological adherence to aristocratic values. The issue of American foreign policy and neutrality is lost in his analysis. On the other hand, the Freeman anticipated greater implications for American republicanism:

---

<sup>91</sup> "To the Freemen of Philadelphia," *National Gazette*, April 24, 1793, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>92</sup> "To the Freemen of Philadelphia."

“You will discover principles lurking at bottom at variance with *your* liberty... But I flatter myself there is not that *servility* in the citizens of Philadelphia to be influenced by any such determination, nor any such apostasy from the genuine principles of republicanism, as to prevent them from manifesting a decided approbation of the cause of mankind, by a proper and joyful reception of Mr. Genet.”<sup>93</sup>

Though the government’s decision to limit the fanfare of Genet’s reception irked the Freeman, he was confident that the true republicans of Philadelphia would hold their ground. In his view, their cause was the natural cause of republicanism, the “cause of mankind.” Like the article “From a Correspondent,” the Freeman used the language of natural, and hence rational, states of governance to support his cause, condemning the Federalist maneuvers as irrational, aristocratic malfeasance. The fight to define national character displayed here by the Freedman was only one piece of a growing Republican effort to paint the Federalists as un-republican and thus un-American. Thus, for Republicans, Genet’s reception provided a gauge of commitment to republican values like popular sovereignty and equality. For Federalists, the affair served as a litmus test for commitments to American neutrality and independence. Both reactions, then, employed the Genet Affair to promote a partisan interpretation of the American revolution and its implications for national and international republicanism.

Beyond the sphere of the establishment partisan press stood a growing number of Democratic-Republican societies—groups which formed spontaneously to support the French Revolution. Arising in the early to mid-1790s, they were initially weak as American public opinion turned against the Terror. They grew more popular by the end of the decade as the Adams administration fell out of favor for the Jay treaty and an increasingly weak economy.<sup>94</sup> Modeled on French Jacobin clubs, the Democratic-Republican societies allowed for greater public

---

<sup>93</sup> “To the Freemen of Philadelphia.”

<sup>94</sup> Laura Foner and Elizabeth Vandepaer, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts* (Greenwood Press, 1976), 11.

participation by publishing resolutions and opinions formed by their individual members. These societies often gave public political voice to immigrant communities who formed their own groups but participated in the larger network which grew throughout the remainder of the 1790s. Importantly, these groups widely supported Citizen Genet.

One such group, the German Republican Society of Philadelphia, wrote a public letter to Genet on May 17, 1793, which was later published in Philadelphia's *American Daily Advertiser*. The letter proclaimed: "we feel the liveliest sympathy for the distresses of our republican brethren, who are combating the fell hosts of tyrants, in defense of their own natural rights, and the rights of mankind."<sup>95</sup> In such remarks, this society echoed the sentiments of other Republican voices which saw the French Revolution as a fight for republicanism. They proclaimed:

"We deplore that a nation from whom we are descended should be among the first in the conspiracy against Liberty. We see, with pain and, horror the confederation of all European despots against freedom—their united efforts to supersede the *general will* of France... The combinations of the sovereignty of the people are the only security for general liberty and happiness."<sup>96</sup>

Alluding to the Francophobic sentiments within the growing Federalist camp, the letter accused the "nation" of conspiring against liberty. The group was concerned that the government would override the general will of the people. Reflecting back on the social contractarian methodology present in Webster, Sullivan, Paine, and others, the idea that a government could override the will of the people was a highly persuasive one to the grassroots Democratic-Republican societies who held social capital but little electoral power and felt overwhelmed by the policies of the Washington administration. Though the President could be elected every four years, the press had a duty to hold him accountable to the will of the people throughout that term. Throughout the Washington administration, and certainly under Adams, a vicious opposition press arose under

---

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Foner and Vandepaer, 55.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Foner and Vandepaer, 55.

newfound notions of freedom of the press. Expressing the true will of the people through the press and likeminded societies were safeguards against tyranny. Perhaps such sentiments carried more than a grain of truth as the Adams Administration attempted to curb anti-Federalist press with the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. The Acts targeted Republican printers who spoke out against the Adams administration and were preceded by deep-seated Federalist prejudice against Genet and his Republican followers.

Federalist responses to the Republican excitement for Genet were harsh. Some within the Washington administration grew infuriated with the reception of the French minister in Philadelphia and the sentiments articulated by the Democratic-Republican societies. Future Chief Justice of the United States John Marshall, in his 1803 biography of George Washington, wrote that

“the day succeeding [Genet’s] arrival, he received addresses of congratulation from particular societies, and from the citizens of Philadelphia, who waited on him in a body, in which they expressed their fervent gratitude for the zealous and disinterested aids which the French people had furnished to America, unbounded exultation at the success of their arms, and a positive conviction that the safety of the United States depended upon the establishment of the republic.”<sup>97</sup>

For Marshall, the “fervent” reception of Genet demonstrated the misguided nature of the citizens’ position. To follow the “zealous and disinterested” French aids was only possible to those willing to participate in such “unbounded exultation.” Marshall implied, here, is that the crowd receiving Genet was so fervently interested in his celebrity that they overlooked the deficiencies of his aids, and therefore, ultimately, the deficiencies of his entire mission. It was thus apparent to Marshall that the followers of Genet were cult-like, expressing a pride and euphoria for Genet that was not befitting of a public envisioned enlightened and rational. Worshipping any figure was dangerous

---

<sup>97</sup> John Marshall, Paul Carrese, and Robert Faulkner, *The Life of George Washington* (Indianapolis, IN, UNITED STATES: Liberty Fund, Incorporated, 2000), 382.

because it symbolized the public's gravitation toward its common passions. Genet, in particular, appeared dangerous to the Federalists because he aroused those passions so easily in the masses. The implications of such arousal were both philosophical and political: the episode reminded Federalists of the dangers of inclusive democracy while also foreshadowing the enthusiasm that would lead to their eventual demise as a party.

### **The Implications of the Genet Affair**

Years later, the Federalist press continued to stir up the Genet Affair. The Federalists desired greater support as they dug-in to a mounting naval conflict with France. The 1796 treaty between the United States and Great Britain (known as Jay's Treaty after its primary negotiator, John Jay) flustered French officials and led to increased danger for American vessels in the Atlantic as the French sought to cripple American shipping during this geopolitical realignment.<sup>98</sup> Because war was never officially declared, the naval conflict is known by historians as the "Quasi-War." France was now an enemy of the United States, which frightened the Federalist establishment and angered Republicans who still supported the French Revolution, now in its post-Terror stages. The Jay Treaty further aligned the United States with Britain in a move to foster trade and increase security; yet Republicans were frustrated that very little security concessions were made by the British.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the Jay Treaty played a major role in defining the political lines of the 1790s: northeastern Federalists supported the treaty while increasingly southern Republicans accused it of propping up trade in Federalist strongholds at the expense of the south.<sup>100</sup> Fearing that the many Republican groups formed during Citizen Genet's first months in America

---

<sup>98</sup> Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, "Private Letters and Public Diplomacy: The Adams Network and the Quasi-War, 1797-1798," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 283.

<sup>99</sup> Dennehy, "James Sullivan and the Birth of Massachusetts Republicanism."

<sup>100</sup> Wendell Bird, "Passing Laws against Internal Enemies," in *Criminal Dissent*, Prosecutions under the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 (Harvard University Press, 2020), 32.

would side with France during a potential invasion of the United States, the Federalist press viewed themselves as more important than ever in the partisan struggle to preserve order in the young republic.

Against this backdrop, Federalist commentators like William Cobbett (1763-1835) reassessed the Genet Affair. The English-born editor of *Porcupine's Gazette* (1797-1799), Cobbett founded his newspaper in the capital city. An agrarian reformer and a critic of British political corruption, Cobbett first fled to France in 1792. There, he encountered the beginning of the Reign of Terror and fled to the United States in 1793. He drew attention in Philadelphia, where he settled, for displaying a large portrait of George III in the window of his bookstore. Like other political refugees, especially those who came later from the white planter class that fled Haiti during its revolution, Cobbett took advantage of the rising market for newspapers spurred by increased literacy rates and growing interest in current events.<sup>101</sup> His *Porcupine's Gazette* printed with a Federalist slant. It featured numerous editorials on the French Revolution where it leveled especially vicious attacks on its American supporters.

Cobbett pinpointed the emotional nature of Genet's speeches in his June 7, 1798, editorial on the Genet Affair. The reflection began:

“We must all recollect what were our feelings while Genet exercised the functions of minister of the republic of France in this country; many of our deluded fellow-citizens had been induced to enlist under the banners of this incendiary; we were threatened from within and from without; and it was evident that nothing but vigilance, prudence, firmness, and rectitude could save us.”<sup>102</sup>

Written nearly five years after the Genet Affair, the *Gazette* accused the French republican envoy of seducing and misleading an emotionally susceptible public. Genet represented an “incendiary”

---

<sup>101</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Hoboken, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011).

<sup>102</sup> “From Russel's Boston Gazette. Jefferson,” *Porcupine's Gazette*, June 27, 1798, America's Historical Newspapers.

French republicanism, and threatened U.S. sovereignty by violating Washington's authority espoused in the neutrality proclamation. To combat the delusion that Genet spread, certain level-headedness was necessary. Similar to Webster's notion that only the spread of knowledge could contain the force of passions in political decisions, the *Gazette* identifies "prudence, firmness, and rectitude" as the counter-balancing sentiments to Genet's emotional and misleading calls to support France. Upstanding, careful judgement was needed to counterbalance these kinds of passionate political speeches. For Cobbett, newspapers were tools to train and reinforce rational thinking. Unlike the Genet Affair, which centered on fiery oratory, newspapers removed inclinations toward the passions from public discourse by writing in simple and prudent prose. They imposed the prudence and rectitude that Federalists called for. Cobbett's pro-British sentiment played into his paper's assessment of the Genet Affair and framed other *Gazette* responses to the French Revolution.

One such response was *Porcupine Gazette's* fierce critique of Benjamin Franklin Bache (Benjamin Franklin's grandson) and Matthew O'Carey (a disciple of Benjamin Franklin) for printing pro-French Revolution materials in their *Aurora General Advertiser*. Accusing them of printing Jacobin materials, the *Gazette* piece on March 12, 1798, composed by Cobbett, asked "pardon of [the paper's] readers for devoting a part of the [paper] to the *business of warfare*—he loves peace as sincerely as they do—yet, when repeatedly and pointedly attacked by the *papers of sedition* it might be a crime to let them always pass unnoticed."<sup>103</sup> Cobbett expressed here the undesirability of newspaper attacks. He viewed them as unbecoming as they violate his principles of prudence and rectitude. Yet, for Cobbett, his attack on Bache and O'Carey was necessary because the public deserved to know what the whole "truth" was. Cobbett needed to respond to

---

<sup>103</sup> "Editor; Boston; Federal Gazette; Mr. Wayne British; English," *Porcupine's Gazette*, March 12, 1798, America's Historical Newspapers.

Bache and O’Carey because of their “many attempts” to “injure the circulation of a paper tending to expose their party to merited contempt.”<sup>104</sup> Cobbett referred, here, to his earlier accusation that Bache and O’Carey attempted to cut off the circulation of the *Boston Federal Gazette* in retaliation for publishing anti-French material.<sup>105</sup> Cobbett implied that the proper way to settle a debate was in the newspaper instead of by applying prior restraints on circulation. However, Cobbett’s focus on Bache and O’Carey’s content—and not merely on their methods—conflated reason with political agreement.

The bitter partisanship of the 1790s, wrought by conflict with France, meant that “only one side could be right,” validating verbal abuse—like that between Bache, O’Carey, and Cobbett—by newspapers towards each other.<sup>106</sup> Such sentiments produced the Alien and Sedition Acts, which prosecuted people for speech deemed “dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States.”<sup>107</sup> The laws targeted newspaper editors like Bache and O’Carey who promoted Republican ideas and opposed the John Adams presidency. Increasingly, Federalists viewed Republican editorial opposition as an arm for French propaganda and therefore sought to paint them as treasonous.<sup>108</sup> For the Federalists, then, mistrust of public opinion went far beyond the fear of unmoderated passions. Federalist censorship revealed the party’s insecurity regarding its grip on power and the vitality of its principles.

If newspapers provided a regulatory mechanism for filtering emotions out of politics, and if oppositional speech was treasonous, then eliminating the opposition press was a logical next step for the Federalists. Merely because this step arguably violated freedom of the press and

---

<sup>104</sup> “Editor; Boston; Federal Gazette; Mr. Wayne British; English.”

<sup>105</sup> “Editor; Boston; Federal Gazette; Mr. Wayne British; English.”

<sup>106</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*, 0 edition (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1996), 51.

<sup>107</sup> “Our Documents - Transcript of Alien and Sedition Acts (1798),” accessed May 6, 2021.

<sup>108</sup> Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*, 58.

freedom of speech did not render moot its function of encouraging public reason. Restricting freedom of the press and encouraging public reason were not mutually exclusive. As Republicans responded to the Alien and Sedition Acts by doubling down on support for First Amendment rights and state sovereignty (evidenced by the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions written by Jefferson and Madison), they signaled a willingness to accept some oppositional speech for the benefit of regaining their own. Thomas Cooper, a Republican editor of the *Sunbury and Northumberland Gazette*, wrote that the Federalist administration had “[stretched] to the utmost the constitutional authority of our Executive, and [introduced] the political evils of those European governments whose principals we have rejected.”<sup>109</sup> Ironically, Republicans like Cooper only denounced the “evils” of European governments once Federalists placed similar censorship on Republican publications.

The conflation of public reason and political agreement divided Federalist politicians and editors. Since both Webster and Cobbett emphasized the importance of editorial debate, and since Cobbett railed against prior restraints, their views contradicted Federalist policy objectives under the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Acts, through censorship and the elimination of political discourse, hindered the newspaper’s ability to reinforce public reason. If debate was necessary to encourage rational analysis of public events, then the Acts stifled public reason by forcing the public to digest only one interpretation of those events. Editors like Webster and Cobbett, though skilled writers with distinct political characters, were ultimately professional mouthpieces for the Federalist party. They possessed little autonomy when it came to which Federalist policies they could oppose in their papers. There was a financial force preventing their ability to print authentic and nuanced opinions. Most Federalist publications had direct monetary ties to Alexander

---

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Cooper, *National Intelligencer*, November 7, 1806.

Hamilton, and Hamilton himself professed the utility of the press in advancing his political agenda and career.<sup>110</sup> Complicating the notion that the newspaper could be used as a regulatory mechanism for emotion in politics, then, was the idea that newspaper editors served as puppets in a political dance choreographed by party bosses. Editors needed to fall in line with the party objectives.<sup>111</sup> This dance would continue to play out at the end of the 1790s and into the early 1800s over increasingly contested issues, primarily, for example, the influx of refugees from Saint Domingue in the wake of the Haitian Revolution.

Citizen Genet, whose Girondin faction was overthrown by the Montagnard Robespierre in 1793, would request asylum in the United States. President Washington begrudgingly accepted his petition, and Genet married into a wealthy New York family and resided in that state for the remainder of his life. Though the Genet episode is often merely examined in the context of American international affairs, Genet's role in American debates over revolution and political stability reveal a press attempting to define new limits to public reason. American interpretations of the French Revolution, guided by Genet's behavior in the United States, solidified the notion that newspapers were a more enlightened form of discourse than oratory: newspapers could guide and encourage public reason amidst the emotional nature of revolution. These ideas would be tested as the American public confronted revolution in Saint Domingue. In the face of trade ramifications, refugee resettlement, and domestic slavery and racial relations, American debates over liberty and public reason took on a racialized element during the Haitian Revolution, forcing Americans to reexamine the boundaries of reason, the passions, and freedom.

---

<sup>110</sup> Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*, 43.

<sup>111</sup> This was more difficult on the Republican side, which included a wider variety of political opinions and was far less centralized than the Federalist organization.

## THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION AND THE RACIALIZED PUBLIC SPHERE

### Revolution Spreads to Saint Domingue

“Review the history of their past sufferings, be but a moment in their situation, and judge whether in a climate warm as theirs your blood would flow coolly. Let us be consistent Americans, and if we justify our own conduct in the late glorious Revolution, let us justify those, who, in a cause like ours fight with equal bravery.”<sup>112</sup>

The dawn of 1791 saw the first year of a slave rebellion in Saint Domingue, the French island colony in the West Indies. American observers, like the author of this article in Boston’s *Argus*, linked the revolutionary struggles of America, France, and Saint Domingue. In 1791, with the French Revolution yet to advance toward its more violent stages, Americans struggled to characterize the conflict in Saint Domingue. Was it closer to domestic slave uprisings, or did it bear closer similarity to the French Revolution? Some American commentators connected black violence to black character, while others linked the rebellion to the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In this article, the *Argus* offered a plain analysis of the slave revolt, arguing that “the efforts of Blacks for a peaceable assertion would have cost them their lives,” and

“had they been treated with mildness, perhaps their measures had been more mild... Shall we now sacrifice principle to a paltry partiality for colour? Can we believe that the French people were ever oppressed as the Blacks have been?”<sup>113</sup>

The *Argus* posited that poor conditions caused the rebellion. Under these conditions and violent repression, the slave system deprived slaves of their natural rights. Indeed, slaves in Saint Domingue experienced some of the worst conditions in the New World. Many Americans believed their form of slavery to be more humane than that of Saint Domingue, and the slave rebellion on

---

<sup>112</sup> “Those Who in a Cause Like Ours Fight with Equal Bravery,” *The Argus*, November 22, 1791, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>113</sup> “Those Who in a Cause Like Ours Fight with Equal Bravery.”

the island reinforced this view.<sup>114</sup> Thus in the eyes of some American onlookers, the rebellion was justified but the end of American slavery was not.

Recalling Sullivan's view of rebellion in his *Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution* is useful for understanding how Americans might have understood the links between events in France and Saint Domingue. To Sullivan, slavery was the opposite of liberty. If one believed that blacks possessed the same natural rights of whites, then their deprivation of liberty fit neatly into Sullivan's model. Under this view, rebellion was justified under any deprivation of natural rights. If Americans were similarly deprived of liberty before 1776—under a despotic, foreign king—then they had every right to revolt against him. Similarly, the French Third Estate, with a new understanding of natural rights, overthrew Louis XVI. Black slaves in Saint Domingue, deprived of their liberty under slavery, rebelled against their masters.

The potential connections between these revolutions raised the stakes for Americans: whether or not Americans drew a direct line between France and Saint Domingue would determine, in part, how they contextualized their own revolution. If there was indeed kinship between the French and Haitian struggles, no less their own, then Americans would have to consider the boundaries of revolution in the New World. Were all revolutions against despotic rule, whether under king or slave master, rational expressions of a desire for liberty?<sup>115</sup> The answer to that question would have massive implications for American democracy and slavery. The revolution in Saint Domingue would force the public sphere to adapt to changing and competing notions of who could participate in the young republic.

---

<sup>114</sup> Ashli White, "The Politics of 'French Negroes' in the United States," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 29, no. 1 (2003): 105.

<sup>115</sup> See Tyler Stovall, *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021), 107 for a discussion of "slavery" as a racially exclusive political metaphor.

Rich with sugar, European colonists during the sixteenth century turned to slave labor imported from Africa after the island's native population nearly ceased to exist. Thus, by the eighteenth century, around five hundred thousand of the island's population of 556,000 were African slaves.<sup>116</sup> The remainder of Saint Domingue's population was made up of whites, often of French origin, and the *gens de couleur*, or free people of color. The latter group contained around 25,000 people.<sup>117</sup> This group included many mixed-race individuals, and was not internally stratified, while the whites were sharply divided along class lines (known as *petit* and *grand blancs*).<sup>118</sup> The *gens de couleur*, who built up their own plantations, and often owned black slaves, increased their political capital during the eighteenth century. Historian Ashli White argues that by the end of the eighteenth century, both the whites and free people of color on Saint Domingue benefitted from tightly knit "networks of trade, migration, and information."<sup>119</sup> Indeed, trade with the United States was vital to the island's economy, and vice versa.<sup>120</sup> The white French planters of Saint Domingue were the wealthiest in the New World, the result of harsh slave exploitation and easy port access at Cap Français, where over one hundred ships anchored on a daily basis.<sup>121</sup> The *gens de couleur* leveraged their ever-increasing economic importance on Saint Domingue as the revolution neared; they even sent delegates to the signing of the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" in France to ensure their inclusion.<sup>122</sup> The rise of the *gens de couleur* had a profound impact on the Haitian Revolution.

---

<sup>116</sup> "Haitian Revolution | Causes, Summary, & Facts," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 6, 2021.

<sup>117</sup> James Alexander Dun, "Introduction: Making Revolution in Philadelphia," in *Dangerous Neighbors*, Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 19.

<sup>118</sup> Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>119</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 5.

<sup>120</sup> Jeremy D. Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (Hoboken, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011), 3.

<sup>121</sup> Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 10.

<sup>122</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 4.

In America, the initial shots of the Haitian Revolution competed for headlines with the French Revolution. By the time fighting broke out in Saint Domingue, American observers anticipated news from France nearly every day. When news that some *gens de couleur* received new rights as citizens of France sent shockwaves through the American press, it left both the French colonial authority and the Americans wondering how far the revolution in France could be stretched. While the *gens de couleur* further obtained new rights from the French National Assembly in May of 1791, white planters refused to stand on equal ground with their black counterparts. When black slaves initially revolted in August of 1791 in the northern provinces of Saint Domingue, white planters were forced to accept treaties with the *gens de couleur*, agreeing to allow those free blacks to serve alongside them in local government.<sup>123</sup> Perhaps these planters saw a common interest with the often slaveholding *gens de couleur*, putting their racial prejudices aside to ensure the preservation of the slave economy. Yet this action did not prevent the spread of mass slave uprising over the course of the next decade.

These uprisings, now the Haitian Revolution, triggered an exodus of white planters, *gens de couleur*, and former slaves from the island. Tens of thousands of people from Saint Domingue flocked to the United States, especially the cities of Charleston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond.<sup>124</sup> While the various alliances, battles, and political developments in Saint Domingue throughout the course of the revolution (1791-1804) are worthy of investigation, this section is dedicated to exploring American responses to the events in Saint Domingue. A fight for black freedom, based on the same premises of the American and French revolutions, promised heated debate in the young republic. Just as debates about Edmond Genet served as a proxy for a domestic understanding of the French Revolution and its political implications for the preservation of the

---

<sup>123</sup> Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*, 41.

<sup>124</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 5.

American Revolution, the arrival of refugees from Saint Domingue offered Americans a battleground for debating a revolution that felt—and was—much closer to home than France. Americans looked to Saint Domingue for lessons about liberty and slavery. The revolution called into question the elasticity of their own revolutionary values. Debates about Saint Dominguen refugees reveal an America grappling with just how far public reason could extend, defining new, racialized boundaries for the American public sphere.

### **The Saint Dominguen Refugee Crisis**

By 1793, when the powers of Western Europe converged on France, fighting also intensified around Saint Domingue and in the Caribbean. The British, who controlled Jamaica and other nearby island colonies, invaded Saint Domingue that September. They landed in the northwestern part of the island, which commenced nearly five years of fighting between them, the French, the Spanish, and the slave militias. Many of the white French planters, who felt increasingly alienated from their mother country, welcomed the British as liberators.<sup>125</sup> As thousands of white Saint Dominguens fled the violence and sought refuge in the United States, their potential allegiance to the British crown drew suspicion from Americans of both political persuasions. One article in Webster's *American Minerva* accused white Saint Dominguen refugees in Baltimore of "recruiting" Americans to fight for the British in the Caribbean, where they would have to

"swear to shed even the last drop of my blood in support of the British flag at St. Domingo, to fight until death against all Frenchmen... and to perish rather than to acknowledge the French Republic."<sup>126</sup>

Just as Federalists worried about Citizen Genet's recruitment of Americans to fight for the French, most Americans agreed that fighting on behalf of the British—the original enemy of the United

---

<sup>125</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 92.

<sup>126</sup> "French Colonial Affairs," *American Minerva*, January 2, 1794, *America's Historical Newspapers*.

States—was far less acceptable. Even though the *Minerva* was a Federalist paper, which the opposition press accused of being Anglophilic, this article flatly rejected any association with the British. In doing so, Webster walked a fine line between two extremes which he and other Federalists found unenticing. On one hand, denied supporting the French Revolution and its influence on the uprising in Haiti, yet on the other, he rejected the British invasion of the island which threatened to restore colonial monarchy in Saint Domingue. Such a tightrope walk left the reader wondering where Federalist sentiment lay. If not in support of Jacobinism nor monarchy, Webster might have tacitly been expressing support for a Saint Domingue independent of both France and Britain. This would, in turn, mean supporting blacks as capable proprietors of a republican state, something that Webster was not ready to explicitly state in his publication.

Perhaps to avoid the question of an independent Haiti, American commentators focused on the impact of refugee arrivals in the United States. The first wave of refugees were a few hundred white planters to arrive in Philadelphia. Americans like Webster feared that the white refugees, many of them with dozens of slaves in tow, would bring aristocracy and erode the beginnings of republican culture in the United States. Of the over 3,000 Saint Dominguen refugees who landed in Philadelphia alone during the early 1790s, many were politically homeless, struggling to identify with the Federalists or Republicans.<sup>127</sup> Although they sympathized with Federalist views on the French Revolution, they found solace in the Republicans' pro-slavery stance.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, some Americans suspected that the white refugees from Saint Domingue were involved with the initiation of the revolution there, sowing chaos to restore the monarchy in France. In the United

---

<sup>127</sup> Garvey F. Lundy, "Early Saint Domingan Migration to America and the Attraction of Philadelphia," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2006): 76.

<sup>128</sup> White, *Encountering Revolution*, 115.

States, this issue of refugee loyalty fostered some of the most heated debates about the Haitian Revolution.

The theory, presented by the Republican *Virginia Chronicle*, contended that “counter revolutionists had made the negroes to believe that Capet [Louis XVI] had left a will by which the negroes were to have their liberty, if by their exertions his son should come to mount the throne.”<sup>129</sup> Thus the white refugees in the United States were characterized as devious aristocrats bent on restoring the monarchy and imposing slavery. This would have been alarming to many northerners, whose states were either in the process of abolishing slavery or had already done so.<sup>130</sup> Anti-slavery forces in America were further alarmed by the fact that many white planters from Saint Domingue—understanding and taking advantage of the burgeoning print culture in the United States—set up their own newspapers. This included New Orleans’s first newspaper, *Le Moniteur de la Louisiane*, which advocated for federal assistance to white refugees from Saint Domingue.<sup>131</sup> These papers served as mouthpieces for a monarchist-leaning, pro-slavery view on Saint Domingue that would shape public opinion not only on the Haitian Revolution but also on American domestic affairs with regard to emancipation and republicanism. These subversive political forces likely gave pause to both Federalists and Republicans who, at best, possessed overlapping interests on some issues with the white refugees from Saint Domingue.

Beyond political persuasion, French refugees from Saint Domingue attempted to recruit Americans to fight for their cause. In the midst of his own recruitment scheme, Citizen Genet warned Thomas Jefferson that “assemblies of colonists” in American cities were stirring up

---

<sup>129</sup> “Jacobin Club,” *Virginia Chronicle, &c.*, November 17, 1794, *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

<sup>130</sup> Pennsylvania and Massachusetts began such measures as early as 1780 and 1783, respectively.

<sup>131</sup> Smithsonian Magazine, “The History of the United States’ First Refugee Crisis,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed February 10, 2022.

counterrevolutionary behavior through their publications.<sup>132</sup> Arousing even more suspicion was the fact that many of the white refugees were Catholics and thus potentially loyal to the Pope and not to the United States. Such character assassinations directed toward the white refugees, insofar as they focused on the failings of the planters and not on the conditions faced by their slaves, diluted the sense in which the revolution in Saint Domingue was an organic slave uprising. This led American commentators to focus on similar failings in their own society, raising questions about what a slave revolt would mean for the United States. The spread of slave insurrection frightened Americans—even those opposed to slavery—because it threatened domestic peace and constitutional order. Saint Domingue’s proximity to the United States magnified these fears, for if slave insurrection could spread so easily to Jamaica, as some suspected, then the planters of the American south might be next. Their slaves might, as one observer claimed, “follow the example of their brethren, the French negroes in Hispaniola.”<sup>133</sup>

### **Slavery and the Public Sphere**

If the debate to define republicanism in the early republic relied heavily, by proxy, on debates over Saint Domingue, then new norms of public sphere participation emerged in response to the refugee crisis of the Haitian Revolution. By drawing comparisons between the Haitian and French revolutions, Americans pondered the limits of freedom. In doing so, they simultaneously crafted new notions of public sphere participation that centered on both racialized ideas of rational capacity and burgeoning fears of a black national identity. Was the Haitian Revolution more “French” or more “Negro?” Nowhere did these debates play out more than over the issue of black slaves brought to the United States from Saint Domingue. Did those slaves have a legal right to

---

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in White, *Encountering Revolution*, 103.

<sup>133</sup> “Cape Francois; French; New-York; Cape-Francois; France; St. Marks,” *National Gazette*, February 9, 1792, America’s Historical Newspapers.

freedom? If they did, to what degree could they be trusted to participate in the public sphere? The debate over the degree of liberty that should be afforded to these slaves elucidated competing notions of a racialized public sphere and the black capacity for reason. If these slaves could live as free men and women, and even further, if they could integrate into the existing free black public sphere in the northern cities, then the Haitian Revolution itself could have been better viewed as more French and more republican. Yet, on the other hand, assigning a certain Frenchness to the Haitian Revolution would associate it with senseless violence, casting it in a negative light.

One of the largest problems raised by popular migration to cities like Philadelphia involved what to do with slaves brought by white émigrés from Saint Domingue. This issue provided a backdrop for debates over the meaning of the Haitian Revolution in the face of political stability and black inclusion in the public sphere. Migration from Saint Domingue initiated after the first shots of the Haitian Revolution in August of 1791. From 1791 through 1794, 262 ships carrying a total of 2,236 whites, 32 “free negroes,” and 816 slaves arrived in Philadelphia.<sup>134</sup> Because of a Pennsylvania gradual manumission law, all slaves had to be freed within six months of arrival in the state. Thus, the population of free blacks in the city grew exponentially by 1804. Comprising a mere 4.5 percent or 2,500 people in 1790, by 1800, free blacks made up nearly nine percent of Philadelphia’s population, or about 8.5 percent, and would continue to see growth toward almost ten percent by 1810.<sup>135</sup> As the proportion of free blacks to whites rose in Philadelphia, so did racial tensions. The issue of slavery loomed over the white émigré planters who had recently resettled in Philadelphia and the surrounding Pennsylvania farmland.

---

<sup>134</sup> Gary B. Nash, “Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Dominguans in Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65 (1998): 46.

<sup>135</sup> “All United States Data,” Social Explorer, accessed November 17, 2021.

Gradual manumission laws, like Pennsylvania's six-month release rule, prevented white émigrés from keeping their slaves or from leaving the state with their slaves.<sup>136</sup> However, these émigrés attempted to use their influence to gain an exception for their slaves. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, which had been working for years to free black slaves in the area, met the émigrés with resistance. The abolitionists pointed out that the state constitution provided that "all men are born equally free and independent, and have inherent and indefeasible rights, among which are those of enjoying and defending life and liberty."<sup>137</sup> The abolitionist view was that slavery—whether domestic or imported—ran contrary to these words in the state constitution. Some even argued that since France had outlawed slavery in 1794, Saint Dominguen slaves should be free. Despite such arguments, which did free hundreds of Saint Dominguen slaves, economic opportunity for free blacks in the city was so low that many of the freed slaves were forced to become indentured servants—essentially slavery with an expiration date—for the same masters that freed them. In Philadelphia, 659 slaves were freed between 1787 and 1810; only 45 of them did not enter indentured servitude upon their release.<sup>138</sup> These servants, often very young, would serve their same masters until, on average, their twenty-eighth birthday. Such contracts allowed masters to shirk the burden of caring for older, less productive servants, which they would have to do under a strict slave system.

Perhaps economic need was not the only impetus for keeping free blacks under control. While abolitionists fought for the release of slaves, they did little to prevent their signing into indentured servitude. Fear of slave revolt echoed throughout the 1790s, with fears that, as previously stated, blacks would "follow the example of their brethren, the French negroes in

---

<sup>136</sup> Gary B. Nash, "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Dominguans in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65 (1998): 54.

<sup>137</sup> Nash, "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North," 54.

<sup>138</sup> Nash, "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North," 55.

Hispaniola.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, the global abolitionist movement not only wanted freedom for slaves, but also wished to provide blacks with, as French abolitionist Benjamin Giroud wrote of Saint Dominguen slaves in the United States, “instruction, light and maxims of morality, as are proper for free and civilized men.”<sup>140</sup> If slaves, from decades of bondage, were not ready to exist as free people, whites like Giroud saw themselves as benevolent tutors of the morality and conduct necessary for blacks to live peacefully as free citizens. The interest in moral instruction sought to push back against the idea that black freedom meant destruction. The prudence and rectitude which the newspapermen clamored for in public discourse was, in the view of the abolitionists, a prerequisite for black participation in the public sphere.

In some southern cities, like Charleston, the fear of revolt was greater than that of Philadelphia. For example, fires set by black slaves ravaged the city. Northern commentators were alarmed by such incidents, worrying that they would spread to the north. For example, the *New York Journal and Patriotic Register* reported in October 1793 that

“They write from Charleston that the negroes have become very insolent, in so much that the citizens are alarmed, and the militia keep a constant guard. It is said that the St. Domingo negroes have sown those seeds of revolt, and that a magazine has been attempted to be broken open.”<sup>141</sup>

Seen as non-citizens, Charleston’s blacks, whether refugee or native, attempted to access a “magazine,” or heavy artillery, perhaps indicating a drive to revolt. The detail also could have been added to stoke fear in the city’s white population, allowing for retribution against the city’s blacks who were seen as dangerous amidst the arrival of Haitian refugees. The accepted belief that Saint Dominguen blacks encouraged the setting of fires in Charleston demonstrates the unease with

---

<sup>139</sup> “Cape Francois; French; New-York; Cape-Francois; France; St. Marks,” *National Gazette*, February 9, 1792, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>140</sup> “Philadelphia, 1st Pluviose, 5th Year of the French Republic, Jan. 17, 1797,” *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*, July 12, 1797, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>141</sup> *New York Journal and Patriotic Register*, October 16, 1793.

which northern commentators on both sides of the political divide took with regard to the revolt in Saint Domingue.

However, while Republicans feared that the slave insurrection was a British plot to take Saint Domingue, Federalists connected the revolt with the terrors they saw in France. Philadelphia's *National Gazette*, a Republican paper, republished a letter from the war-torn Cape Francois in February of 1792 which stated that Saint Domingue's

“government has declared the execution of martial law through the island upon all insurgents; which it is thought will have some effect in keeping them quiet, in addition to their dread of the wild mountain negroes who are in alliance with the English.”<sup>142</sup>

Here, coverage of the revolution demonstrated that Republican anxiety about Saint Domingue went far beyond mere racial prejudice. Indeed, both parties had abolitionist and pro-slavery forces.<sup>143</sup> Republicans in particular, however, viewed the fight over Saint Domingue as a proxy war between monarchal British forces and republican French ones. By attributing the behavior of Saint Domingue's “wild mountain negroes” to an “alliance with the British,” the Republican press painted a picture of blacks that was incompatible with public sphere participation and natural rational capacity both from a racial and nationalistic perspective. Thus, the tension within the Republican position could not be more apparent: they supported the French Revolution, which ostensibly influenced blacks on Saint Domingue, but could not believe that the French idea of political equality could influence blacks, instead attributing their revolt to British motives and encouragement.

Meanwhile, Federalists readily accepted the links between the black slave revolt in Saint Domingue and the horrific parts of the French Revolution and tried to use this tie to its political

---

<sup>142</sup> “Cape Francois; French; New-York; Cape-Francois; France; St. Marks.”

<sup>143</sup> Stovall, *White Freedom*.

advantage. This treatment of the events in Saint Domingue was amplified by coverage of the struggle between black military leader Toussaint Louverture and white French Jacobin General Léger-Félicité Sonthonax. Federalists looked to Louverture as a savior from the increasingly radical Jacobin leadership provided by Sonthonax. Primarily, this sentiment came from Louverture's promise to white émigrés in the United States—published in the American press—that they would be safe upon return to Saint Domingue.<sup>144</sup> The island needed the émigrés' return to cultivate land and rebuild the faltering wartime economy. Commitments to political stability were popular with Federalists who were more skeptical of the French Revolution and what they saw as its excesses. Specifically, Sonthonax was instrumental in the seizure of American vessels in the Caribbean theater during the Quasi War with France. For example, William Cobbett's *Porcupine's Gazette* reported that in early January of 1798, an American schooner named Friendship was “plundered” by “French privateers” upon its entrance to Saint Domingue.<sup>145</sup> The captain of the ship “immediately” went to Cap Francois, where he was greeted by “the black commandant Touissant, who received him politely, and gave him orders for the restoration of his vessel.”<sup>146</sup> Here, Louverture is portrayed as a benevolent protector of American commercial interests against the excesses of France, represented to the writer by “the robber Sonthonax.”<sup>147</sup> The honorable Louverture, who the article identifies as black, is held above the white Sonthonax, who is depicted as a meddling and duplicitous French agent. The article went beyond a mere association of commercial benevolence to Louverture. It claimed that he had a “regard for justice and

---

<sup>144</sup> James Alexander Dun, “Black Jacobins: Saint Domingue in American Politics,” in *Dangerous Neighbors, Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 153.

<sup>145</sup> “French Fraternity,” *Porcupine's Gazette*, January 30, 1798, America's Historical Newspapers.

<sup>146</sup> “French Fraternity.”

<sup>147</sup> “French Fraternity.”

humanity.”<sup>148</sup> Apparently, for Federalists like Cobbett, it was not difficult to imagine a black man as a strong and fair leader.

By the time this article was published, Louverture was already famous in the United States for his political altercations with Sonthonax. In 1797, Sonthonax wished to execute the remaining whites in the colony, who he saw as royalists.<sup>149</sup> Federalists thus praised Louverture when he published a dialogue between himself and Sonthonax in the American press, exposing Sonthonax’s plot and Louverture’s resistance to radical ideas.<sup>150</sup> A black republic run by Louverture could serve U.S. commercial interests. It could also serve as an emigration destination for free blacks in America, whom leaders like James Madison and James Monroe worried could not exist alongside whites. Madison, who himself owned slaves but called the institution “the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man,” believed that colonization of a new country would alleviate the problem of domestic racial coexistence.<sup>151</sup> If, under Louverture, Saint Domingue became a stable black republic, it could ease growing domestic racial tensions brought by the strengthening of the free black population in cities like Philadelphia. Louverture’s measures thus symbolized to Americans a potential for a, though geographically distant, rational black public sphere. His measures also reinforced the notion that blacks, if free, would fare better in a separate environment from whites.

At the same time, the domestic racial tensions that grew during the Haitian Revolution demonstrated the emergence of a strong free black community that had no interest in moving to a

---

<sup>148</sup> “French Fraternity.”

<sup>149</sup> James Alexander Dun, “Black Jacobins: Saint Domingue in American Politics,” in *Dangerous Neighbors*, Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 153.

<sup>150</sup> “Extract from the Report Made to the Executive Directory by the Citizen Toussaint Louverture, General in Chief of the Forces of the French Republic at St. Domingo,” *The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser*, October 7, 1797, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Cheney, *James Madison*, 214.

Madison and Monroe would later help found the country of Liberia in Western Africa, which would host former American slaves.

foreign country. These men and women viewed themselves as Americans, evidenced by their yearly participation in Independence Day celebrations. For the first two decades of the early republic, free blacks celebrated Independence day in what is now known as Washington Square, or the southeast square of the original city plan.<sup>152</sup> Such a location made sense because of its proximity to Southwark, the river neighborhood where most of Philadelphia's free blacks resided during the late 18th and early 19th centuries.<sup>153</sup> Although the group of free blacks celebrating Independence Day remained separate from the white crowds that routinely gathered at Independence Hall, there was no *de jure* segregation of this or any other independence day celebrations in the city. In theory, free blacks could join these celebrations, but the existence of the Washington Square event means it is likely that blacks avoided Independence Hall on the Fourth. Thus, two independent public spheres were forming in the late 1790s: one white, and one black.

Complicating the notion of the divergent, racialized public sphere was the influx of Irish immigrants to the United States during the 1790s. Between 1789 and 1800, the Irish made up fifty-five percent of all naturalized citizens, demonstrating not only their growth but also their desire to participate in American democracy.<sup>154</sup> According to Noel Ignatiev, an American historian who focused on Irish immigrants, this vast increase in Irish political participation led the Federalists to conclude that “their defeat in the gubernatorial election of 1799 [was due] to a statewide coalition of Irish and German voters.”<sup>155</sup> Packed into the same neighborhood as free blacks—Southwark in

---

<sup>152</sup> Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 142.

<sup>153</sup> Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988), 177.

<sup>154</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 77.

<sup>155</sup> Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 77.

southeastern Philadelphia, nestled just below Washington Square on the Delaware River—the two groups often clashed over low-wage job opportunities. Ignatiev wrote that

“The Irish... came to a society in which color was important in determining social position. It was not a pattern they were familiar with and they bore no responsibility for it; nevertheless, they adapted to it in short order.”<sup>156</sup>

In other words, the Irish struggled throughout the nineteenth century to integrate into white society, and this struggle included violent outbursts directed at black neighbors. These outbursts, perhaps, demonstrated their whiteness to a society hostile to them upon arrival, mostly because of religious tensions wrought by Irish Catholicism. Against the backdrop of the Haitian Revolution, the racial violence that erupted between the Irish and Philadelphia’s free blacks symbolized Madison’s original fear that black freedom and racial coexistence would lead to instability in the United States.

---

<sup>156</sup> Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 2.

## ECHOES OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION IN THE UNITED STATES

### A Captain, Lieutenant, and Ensign

By the end of the 1790s, fighting in France, the Atlantic, and Saint Domingue continued.

Weary of the decade of fighting, William Cobbett lamented in June of 1798:

“How long, Americans, are we to bear and forbear! Rouse, and free our soil from the polluted foot steps of those base foreigners, and spurn from our bosoms the vipers we are cherishing!”<sup>157</sup>

A foreigner himself, Cobbett urged the United States to avoid involvement in the quarrels of European powers, a conflict between foreign slaves and their masters. So much entanglement—especially trade with Saint Domingue and Britain—frightened a Cobbett interested in American independence. Cobbett simultaneously understood the great weight of the conflict in Saint Domingue for the American slave system. With the fight of the next century, of abolishing slavery and expanding democracy, on the horizon, Cobbett concluded his piece with a stark warning, full of his habitually biting rhetoric: “Take care, take care, you sleepy southern fools. Your negroes will probably be your masters before this day twelve months.”<sup>158</sup>

Seven years later, the Haitian Revolution neared its conclusion. Toussaint Louverture had been taken prisoner by Napoleon in early 1803 and died in prison that April. However, Napoleon’s campaign in Saint Domingue proved disastrous, and he surrendered to Louverture’s more radical successor Jean-Jacques Dessalines in late 1803.<sup>159</sup> On New Year’s Day, 1804, Dessalines declared Haiti independent. Four days later, he commenced the seizure of white-owned property. Dessalines sent orders throughout the island to massacre its remaining whites, sending shockwaves through the American press.<sup>160</sup> Such an intense development to this final stage of the Haitian Revolution

---

<sup>157</sup> “Americans, Look Out !!!,” *Porcupine’s Gazette*, June 7, 1798, America’s Historical Newspapers.

<sup>158</sup> “Americans, Look Out !!!”

<sup>159</sup> Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*.

<sup>160</sup> Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*.

manifested the worst fear held by some Americans: blacks would not only find their freedom but would also violently take power and overturn more than two centuries of white hegemony in the Americas. The memory of Gabriel's Rebellion in Richmond, Virginia was at the fore of slaveowners' collective memory heading into 1804, when only four years earlier it had rocked the south with rumors of widespread slave rebellion the New World had not seen except in Saint Domingue.<sup>161</sup> Gabriel's Rebellion, in addition to the violence in Saint Domingue, contributed to widespread fear in America over black slave rebellion.

An example of this fear occurred in Philadelphia, where newspapers reported an incident involving a violent black mob on Independence Day, 1804. The mob allegedly attacked white onlookers as they passed from Southwark through the city, saying they would "shew (sic) the whites St. Domingo."<sup>162</sup> This event illuminated how black and white Americans reacted to the final events in Saint Domingue. It reveals the continued anxiety not only about the refugees from Saint Domingue themselves, but also about the expansion of liberty and equality to the country's black population. The white understanding of black behavior on that day in 1804, and the subsequent repression of black Independence Day celebrations, demonstrate the impact that black independence in Saint Domingue had on the American understanding of race and the developing public sphere.

After Haitian independence, northern whites regarded black freedom as incompatible with their vision of liberty and acted with hostility toward a group which whites had mostly left alone in the preceding decades. For many white Americans, Dessalines' massacre and the events of July 4, 1804 signaled that black people did not possess enough reason to deserve a place in the public

---

<sup>161</sup> James Alexander Dun, "Second Revolutions: Saint Domingue and Jeffersonian America," in *Dangerous Neighbors*, Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 179–208.

<sup>162</sup> "From the Philadelphia Freeman's Journal," *Evening Post*, July 12, 1804.

sphere. To entrust black reason would be to support what many whites saw as a barbaric perversion of revolutionary values. If even free blacks could not participate in the project of liberty, they were thrust outside of the public sphere and left devoid of the once-promising hope for freedom of expression exemplified by Philadelphia's black Independence Day celebrations before 1804.

The status quo of peaceful but separate celebrations indeed fell apart on July 4, 1804. The aforementioned article in the Philadelphia *Evening Post* (Philadelphia, PA) on July 12, 1804 was titled "From the Philadelphia Freeman's Journal." It borrowed the article from a newspaper bearing that name published by a descendent of Irish immigrants named William M'Corkle.<sup>163</sup> Both the *Evening Post* and the *Freeman's Journal* were initiated by M'Corkle to combat what he and other so-called "Quids" saw as a rising radical streak within Philadelphia's Jeffersonian Republicans. By 1804, largely because of the Alien and Sedition Acts and the failures of the Adams presidency, Federalists were so weak in the United States that Jeffersonian Republicans had taken over the young republic. Within this emerging political reality, new divisions emerged.

These divisions became apparent when the *Evening Post* was founded in February of 1804. In their publications, the Quids—who vouched for individual and property rights over what they saw as the dangers of majority rule—focused on the United States' economic potential.<sup>164</sup> Whereas the Quids emphasized these individual economic and property rights as integral pieces of democracy, they stood against the city's more radical Jeffersonian Republicans who saw inclusive, expansive democracy, complete with a strong legislature and a weaker judiciary, as the ideal form of republicanism. While property rights still mattered to these increasingly radical republicans, representation in the legislature was, for them, the crux of living in a republican society. The Quids

---

<sup>163</sup> "The Freeman's Journal, Or the North-American Intelligencer (Philadelphia [Pa.]) 1781-1792," Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed November 7, 2021.

<sup>164</sup> Andrew Shankman, "Malcontents and Tertium Quids: The Battle to Define Democracy in Jeffersonian Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 1 (1999): 59.

not only disagreed with this more radical vision for the republic, but they also feared that radical republicanism threatened the social harmony necessary to achieve economic growth and political stability: “Just when we should be happiest, when we are at our most triumphant, we divide amongst ourselves, we trample our unity.”<sup>165</sup> The black riots of July 4 and 5, 1804 in Philadelphia occurred against this backdrop of political schism. And, through this partisan lens of economic and political stability, the *Quid Evening Post* covered the events.

Alongside the Irish, Philadelphia’s free blacks demanded more rights and freedoms. The Haitian Revolution had, in some American cities, spurred violence. But in Philadelphia, while some feared more reckless passion, the revolution established a new paradigm of public participation for blacks in the city. Now, blacks could see themselves as integral participants of the republican project. They looked to Haiti for leadership. In the spirit of the three Atlantic revolutions, Jean-Jacques Dessalines exclaimed in a speech on April 28, 1804: “Shiver in fear, tyrants, usurpers, scourges of the New World!”<sup>166</sup> Americans would have read these words in their own newspapers.<sup>167</sup> With the Haitian fight for liberty ending, and with this speech coming on the heels of Dessalines’ massacre of Saint Domingue’s remaining white population, blacks in Philadelphia might have felt further emboldened to participate in American democracy or else use violence to claim freedom. Thus, the questions of an inclusive republic and political stability raised by the Quids came to the fore as blacks and whites clashed during Philadelphia’s 1804 Independence Day celebrations.

Written by “a subscriber” who claimed to have witnessed the riot on Independence Day, the article in the *Evening Post* on July 12, 1804, alleged that the group of black men

---

<sup>165</sup> “From the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal,” *Evening Post*, July 12, 1804.

<sup>166</sup> Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Dessalines Reader, April 28, 1804).

<sup>167</sup> James Alexander Dun, “The Negrophile Republic: Emancipation and Revolution,” in *Dangerous Neighbors, Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 87–120.

“formed themselves into a company, and appointed a captain, lieutenant, and ensign; they proceeded from Small to Shippen street; they at this time were without arms. In about three quarters of an hour a cry of murder was heard in Small street.”<sup>168</sup>

Written with matter of fact, succinct prose, the subscriber outlined a military-like organization of the group. At this time, the group remained unarmed. Yet shortly after—within an hour—the subscriber heard a “cry” as the group made its first attack.

After naming a few more specific violent encounters with white onlookers, the subscriber contended that the group

“threatened to murder a Mr. Kane and family, but through the interference of a Mr. Brushell, an American, they were protected... They were now about one hundred strong, armed with clubs, swords.”<sup>169</sup>

The subscriber did not explain how “Mr. Brushell, an American” managed to save an entire family from the growing, armed group. This moment in the story—whether intentionally or not—delineated the otherness of the attackers. The author did not explicitly reference the race of the victims as he did with the attackers. Instead, he mentioned the aid of an “American” which implied that the victims were not American. Perhaps they were the Irish who lived in the neighborhood and held a racial rivalry with the nearby black population. After all, “Kane” is an Irish name. It is unclear how the group of blacks obtained arms as they moved through the city.

Following the Kane episode, the subscriber turned to the second night of violence and the apex of the story:

“On the night of the 5th they collected again, about ten o’clock in the evening, from one to two hundred, armed as before, and committed to similar if not greater excesses... damning the whites, and saying they would shew (sic) them St. Domingo.”<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> “From the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal,” *Evening Post*, July 12, 1804.

<sup>169</sup> “From the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal.”

<sup>170</sup> “From the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal.”

Here, the author drew direct reference to the events in Saint Domingue. Given the fact that Philadelphians would have heard about Dessalines' massacre by July of 1804 (the popular *United States Gazette* began covering the massacre in early May of 1804), showing the whites "St. Domingo" carried weight to the readers. The reference was not only notable for its shock factor. While a white reader might have been frightened by the comparison, the very mention of Saint Domingue demonstrated the anxiety that the northern Jeffersonian press was beginning to feel about the appropriation of American revolutionary values to black people.

To associate the mob on the nights of July 4 and 5, 1804 with the Haitian Revolution—and more specifically, Dessalines' murderous campaign against the island's white population—was to warn the public about the dangers of black participation in the public sphere. The article put the link between the violence and the later stages of the Haitian Revolution in the mouths of the black rebels. Whereas separate parades had once been acceptable, the mob proved to the author, and probably to his readers, that blacks were incapable of assembling peacefully. In the subscriber's view, blacks were committed to violent "excesses." They were vengeful, lacked reason, and might even threaten to disrupt political stability through infidelity to the United States. Together, these attributes demonstrated the Quid mantra that an inclusive democracy was untenable in the face of instability. To reject inclusive democracy challenged the Quids' political opponents like the more radical printers of the popular Philadelphia *Aurora*. The *Aurora*, in particular, published Dessalines' speeches and proclamations as close to Independence Day as April 19, 1804, demonstrating its support for Dessalines' cause.<sup>171</sup>

Rather than attribute some innate quality of black people to the mob violence he observed on July 4 and 5, 1804, in addition to the revolution in Saint Domingue, the subscriber chose to

---

<sup>171</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, April 19, 1804.

contextualize his concerns within the Quid paradigm of stability. He finished the article by revealing that

“a considerable number of strange black people have been noticed loitering about within a short time. Should there not be an enquiry (sic) made into this affair, and some mode of employment adopted for them? Otherwise the consequences may be fatal to the peace and security of this city.”<sup>172</sup>

Here, the subscriber blamed the potential for violence on black idleness. He saw employment—not political participation—as a mechanism to save the city from black mob violence. Economic anxieties in the city thus gave way to political ones: if, as the subscriber believed, black freedom of expression would increase irrational discourse and beget political instability, the root of such instability might be black unemployment. If the free black people of Philadelphia, the argument implied, were gainfully employed, the city’s white population would be free from disturbances from angry blacks. Idle hands might cause trouble, but work could provide discipline. By grounding political and social stability in economic security, this perspective neglected the importance of Saint Domingue on black ideas of freedom and equality. In his focus on idleness and employment, the subscriber missed a lesson from Saint Domingue on political inclusion which other groups of Americans, like the more radical Jeffersonians and the scant remains of the Federalists, were beginning to understand. While the free blacks of Philadelphia may have rioted on July 4, 1804, because of economic insecurity, the expression of violence might also have been a display of changing loyalties within the black community.<sup>173</sup>

It is unclear to what extent the events described by the subscriber occurred, and their occurrence is not verifiable. But given the context of racial hostility, economic hardship, and the events in Haiti, it is not unfathomable that such an event occurred. Furthermore, while it is

---

<sup>172</sup> “From the Philadelphia Freeman’s Journal.”

<sup>173</sup> Haitian Independence marked a change in black attitudes toward the Fourth of July, which will be covered in the next subsection.

similarly unclear if the mob truly referenced the Haitian Revolution while roaming the city's streets, the mention of "St. Domingo" by the subscriber at the very least projected a growing anxiety. Such anxieties were over black stewardship of the same revolutionary ideals that propelled Americans in 1776. Blacks, the subscriber implied, without a capacity for rational public discourse, could not be trusted to participate in public opinion nor express themselves freely, ultimately providing grounds to exclude them from democracy.

## CONCLUSION

Just one year later, white Philadelphians signaled their unreadiness for an inclusive racial democracy: when blacks showed up to peacefully celebrate Independence Day at the white celebration, they were beaten away by the crowd.<sup>174</sup> In fact, historian Gary F. Lundy notes that after 1804, blacks in Philadelphia—and across the United States—began to celebrate January 1 as their own independence day. The date carried more importance than July Fourth because it marked Haitian independence and the abolition of the slave trade in America.<sup>175</sup> Such celebrations, marked by sermons and feasts, signified the integration of the black refugees from Saint Domingue into the American black community. They also symbolized the changing loyalties of free blacks who once celebrated American independence with pride. Thus, the public sphere had fragmented not only along racial lines but divided based on a new reflexive understanding of what black independence meant.

After 1804, while the abolitionist movement in Philadelphia and across the United States beat on, increasingly fewer white voices called for black inclusion in democracy. Both the Quids and the city's more radical republicans took then-President Jefferson's lead on Haiti. They chose to ostracize the new nation—despite earlier support—in the wake of Dessalines' massacre.<sup>176</sup> United against the developing free black population in Philadelphia, struggles between abolitionist groups in the city—often Quakers—and a party heavily influenced by Southern slaveholding planters would define a sort of a domestic continuation of the Haitian Revolution that would hold until the question of slavery came to a boiling point in the American Civil War. It was not until 1862, at the beginning

---

<sup>174</sup> Garvey F. Lundy, "Early Saint Domingan Migration to America and the Attraction of Philadelphia," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2006): 90.

<sup>175</sup> Lundy, "Early Saint Domingan Migration," 90.

<sup>176</sup> Philippe R. Girard, "Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System: A Reappraisal," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2012).

of the Civil War, that the United States officially recognized Haitian independence. In some ways a precursor to the abolition of slavery in the United States, the recognition of Haitian independence during the Lincoln administration signaled a new understanding of black freedom in the United States. This new understanding of black freedom would be formidably challenged over the course of the next century in public discourse, in the courts, and in Congress.

The reconciliation of the fragmented public sphere, along racial, class, and even gendered lines, would test the American system over the next one hundred and fifty years. Far more than a bourgeois endeavor, the creation of a strong public sphere—where debate thrived and opposing factions came together—was vital for sustaining a gradually more diverse republic. Today, with an expanding yet similarly hyper-partisan public sphere the United States faces unprecedented challenges regarding public trust. Factions digest information internally while disregarding anything that falls outside the realm of their tribe. Debate falters as partisan groups live in independent information universes, and thus people cannot meet each other in discourse with good faith or trust.

Diverse and expansive republics may only function if the fragmented public sphere can come together to debate the issues pressing the country on a level playing field. With freedom of speech and of the press for all, where ideas and information can be tested freely, and under the auspicious cloud of mutual respect for another's individual rational capacity—it is here that the American public sphere can conquer the greatest challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a challenge reminiscent of the challenge faced during the 1790s: sustain political stability in a free society.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

- Porcupine's Gazette. "Americans, Look Out !!!" June 7, 1798. America's Historical Newspapers.
- Aurora General Advertiser. "Aurora. Philadelphia: Thursday, April 19, 1804." April 19, 1804. America's Historical Newspapers.
- The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser. "By This Day's Mail. New-York, May 14." May 16, 1795. America's Historical Newspapers.
- National Gazette. "Cape Francois; French; New-York; Cape-Francois; France; St. Marks." February 9, 1792. America's Historical Newspapers.
- National Archives. "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," November 1, 2015.
- Aurora General Advertiser. "[Devastations; Danger; Unhappy; Danger; Reached]." January 14, 1797. America's Historical Newspapers.
- American Minerva. "Direct from Paris and Translated for the Minerva." December 3, 1794. America's Historical Newspapers.
- Porcupine's Gazette. "Editor; Boston; Federal Gazette; Mr. Wayne British; English." March 12, 1798. America's Historical Newspapers.
- The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser. "Extract from the Report Made to the Executive Directory by the Citizen Toussaint Louverture, General in Chief of the Forces of the French Republic at St. Domingo." October 7, 1797. America's Historical Newspapers.
- Gazette of the United States. "For the Gazette. To the Sieur Genet, Minister of France." September 11, 1793. America's Historical Newspapers.
- American Minerva. "French Colonial Affairs." January 2, 1794. America's Historical Newspapers.
- Porcupine's Gazette. "French Fraternity." January 30, 1798. America's Historical Newspapers.
- National Gazette. "From a Correspondent." April 10, 1793. America's Historical Newspapers.
- Porcupine's Gazette. "From Russel's Boston Gazette. Jefferson." June 27, 1798. America's Historical Newspapers.
- Evening Post. "From the Philadelphia Freeman's Journal," July 12, 1804.
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1739.

Virginia Chronicle, &c. "Jacobin Club." November 17, 1794. America's Historical Newspapers.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Dessalines Reader, April 28, 1804.

Kant, Immanuel. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals: And, What Is Enlightenment?* Second edition, Revised. The Library of Liberal Arts 113. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1997.

Gazette of the United States. "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings." December 17, 1793. America's Historical Newspapers.

Gazette of the United States. "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," January 6, 1804.

Madison, James. "Federalist No 49," February 5, 1788.

Madison, James. "Federalist No. 50," February 5, 1788.

Madison, James. "The Federalist No. 55." University of Virginia Press, February 13, 1788.

Madison, James. "To the Minister of the Interior of the French Republic," April 1793. Papers of James Madison, Congressional Series.

Marshall, John, Paul Carrese, and Robert Faulkner. *The Life of George Washington*. Indianapolis, IN, UNITED STATES: Liberty Fund, Incorporated, 2000.

Morris, Gouverneur. *A Diary of the French Revolution*, n.d.

"Our Documents - Transcript of Alien and Sedition Acts (1798)." Accessed May 6, 2021.

Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense and Other Works by Thomas Paine*. Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: Lerner Publishing Group, 2019.

Porcupine's Gazette and United States Daily Advertiser. "Paris, January 17." March 25, 1797. America's Historical Newspapers.

Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser. "Philadelphia, 1st Pluviose, 5th Year of the French Republic, Jan. 17, 1797." July 12, 1797. America's Historical Newspapers.

"[Port-Prince; Commodore; Barry; Charleston; Island; March; Domingo]." *United States' Gazette* XXV, no. 3604 (May 1, 1804): [3].

"Public Acts of Congress Passed at the 1st Session of the Third Congress." 1794.

Republican Society of the Town of Newark. "'Republicanism' to Friends and Countrymen." *Woods's Newark Gazette*. March 19, 1794.

Sullivan, James. *An Impartial Review of the Causes and Principles of the French Revolution*. Boston, MA: Benjamin Edes, Kilby Street, 1798.

National Archives. "The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription," November 4, 2015.

American Minerva. "The Editor's Address to the Public." December 9, 1793. America's Historical Newspapers.

*The Tragedy of Louis Capet: Being a True and Authentic Narrative of the Horrid and Barbarous Execution of the Late Unfortunate Monarch, Louis XVIth of France, Who Was Beheaded, on the Twenty First of January, 1793 ...* 26273. Gray, Edward, 1778?-1805, printer., 1793.

The Argus. "Those Who in a Cause Like Ours Fight with Equal Bravery." November 22, 1791. America's Historical Newspapers.

Gazette of the United States. "To Citizen Genet, Minister from the Republic, to the United States of America." August 24, 1793. America's Historical Newspapers.

National Gazette. "To the Freemen of Philadelphia." April 24, 1793. America's Historical Newspapers.

United States and Norman Ross Publishing. *Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States of America, and the Territories Thereof, Agreeably to Actual Enumeration Made According to Law, in the Year 1810*. New York, N.Y.: N. Ross Pub., 1990.

Porcupine's Gazette. "Valuable Extract, from New-York Gazette," December 20, 1797.

Washington, George. "Neutrality Proclamation, 22 April 1793." University of Virginia Press. Accessed March 24, 2021.

Webster, Noah. *The Revolution in France, Considered in Respect to Its Progress and Effects. By an American*. 28053. George Bunce, 1794.

Webster, Noah. "To George Washington from Noah Webster, 20 April 1794." University of Virginia Press. Accessed March 24, 2021.

## Secondary Sources

Social Explorer. "All United States Data." Accessed November 17, 2021.

Allen, Amy. "The Public Sphere: Ideology and/or Ideal?" *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 822–29.

Amory, Thomas C. *Life of James Sullivan*, 1859.

- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Barker, Hannah, and Simon Burrows, eds. *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760–1820*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Bernstein, Richard J. “The Normative Core of the Public Sphere.” *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 767–78.
- Bird, Wendell. “New Light on the Sedition Act of 1798: The Missing Half of the Prosecutions.” *Law and History Review* 34, no. 3 (2016): 541–614.
- Bird, Wendell. “Passing Laws against Internal Enemies.” In *Criminal Dissent*, 31–52. Prosecutions under the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. Harvard University Press, 2020.
- Bristow, William. “Enlightenment.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2017. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017.
- Campbell, Wesley J. “The Origin of Citizen Genet’s Projected Attack on Spanish Louisiana: A Case Study in Girondin Politics.” *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 4 (October 1, 2010): 515–44.
- Cheney, Lynne V. *James Madison: A Life Reconsidered*. New York: Viking, 2014.
- Christopher J. Young. “Connecting the President and the People: Washington’s Neutrality, Genet’s Challenge, and Hamilton’s Fight for Public Support.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2011).
- Daniel, Marcus. *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy*. Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2010.
- Davis, David Brion. “Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions.” In *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, edited by David P. Geggus, 3–9. University of South Carolina Press, 2001.
- Dennehy, John A. “James Sullivan and the Birth of Massachusetts Republicanism.” Boston College, 2011.
- Dun, James Alexander. “Black Jacobins: Saint Domingue in American Politics.” In *Dangerous Neighbors*, 143–78. Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Dun, James Alexander. *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America*. Philadelphia, UNITED STATES: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

- Dun, James Alexander. "Introduction: Making Revolution in Philadelphia." In *Dangerous Neighbors*, 1–26. Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Dun, James Alexander. "Second Revolutions: Saint Domingue and Jeffersonian America." In *Dangerous Neighbors*, 179–208. Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Dun, James Alexander. "The Negrophile Republic: Emancipation and Revolution." In *Dangerous Neighbors*, 87–120. Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Foner, Laura, and Elizabeth Vandepaer. *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts*. Greenwood Press, 1976.
- Girard, Philippe R. "Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the Atlantic System: A Reappraisal." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 3 (2012): 549–82.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Sixth Printing edition. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1991.
- Humphrey, Carol Sue. *Revolutionary Era, The: Primary Documents on Events from 1776 to 1800*. Santa Barbara, UNITED STATES: ABC-CLIO, 2003.
- Humphrey, Carol Sue. *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*. 0 edition. Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1996.
- Hyland, Ken. "Metadiscourse: What Is It and Where Is It Going?" *Journal of Pragmatics* 113 (May 1, 2017): 16–29.
- Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Jacob, Margaret C. *The Secular Enlightenment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.
- Jenson, Deborah. "Dessalines's American Proclamations of the Haitian Independence." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 15, no. 1/2 (2009): 72–102.
- Lundy, Garvey F. "Early Saint Domingan Migration to America and the Attraction of Philadelphia." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2006): 76–94.
- Mansbridge, Jane. "Conflict and Commonality in Habermas's Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere." *Political Theory* 40, no. 6 (2012): 789–801.

- McCann, Andrew Lachlan. "Dangerous Publics: Literature, Culture-Consumption and Political Activism in the 1790s." Ph.D., Cornell University, 1996.
- Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Nash, Gary B. "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Domingans in Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65 (1998): 44–73.
- Newman, Simon P. "American Political Culture and the French and Haitian Revolutions: Nathaniel Cutting and the Jeffersonian Republicans." In *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, edited by David P. Geggus, 72–90. University of South Carolina Press, 2001.
- Pasley, Jeffrey L. *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*. Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic. University of Virginia Press, 2001.
- Perl-Rosenthal, Nathan. "Private Letters and Public Diplomacy: The Adams Network and the Quasi-War, 1797-1798." *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 283–311.
- Popkin, Jeremy D. *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*. Hoboken, UNITED KINGDOM: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011.
- Reddy, William M. *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Shankman, Andrew. "Malcontents and Tertium Quids: The Battle to Define Democracy in Jeffersonian Philadelphia." *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 1 (1999): 43–72.
- Slauter, Will. "Forward-Looking Statements: News and Speculation in the Age of the American Revolution." *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 759–92.
- Stovall, Tyler. *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021.
- Smithsonian Magazine. "The History of the United States' First Refugee Crisis." Accessed February 10, 2022.
- Travers, Len. *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic*. Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997.
- Wahrman, Dror. *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*. New Haven, UNITED STATES: Yale University Press, 2004.

- Walton, Charles. *Policing Public Opinion in the French Revolution: The Culture of Calumny and the Problem of Free Speech*. Cary, UNITED STATES: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2009.
- Warner, Michael. *The Letters of the Republic : Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. *The Letters of the Republic : Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- American National Biography. "Webster, Noah (1758-1843), Lexicographer." Accessed September 4, 2021.
- Westphal, Kenneth R. "Enlightenment, Reason and Universalism: Kant's Critical Insights." *Studies in East European Thought* 68, no. 2–3 (September 2016): 127–48.
- White, Ashli. *Encountering Revolution*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
- White, Ashli. "The Politics of 'French Negroes' in the United States." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 29, no. 1 (2003): 103–21.
- Williams, Charlie. "Explorer, Botanist, Courier, or Spy? André Michaux and the Genet Affair of 1793." *Castanea*, 2004, 98–106.
- Williams, Garrath. "Kant's Account of Reason." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2018. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018.
- Ziesche, Philipp. "Exporting American Revolutions: Gouverneur Morris, Thomas Jefferson, and the National Struggle for Universal Rights in Revolutionary France." *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 419–47.
- Zuckerman, Michael. *Almost Chosen People: Oblique Biographies in the American Grain*. Berkeley, UNITED STATES: University of California Press, 1993.