

AMERICAN REACTION TO THE  
FRENCH REVOLUTION

by

Ann McLaurin

---

A THESIS

Approved:

---

---

---

Committee

Approved:

---

Dean of the Graduate School

AMERICAN REACTION TO THE  
FRENCH REVOLUTION

---

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
San Houston State Teachers College  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

---

by

Ann McLaurin

Huntsville, Texas

August, 1964

McLaurin, Ann M., American Reaction to the French Revolution.  
Master of Arts (History), August, 1964, Sam Houston  
State Teachers College, Huntsville, Texas. 94 pp.

### Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to record information concerning the public reaction of the American people to the French Revolution. Special consideration has been given to (1) the pre-revolutionary period of Franco-American relations; (2) the attitudes of prominent contemporary Americans; (3) the influence of the French Revolution upon the political and social aspects of American life; (4) the effects of the Revolution upon the formation of American foreign policy; and (5) the later reactions of the American people toward the French Revolution.

### Methods

The principal method used to obtain data for this study consisted of an examination of books, diaries and writings, and periodicals. Some of the authors whose books were used were John Bach McMaster, Howard Mumford Jones, Louis Martin Sears, Lewis Rosenthal, John C. Miller, Alexander DeConde, Esther E. Brown, Joseph I. Shulim, and Charles Downer Hazen. Some diaries and writings that were used were those of John Jay, Rufus King, Gouverneur Morris, William Sullivan, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. Several articles from the American Historical Review were used in this study.

## Findings

1. The pre-revolutionary relations of America and France played a significant role in determining the policies followed by both countries in regard to each other in later years.

2. Prominent American leaders aided in the development of American public reaction to the French Revolution.

3. The French Revolution was possibly the greatest single factor responsible for the formation of political parties.

4. The French Revolution acted as a vital issue in determining the course of United States foreign policy.

5. The French Revolution, for a time, completely altered the daily lives of Americans, causing them to imitate French fashion, manner of speaking, and social habits.

6. During the early years of the French Revolution the influence of France could be clearly evinced from the literature read, the plays attended and the topics of conversation most frequently discussed.

7. The opinions of Americans in regard to the French Revolution were constantly changing due to event in France, Europe, and America.

8. The newly established republic of the United States was able to cope successfully with the complication presented



by the French Revolution.

Approved:

---

Supervising Professor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. PRE-REVOLUTIONARY FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS . .	5
The American Revolution . . . . .	7
Causes . . . . .	7
French reaction . . . . .	7
French aid . . . . .	8
The French Revolution . . . . .	16
Causes . . . . .	17
American reaction . . . . .	18
III. INITIAL REACTION OF NOTABLE AMERICANS . . . . .	20
Initial Public Reaction . . . . .	21
Hostile Reaction . . . . .	23
George Washington . . . . .	24
John Adams . . . . .	26
Gouverneur Morris . . . . .	28
Favorable Reaction . . . . .	30
Thomas Jefferson . . . . .	30
James Madison . . . . .	31
Joel Barlow . . . . .	32
IV. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE . . . . .	36
Influence on American Politics . . . . .	37
The Federalists . . . . .	38

CHAPTER	PAGE
The Republicans . . . . .	39
Influence on Daily Life of American People . .	40
Civic feasts . . . . .	41
Vernacular . . . . .	43
Influence on American Literature . . . . .	44
Influence on the American Theater . . . . .	50
V. EFFECT ON FOREIGN POLICY . . . . .	52
American Reaction in 1793 . . . . .	53
Reaction to the fate of Louis XVI . . . . .	53
Reaction to French declaration of war on the British . . . . .	56
Course of United States Foreign Policy in 1793 . . . . .	57
Question of neutrality . . . . .	58
The challenge to American neutrality . . . .	61
VI.. LATER REACTION . . . . .	75
American Reaction to Later Events of the French Revolution . . . . .	75
Election of 1796 . . . . .	81
X Y Z Dispatches . . . . .	82
VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION . . . . .	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	90
VITA . . . . .	94

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The French Revolution was probably the most influential revolution of the modern era. It brought about profound changes in the social and political climate of France, by breaking down the oppressing institutions of the old regime and by paving the way for "democracy" in France. This revolution was of such magnitude that it could not be contained within the boundaries of the French nation, thus spreading its influence all over Europe and eventually the world. An abundance of material has been written on virtually every aspect of the French Revolution including its impact on Europe. However, a surprisingly small amount of research has been completed on the American reaction to the French Revolution.

The general objectives of this study will be to determine the impact of the French Revolution upon certain aspects of American life, such as the political atmosphere, the social activities, the cultural developments and the mode of living as revealed by the American public. In more specific terms, five objectives will be emphasized in this study. The first objective will attempt to examine the interacting forces between France and America as they existed in the pre-revolutionary period and to determine how these resulted in events which later transpired between the two

countries. A second objective of this study will be to show the first reaction of the public to the French Revolution and to observe how the reaction of leading Americans influenced public opinion. A third objective will be to examine the tremendous influence that the Revolution exerted upon both the domestic and foreign policies of American government. The fourth objective will be to show the influence of the Revolution upon the daily lives of the American people, in terms of dress, speech and social habits. The literature the people read, the plays they attended and the topics they discussed were colored by the events of the French Revolution. The fifth and final objective will be to examine the later events of the Revolution and their effect on American public opinion.

In studying the American reaction to the French Revolution certain factors must be taken into consideration. First of all, the time element must be noted. It was impossible for the American people to know quickly of the events which occurred in France or in other parts of Europe. Due to the primitive means of transportation and communication, sometimes the American public would not be informed of important events in France until after two to three months had elapsed. News of several events might be received by the American public at the same time, making it difficult to identify individual reactions to separate events.

Secondly, in studying the American reaction to the



Revolution, the public in general is used as the basis. Unless specific individuals or specific groups are indicated, the word "American" refers to the people of the United States in general and their attitudes are spoken of as a whole.

Since all authorities do not agree on the exact dates of the French Revolution, for the purposes of this study, the Revolution will be dated from the calling of the Assembly of Notables in 1787 down to the end of the Directory in 1799. This work will be confined to a study of American public reaction to various phases of the French Revolution. No attempt will be made to discuss fully the French Revolution.

The topic, American reaction to the French Revolution, is mentioned in many general American history books, but the coverage is severely limited. John Bach McMaster, the author of several volumes of American history, seems to devote more space to the effects of the French Revolution on the American public than do most modern writers of survey histories. Lewis Rosenthal contributes a great deal to the present study by his work on the French reaction to the American Revolution. John C. Miller and Alexander DeConde both have excellent accounts of early American government in the field of foreign affairs and domestic affairs. Early writings such as diaries or letters which have been compiled were of invaluable use. Some of these are as follows: William Jay's The Life of John Jay: With Selections From His Correspondence And Miscellaneous Papers, Charles King's The Life and Correspondence of Rufus

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a turbulent period for Europe and America. In the seventeenth century the continent of Europe was the battleground for rising nation-states with religion being the major source of conflict. In the eighteenth century European rivalries, no longer confined to the continent, extended to the Americas. Trade, desire for colonies, and the ambitions of monarchs replaced religion as the most important issue in international affairs. The wars which occurred during this era served to alienate neighboring countries, which was particularly true in the case of England and France. Rival political and economic forces tended to make these two nations perpetual enemies. During the first half of the eighteenth century the already existing animosity between England and France was intensified over competitive colonial claims in five regions of the world: India, Canada, the Mississippi valley, the West Indies and Africa, and came to a crisis over North American interests. This was a recently settled land with promises of rich resources and of lucrative trade possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

Several conflicts between England and France occurred

---

<sup>1</sup>Walter T. Wallbank, Alastair M. Taylor, Civilization Past and Present, p. 277.



## CHAPTER II

### EARLY FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a turbulent period for Europe and America. In the seventeenth century the continent of Europe was the battleground for rising nation-states with religion being the major source of conflict. In the eighteenth century European rivalries, no longer confined to the continent, extended to the Americas. Trade, desire for colonies, and the ambitions of monarchs replaced religion as the most important issue in international affairs. The wars which occurred during this era served to alienate neighboring countries, which was particularly true in the case of England and France. Rival political and economic forces tended to make these two nations perpetual enemies. During the first half of the eighteenth century the already existing animosity between England and France was intensified over competitive colonial claims in five regions of the world: India, Canada, the Mississippi valley, the West Indies and Africa, and came to a crisis over North American interests. This was a recently settled land with promises of rich resources and of lucrative trade possibilities.<sup>1</sup>

Several conflicts between England and France occurred

---

<sup>1</sup>Walter T. Wallbank, Alastair M. Taylor, Civilization Past and Present, p. 277.

After the end of the Seven Year's War, the English were left with a tremendous debt, as well as the continuing task of maintaining a force of British regulars in America to prevent Indian uprisings. Therefore, reasoned the British, it was only fair that the English colonists should share the cost. The English colonists who thought the tax imposed on them unfair, created the slogan "No taxation without representation". However, the British colonial taxation policy was not the only factor which led to dissension between the English colonists and the British government. Other acts, such as the Stamp Act, the Quartering Act, the Declaratory Act, and the Townshend Acts were passed by the British government with the aim of subjecting the English colonists to their will. Consequently, these acts along with other intolerable conditions imposed on the colonists by the English, culminated in the American Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

When the French received the news of the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord, they reacted with joyful emotions. The Frenchmen, who disliked the English, prophesied that a war would result from the colonial demand for independence from British rule. The American Revolution became a general topic of conversation in France, especially among the philosophes, the young nobility, and the citizens of Paris who

---

<sup>4</sup>Wallbank, Civilization Past and Present, p. 292.

generally sympathized with the rebels across the sea.<sup>5</sup> The newspapers carried only scattered accounts of the events of the American Revolution, because the press had to have royal consent for publication and the king did not approve of colonial rebellions.

Certain officials in the French government, such as Count Vergennes, the French Foreign Minister, wanted to assist the colonists in their struggle for independence, as an opportunity to gain revenge for the harsh terms the British had imposed on them after the Seven Year's War.

On March 1, 1776, Count Vergennes wrote to the Foreign Minister of Spain, Grimaldi, and asked if he would be willing to direct his country's policies so that both the French and the Spanish could assist the American colonists in their struggle against the British. The Spanish who also had many grievances against England, were willing to aid the rebellious colonists. This aid was given to the colonists under the pretense of a business venture administered by a secret agent, Caron de Beaumarchais. Charles III of Spain made a similar arrangement with the colonists and from these sources the American armies received most of their war materials throughout the first years of fighting.<sup>6</sup>

News of the Declaration of Independence caused

---

<sup>5</sup>Lewis Rosenthal, America and France The Influence of the United States on France in the XVIIIth Century, pp. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup>Richard B. Morris, Encyclopedia of American History, pp. 90-91.



generally sympathized with the rebels across the sea.<sup>5</sup> The newspapers carried only scattered accounts of the events of the American Revolution, because the press had to have royal consent for publication and the king did not approve of colonial rebellions.

Certain officials in the French government, such as Count Vergennes, the French Foreign Minister, wanted to assist the colonists in their struggle for independence, as an opportunity to gain revenge for the harsh terms the British had imposed on them after the Seven Year's War.

On March 1, 1776, Count Vergennes wrote to the Foreign Minister of Spain, Grimaldi, and asked if he would be willing to direct his country's policies so that both the French and the Spanish could assist the American colonists in their struggle against the British. The Spanish who also had many grievances against England, were willing to aid the rebellious colonists. This aid was given to the colonists under the pretense of a business venture administered by a secret agent, Caron de Beaumarchais. Charles III of Spain made a similar arrangement with the colonists and from these sources the American armies received most of their war materials throughout the first years of fighting.<sup>6</sup>

News of the Declaration of Independence caused

---

<sup>5</sup>Lewis Rosenthal, America and France The Influence of the United States on France in the XVIIIth Century, pp. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup>Richard B. Morris, Encyclopedia of American History, pp. 90-91.

widespread enthusiasm among the literate French people. The French public eagerly followed the battles of the American Revolution and steadily increased their admiration for the colonist's struggle. The French people in general wanted to help the colonists of the New World in their fight for freedom. Many French soldiers enlisted enthusiastically in an expeditionary force to aid American rebels.<sup>7</sup>

Lafayette was one of the more notable Frenchmen who went to America. His reception in Charleston, unlike the reception of many other French volunteers, whose motives were regarded with suspicion, was a most hospitable one. Lafayette, himself says in a letter of June 19, 1777, that he was overwhelmed by the politeness and attention that was given him on his arrival at Charleston.

At first the members of the Continental Congress were not very impressed with Lafayette. They thought that he was just another troublesome adventurer. However, he surprised them by saying that he would volunteer to serve them in any capacity and that he would pay his own expenses. By a Congressional resolution of July 31, 1777, Lafayette was given the rank of major-general. He became known as "the Marquis", and Americans thought of him as the perfect or ideal type of Frenchman. His charm and popularity influenced many Americans who knew of him or who had heard of him, to

---

<sup>7</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 55.

favor the Franco-American Alliance when it was formed.<sup>8</sup>

Paris was the soul of France and it had shown its support for the rebels in the New World. The provinces naturally followed the example of Paris. The commercial ports of Bordeaux, Marseilles, Lyons, and Nantes were among the earliest partisans of American independence. They longed for free trade with America.<sup>9</sup>

Benjamin Franklin, who was the American Minister to France, acted as a favorable influence in obtaining French support for the colonists. Franklin was idolized by the majority of the French people who felt that he personified the ideal American. Even Edmund Burke, an English critic of the French Revolution, said that Franklin's meeting with Voltaire at the Academy of Sciences was said to be a symbol of the friendship of the two countries.<sup>10</sup>

Rosenthal states that Louis XVI was hesitant about giving the American rebels open support. He thought that if he declared war on England and won, this would enhance the prestige of France, but on the other hand, this act would make him, Louis XVI, the ally of the American colonists who were rebelling against their lawful sovereign. He thought perhaps he had gone too far already in sending aid secretly to the insurgents; this might prepare the way for a revolution

---

<sup>8</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 518.

<sup>9</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



in France. After all the legislators of America had said that they were the disciples of the French philosophes, who criticized royal rule, and now they were putting those theories into action.<sup>11</sup>

These thoughts created a dilemma for Louis XVI causing him to turn to his two top advisers; one a diplomat, the other an economist. Vergennes, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, favored French participation in the American Revolution. Turgot, the economist, warned the King against helping the colonists because he thought it would lead the French nation into bankruptcy and on to other terrible consequences. Since the King had some understanding of diplomacy and practically none of economics, the diplomat triumphed and French aid insured the success of the American Revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Edwin S. Corwin and other authors such as Alexander DeConde and George Bencroft agree that without French aid the American Revolution would have ended without having achieved the main objective of the English colonists, independence. Corwin asserts that French aid to the colonists presents a paradox:

. . . the oldest and most despotic monarchy of Europe making common cause with rebels against a sister monarchy; a government on the verge of bankruptcy deliberately inviting a war that, to all appearances certainly, it might have easily

---

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>12</sup>Louis Martin Sears, George Washington & The French Revolution, p. 10.



avoided! Ignorance of the risks involved might conceivably afford a partial explanation of the course taken by the French government in the years 1776 and 1783, but in fact the explanation is little available.<sup>13</sup>

Corwin, who analyses several possible explanations for French aid to the rebellious colonists, begins his discussion by reviewing the reasoning of Vergennes, which seems contradictory. In 1776 he proposed war with the British on the assumption that regardless of the outcome of the American Revolution, the British would attack the French West Indies. Later Vergennes states that the French West Indies would be of slight temptation to the British since they already had territory in that area.<sup>14</sup>

Rosenthal claims that Vergennes had always exhibited deep antipathy towards the British and he was willing to do anything to break their power, even to risk bankruptcy.<sup>15</sup>

Corwin discusses the reasons for French aid to the American rebels in terms of aggressive motives such as the desire for territory or the desire for trade. Frederick Jackson Turner's explanation that the French motive in aiding the insurgents was a desire to regain their former colonies of Canada and Louisiana is not accepted by Corwin because he

---

<sup>13</sup>Edwin S. Corwin, "The French Objective in the American Revolution", The American Historical Review, Volume XXI, October, 1915, p. 33.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-36.

<sup>15</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 21.

British defeat in the Battle of Saratoga, to the effect that the British were ready to offer the rebellious colonists generous peace terms. These concessions would ally the colonist with the British and align them against the French. Reports of this nature worried Vergennes, who was afraid that the French would lose their chance for revenge and profit.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of the exact motives, the French aided the colonists in winning their fight for independence against the British. Although their motives were questioned by many individuals, still the general American public was grateful for French aid.<sup>20</sup>

Charles Downer Hazen proves that even later on when the Federalists contended that the French had helped the colonists for their own purposes, most Americans rejected this conservative viewpoint. Therefore, charges against the motives of our French Allies never made much of an impression on American public opinion.<sup>21</sup>

On February 6, 1778, a treaty of Amity and Commerce was drawn up between the former British colonists and the French. Franco-American relations formally began with the signing of this treaty, the first official recognition that

---

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 535-536.

<sup>20</sup>Alexander DeConde, Entangling Alliance Politics & Diplomacy under George Washington, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Charles Downer Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution, p. 291.

the Continental Congress had received from a major power. By the terms of this treaty, both countries granted each other most-favored nation privileges and other liberal trading concessions.

The second treaty with France was one of alliance. If a war should break out between the French and the English as a result of this treaty, the defensive alliance provided that the French and Americans would fight together until American independence was won. The French guaranteed American independence and territory forever, and in return the Americans promised to guarantee the French possessions in America against all powers forever.<sup>22</sup> Neither the French nor the Americans were to conclude a truce or peace without the others consent.

The treaty also involved reciprocal trade agreements which proved so irritating to the British, that as soon as this treaty was signed, they recalled their ambassador from Paris and began capturing French merchantmen. Thus, Jones remarks, the immediate result of this alliance was a war between the French and the British and a secondary result was that the Americans experienced a deepening hatred for the British, and closer relations with the French.<sup>23</sup>

The fighting of the American Revolution was ended by the Battle of Yorktown but treaties were not signed until

---

<sup>22</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 520.

1782 and 1783. The Americans had won their independence and the French had avenged the humiliating treaty of 1763. The enthusiasm felt by the French people for the American's experiment in self-government gradually increased and eventually led to imitation.<sup>24</sup>

After the fighting was over the British tried to break up the close relationship between the French and the Americans by granting generous terms to the new nation in the Treaty of Paris signed on September 3, 1783. They thought that where English force had failed, perhaps English diplomacy could succeed.<sup>25</sup>

Regardless of the treaty of alliance with the French and in possible violation of it, the Americans had negotiated the treaty with the British without French supervision. The French government did not approve of this procedure because the French leaders felt that the American leaders were breaking the terms of the Franco-American Alliance.<sup>26</sup> Other terms of this treaty brought into question the integrity of the Americans in relation to fulfilling their treaty obligations to France.

Soon after the American Revolution, the French ran into domestic troubles. Langer writes that the spirit of the eighteenth century, in France, as well as in other parts of

---

<sup>24</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 97.

<sup>25</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 9.



Europe, was devoted to the reformation of existing institutions such as the Church and the State. The machinery of the government of France was inefficient, obsolete, and unsuited to the needs of the state. The French proletariat became aware of the fact that they carried the burden of heavy taxation while the nobles and clergy were exempt from this duty. The rising middle class in France who read and listened to the philosophes, began to realize the evils of the old regime. The factor that demanded the immediate attention of the French people was the inability of the government to cope with the threat of national bankruptcy.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time that the Constitutional Convention was assembling in Philadelphia to write a new constitution, the King of France was calling together the Assembly of Notables to support his proposed financial program. The French Assembly which consisted of the principal nobles, clergy, magistrates, and officials, was unable to suggest any definite solutions to mitigate the financial crisis which had been partially precipitated by French aid to the Americans. The Notables proposed that the King call a meeting of the Estates General, that is, a representative group from the three great estates or classes—the clergy, nobles and commons, which had not been assembled since 1614.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>William L. Langer, An Encyclopedia of World History Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, Chronologically Arranged, pp. 578-579.

<sup>28</sup>Edward Raymond Turner, Europe Since 1789, p. 44.

Esther E. Brown finds it odd that the French Revolution was such a surprise to the Americans. An abundance of material had been written about the terrible conditions in France, the dissatisfaction of the intellectuals, the misery of the masses and the decay of the old regime. Still Americans at home and abroad did not, for the most part, seem to sense the coming of this great upheaval.<sup>29</sup>

Several Americans, such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Arthur Young were in Europe prior to the outbreak of the French Revolution and did not realize that a revolution was eminent. Benjamin Franklin, the American Minister of France in the years immediately preceding the Revolution, according to both Sears and Hazen, left no hint in his papers whatsoever which indicated that he knew or even suspected the coming of a revolution in France.<sup>30</sup> Alfred Owen Aldridge, in his book on Franklin, introduces certain authorities who state that Franklin predicted the French Revolution; but he questions the accuracy of their information.<sup>31</sup>

In 1785, Thomas Jefferson succeeded Franklin as the American Minister to France. Jefferson, a keen political

---

<sup>29</sup>Esther E. Brown, The French Revolution and the American Man of Letters, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup>Sears, George Washington, p. 12, and Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup>Alfred Owen Aldridge, Franklin and His French Contemporaries, p. 79.

observer, did not sense the coming of the French Revolution during his stay in France. John Adams was in Europe in 1788 and did not realize or expect that the King of France would soon be overthrown.<sup>32</sup>

Another traveler in Europe in 1788 was Arthur Young, a noted American agronomist. According to Rosenthal, Young wrote that the American Revolution had laid a firm foundation for another revolution, perhaps one in France, but even at that, Young did not think this revolution would occur for several decades.<sup>33</sup>

As the French Revolution began, Americans became emotionally involved over its principles and causes. Why did the masses in the United States show such overwhelming support for a revolution in another country? Why did distinguished publicists engage in such philosophical arguments over the affairs of a foreign nation? Several explanations will be offered to the foregoing questions in the following chapters.

---

<sup>32</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 63.

<sup>33</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 155.



### CHAPTER III

#### INITIAL REACTION OF NOTABLE AMERICANS

Near the end of the eighteenth century, the French and the Americans tremendously influenced each other. The Americans utilized the philosophy and the military aid of the French. The Americans gave the French the idea of revolution and served as their symbol of success. The French longed for the liberty, equality and self-government which Americans enjoyed. Therefore, these two nations were very interested in one another. Rosenthal, in America and France, shows how the French were influenced by American thought and experience.<sup>1</sup>

In the French Assembly in August, 1789, Viscount de Noailles moved that the French follow the course of America in their fight for freedom. He said the French Revolution began when Lafayette and the other French soldiers joined the Americans in their struggle for liberty. De Noailles said, "The valiant hands that served to break a tyrannic chain were not made to bear one a long time themselves."<sup>2</sup>

Shulim writes, "The American Revolution was considered by many as the mother of the French Revolution. Admiration

---

<sup>1</sup>Charles Downer Hazen, "The French Revolution as Seen by the Americans of the Eighteenth Century", Annual Report American Historical Association, Vol. XXII, 1916,

<sup>2</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 182.

of one's offspring was inevitable."<sup>3</sup>

As the French Revolution began, the reaction of the American public was characterized by an unrestrained warmth for the principles of the Revolution. As Jones reports:

The news was hailed with expressions of ardent enthusiasm lively sympathy, broken only here and there, in widely isolated cases, by some subdued utterance of distrust or doubt.<sup>4</sup>

Most authors agree that Americans in general rejoiced over the coming revolution in France. Brown asserts:

For the first time, the people of the United States seemed to become aware of the people of France. Americans who had been fond of prophesying that their country would light the whole world to freedom exulted in the speed and felt pride in the influence which American institutions were exerting on the formation of a new government in France. Reports from France multiplied in the American newspapers. The taking of the Bastille became a favorite subject for articles and poems.<sup>5</sup>

The French Revolution became a major topic of conversation in state papers, messages and proclamations of the Governors. Even the common people enjoyed discussing the French Revolution.

So general was American enthusiasm for the French Revolution that even Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University, who later became a harsh critic of the Revolution, was among those who at first felt that the French Revolution

---

<sup>3</sup>Joseph I. Shulim, The Old Dominion and Napoleon Bonaparte A Study in American Opinion, p. 47.

<sup>4</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 531.

<sup>5</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 72.

was a glorious movement. Dwight reasoned that America had just passed through a revolution, which achieved independence; therefore, it was natural for Americans to sympathize with those who had the same important objectives. Dwight wrote the following:

The minds of the Americans anticipated with a rapturous enthusiasm the emancipation of twenty-five millions of their fellow-men from the thralldom of despotism and superstition.<sup>6</sup>

Philip Freneau, a journalist supported by Jefferson, published a pro-French newspaper, the National Gazette. In 1790 he greeted "The Prospect of A Revolution in France." Freneau rejoiced that the blaze first kindled in America was spreading. "Humanity, he felt, was coming into its own: What though his age is bounded to a span Time shed a conscious dignity on man."<sup>7</sup>

It almost seems impossible that a revolution three thousand miles away could have such a profound impact on the American people. Nevertheless, the influence of the French Revolution penetrated every phase of American life: its politics, its literature, its religious talks, its theater and its social habits. Americans heard all the watchwords of the French Revolution—liberty, equality and fraternity. What did these words mean to Americans? They had liberty, so this was not of interest; they did not all understand

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

fraternity, therefore, this was not valued very highly; but they all understood and most were overwhelmed by this idea of equality. Some Americans felt that even though they fought for this goal, they had not attained it. Other Americans believed that the French Revolution would drive home other doctrines which had not yet been fully accepted in America.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, all Americans, even those who did not favor the revolution, became intensely interested in the course of the French Revolution.

Many other factors influenced American opinion, as for instance, the political leaders of the country, the important writers of the period and Americans who were abroad at this time. Several well known Americans and their reactions to certain phases of the French Revolution will be examined to show how their personal opinions affected the formation of public attitude toward the Revolution. Just as American public opinion was divided over the French Revolution, this same division of opinion was apparent among prominent American politicians and writers. Six of these leading Americans and their reactions to the Revolution will be briefly mentioned. Three of these men favored the Revolution and three were opposed. The three important Americans who opposed the Revolution were George Washington, John Adams, and Gouverneur Morris and the three Americans who gave it their support were Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 99.



Joel Barlow.

During the first years following the establishment of the American Union, George Washington was probably the most influential man in America. Since he was President of the United States at the outbreak of the Revolution, he was forced to guide American diplomacy in relation to the French Revolution, and in order to do this wisely he had to be well informed on the events in France. Some of the information came from his friends in France such as Lafayette, his so-called adopted son, and Rochambeau, a Frenchman who had served as Lieutenant General under Washington in the American Revolution. Washington received other information through correspondence with Americans abroad such as Thomas Jefferson, who was the United States Ambassador to France; William Short, who was Jefferson's friend and successor in the Paris mission; Gouverneur Morris, who succeeded Short in this capacity; and Arthur Young, an American traveler in France.<sup>9</sup> Sears believes that Morris was probably Washington's chief informant. William Short corresponded with George Washington regularly, but since he was so closely attached to Jefferson, Washington chose to depend more on the accounts from Morris, his own friend. Sears claims that at the beginning of the Revolution, Washington favored it. He was in favor of the Assembly of the Notables in which the people conducted a discussion of finances, as he believed that the American

---

<sup>9</sup>Sears, George Washington, p. 13.

Revolution had stimulated the French interest in their government's policies.

Jusserand, a French author, draws the same conclusions about George Washington's first reaction to the French Revolution. He stated that Washington followed the Revolution with sympathetic interest and that he felt that this revolution would have world-wide implications and hence be the beginning of a new era for mankind.<sup>10</sup>

Washington, after hearing of the fall of the Bastille, wrote the following to Morris:

The revolution, which has been effected in France is of so wonderful a nature that the mind can hardly realize the fact. If it ends as our last accounts to the first of August predict that nation will be the most powerful and happy in Europe; but I fear though it has gone triumphantly through the first paroxysm, it is not the last it has to encounter before matters are finally settled. In a word the revolution is of too great magnitude to be effected in so short a space, and with the loss of so little blood.<sup>11</sup>

After the fall of the Bastille, Lafayette sent the key to Washington and in August, 1791, Washington thanked Lafayette for this "token of victory gained by liberty over despotism."<sup>12</sup>

In such an important, such a hazardous voyage, when every thing dear and sacred is embarked, you know full well my best wishes have never left you for a moment. Yet I will avow that the accounts we received through the English

---

<sup>10</sup>J. J. Jusserand, With Americans of Past and Present Days, p. 240.

<sup>11</sup>Fitzpatrick, Writings of Washington, XXX, pp. 440-445, as cited by Sears, George Washington, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup>Jusserand, With Americans of Past and Present, p. 243.

papers (which were sometimes our only channels for information) caused our fears of a failure almost to exceed our expectations of success.<sup>13</sup>

By September 10, 1791, after the report of the King's flight was known by Washington, he wrote the following to Lafayette:

. . . it does not appear likely that the clouds which have long obscured your political horizon will be soon dispersed. As yet we are in suspense as to what may have been the consequences of this event; and feeling, as we do in this country, a sincere regard for the french Nation, we are not a little anxious about them. Opinions we are not able to form here therefore none can be given on the subject. But at any rate, you may be assured, my dear Sir, that we do not view with indifference the happiness of so many millions.<sup>14</sup>

As late as October 20, 1792, after hearing of the establishment of a republic in France, Washington wrote to Morris:

. . . We can only repeat the sincere wish that much happiness may arise to the French nation and to Mankind in general out of the severe evils which are inseparable from so important a Revolution.<sup>15</sup>

While Washington expressed some degree of optimism in regard to the French Revolution in its earlier phases, other Americans were always hostile to the Revolution. John Adams was a severe critic of the French Revolution from its outset and was thoroughly convinced that no good could come from it. Adams had long been suspicious of the French

---

<sup>13</sup>Ford, Writings of Washington, XI, p. 494, as cited by Sears, George Washington, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>Fitzpatrick, Writings of Washington, XXI, pp. 363-363 as cited by Sears, George Washington, p. 108.

<sup>15</sup>Fitzpatrick, Writings of Washington, XXXII, pp. 188-189, as cited by Sears, George Washington, p. 151.



nation and of the French alliance. He believed that the French had used the colonies as a weapon against the British and that the French did not plan to allow the Americans to form a strong and powerful nation.<sup>16</sup>

Adams made a trip across France in 1778 and another in 1780 and the observations he made at the time, later caused him to be skeptical of the outcome of the Revolution. In the first place, Adams had a poor opinion of the morality of the French people, especially of the women. Secondly, as the Revolution progressed and the principles of it became known, Adams disapproved of the doctrine of complete equality. He asserted that a pure democratic state such as the one advocated by the philosophes was not feasible.<sup>17</sup>

On April 19, 1790, Adams wrote:

. . . I know not what to make of a republic of thirty million atheists. . . . Too many Frenchmen, like too many Americans pant for equality of persons and property. The impracticability of this God Almighty has decreed, and the advocates of liberty who attempt it will surely suffer for it.<sup>18</sup>

In 1790, Adams wrote thirty-two articles which were published by Fenno's Gazette of the United States and ran for a year. These articles were entitled Discourses on Davila. They attacked French doctrines and expressed his

---

<sup>16</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup>Rosenthal, America and France, p. 159.

<sup>18</sup>Life and Works of John Adams, IX, pp. 563-564, as cited by Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 153.

own theories of government. Adams thought that democracy was the first step toward anarchy.

Thirdly, Adams condemned the idea of a single legislative assembly by calling it the framework of despotism.

A man would be more simple with but one ear, one arm, one leg. Shall a legislature have but one chamber then, merely because it is more simple? A wagon would be more simple if it went upon one wheel: yet no art could prevent it from oversetting at every step.<sup>19</sup>

These then, were the views of Adams at the beginning of the Revolution and the only change made in his views was that he became more critical of the Revolution as it progressed.

Another severe critic of the Revolution was Gouverneur Morris, who was an avowed aristocrat and a counterrevolutionary, who went to France in 1789 for the purpose of making a large fortune in foreign commerce. Morris disliked the Revolution from the very beginning and he made no effort whatsoever to conceal his opinions. Soon after his arrival in France, he wrote the following:

A spirit which has lain dormant for generations starts up and stares about ignorant of the means of obtaining, but ardently desirous to possess the object, consequently active, energetic, easily led, but, alas, easily, too easily misled.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>Haraszti, Zoltan, John Adams and the Prophets of Progress, p. 234.

<sup>20</sup>Anne Cary Morris, The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris, Vol. I, p. 21.

Morris described the French people as having no religion except their priests, no law except their superiors, and no morals except their own interests. They are led by drunken curates and the first manifestation of insurrection is made in the quest of bread.<sup>21</sup>

On June 23, 1789, Morris attended a dinner in Versailles at which he sat next to Lafayette. Lafayette, in the course of the dinner, told Morris that he was injuring the cause of liberty in France because his ideas concerning the Revolution were continually quoted in France, to which Morris replied:

I seize this opportunity to tell him that I am opposed to the democracy from regard to liberty; that I see they are going headlong to destruction, and would fain stop them if I could; that their views respecting this nation are totally inconsistent with the materials of which it is composed, and that the worst thing that could happen would be to grant their wishes. . . . Before we part I take an opportunity to tell him that if the Tiers are now very moderate they will probably succeed, but if violent must inevitably fail.<sup>22</sup>

Beckles Willson wrote that Morris had a deep sympathy for the French King and Queen—so much in fact, that he became involved in a plot to help them escape from Paris. Fortunately, for Morris's safety the King lost his nerve and did not go through with it.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Vol I., p. 69.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., Vol I., p. 104.

<sup>23</sup>Beckles Willson, America's Ambassadors To France, (1777-1927), p. 50.



Morris was appointed American Minister to France in January 1792 and retained this post until his recall in 1794. During this time, he kept a diary describing the events of the Revolution which he witnessed. His description was always biased, but he did record the events of the Revolution.

In contrast to Gouverneur Morris, Thomas Jefferson always had high hopes for the Revolution. Jefferson was designated by Congress in May, 1784, to go on a foreign mission to Europe to negotiate commercial treaties and on March 10, 1785, succeeded Benjamin Franklin, as Minister to France. The French readily accepted Jefferson as the friend of their beloved Franklin and as the author of the Declaration of Independence. He had published his Notes on Virginia and this led the French to believe that he had similar ideas to the great philosophes of France. Jefferson knew more about politics, constitutions, and legal aspects of matters than did most of the contemporary Frenchmen. Therefore, Jefferson was on good terms with the officials and reformers of the French government. Jefferson made critical comments on the social life and political system of France. He felt that the society of France was attractive but corrupt; likewise, he praised the intellectuals of France but added that many were inferior in education.<sup>24</sup>

Jefferson wrote in his Autobiography that the American Revolution seemed to have awakened the intellectuals of

---

<sup>24</sup>Hazen, American Contemporary Opinion, pp. 4-7.



France "from the sleep of despotism in which they were sunk".<sup>25</sup> Jefferson wrote to Adams in May, 1789, that as yet the Revolution had been quiet and although it had stalled over the voting procedure, he expected them to resolve this problem, and then there would be no further delays because they are all for constitutional reform. Unfortunately, the solution to the problems of the French nation was not as simple as Jefferson thought.<sup>26</sup>

Jefferson stayed in Paris for about two or three months after the fall of the Bastille and he thought that he had seen the worst of the Revolution. Jefferson liked the French people and said he had never known a more benevolent people. After returning to the United States from Paris, Jefferson remarked that "once in twenty years watering the tree of liberty with the blood of tyrants" was a necessity.<sup>27</sup>

James Madison, the close collaborator of Jefferson, had much the same attitude as Jefferson in regard to the Revolution. From the very beginning of the French Revolution, James Madison supported it and defended its noble principles. The only factor that bothered Madison about the Revolution was that its progress toward liberty was too slow. By the fall of 1791, however, he was very pleased by progress that

---

<sup>25</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Autobiography, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup>Lester J. Cappon, The Adams-Jefferson Letters The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams, Vol. I, p. 237.

<sup>27</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 535.

had been achieved. Madison described the old continent in the spring of 1790:

France seems likely to carry through the great work in which she has been laboring. The Austrian Netherlands have caught the flame and with arms in their hands have renounced the government of the Emperor forever. Even the lethargy of Spain begins to awake at the voice of liberty which is summoning her neighbors to its standard. All Europe must by degrees be aroused to the recollection and assertion of rights of human nature.<sup>28</sup>

Madison carefully followed the course of the French Revolution. His sentiments concerning the Revolution were well known by both the French and the American leaders. Later, he was appointed a citizen of France, an honor also bestowed upon Washington and Hamilton. Irving Brandt, an authority on Madison, sarcastically suggested that the reason Hamilton received this honor was because he had been keeping bad company.<sup>29</sup>

Just as the French Revolution had aroused the interest of American political leaders, it also entered the thoughts of the leading writers of the period. Joel Barlow, an American poet and patriot, was eager to reform the political evils of his time. In 1788 he went to Europe as a representative of the Scioto Land Company, which later proved to be a failure and left him stranded in France. Barlow was an eyewitness to the storming of the Bastille in July, 1789. He wrote to

---

<sup>28</sup>Irving Brandt, James Madison Father of the Constitution 1787-1800, Vol. III, p. 371.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 374.

his wife about events of the French Revolution and said it was wonderful to have been permitted to have seen two complete revolutions in the cause of liberty. In 1789 he predicted that much happiness would be produced in France as a result of the Revolution. He was sure that the French government would now be placed on a firm and permanent foundation.<sup>30</sup>

In 1791 Barlow made a congratulatory address to the National Assembly in France. Soon after this Barlow became involved in political journalism and for the next two years he devoted himself entirely to writing propaganda for the cause of "liberty, equality and fraternity."

Barlow's most important work, Advice to the Privileged Orders in the Several States of Europe Resulting From the Necessity and Propriety of a General Revolution in the Principle of Government, was addressed to the upper class Europeans to influence them to adopt the principles of the American and French Revolution. This book was a volume of collected political essays, attacking the Old Regime. There were chapters on the feudal system, the church, military service and the system of revenue and public expenditure in Europe. In them, he attacked many policies in England, such as primogeniture, English law, and capital punishment. This work was extensively read in England and was even suppressed

---

<sup>30</sup>James Woodress, A Yankee's Odyssey The Life of Joel Barlow, p. 101.

by their government.<sup>31</sup>

In 1792 Barlow's enthusiasm for the French Revolution increased. He observed the storming of the Tuileries and told how the mob broke into the palace on June twentieth. Even though this event snapped the final link between the King and the people, Joel reported reassuringly: "You will hear frightful stories about the riots . . . believe but little. There was no violence committed."<sup>32</sup>

When Barlow heard of the proclaiming of the French Republic, he wrote "A Letter to the National Convention", which he sent to Thomas Paine to deliver for him in Paris. In this pamphlet he suggested several proposals for the new Constitution. He wrote Jefferson that France was now ready to establish a glorious republic, because they had tried a limited monarchy and it had failed. Barlow contended that any people, wise or vicious, can govern themselves better than the wisest king can. The only good law is the expression of the will of the nation.<sup>33</sup> Barlow remained in Paris all during the revolutionary years, and kept accounts of the events just as did Morris, except his accounts were favorable toward the Revolution and Morris's were not.

In summary, the initial reaction to the French Revolution as experienced by a few select contemporary Americans

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 128-9.



ranged from strong opposition to strong support. Further notice of their reactions will be investigated as the present writer follows further development of the French Revolution.

## CHAPTER IV

### POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

By the beginning of 1792, the mind of the general American public was saturated with French politics. The French Revolution, even had its influence upon American governmental development. Several vital aspects of American life were altered because of the influence of the French Revolution. Jones says that from the years 1789-1793 American politics became more affected by the French as did topics of letters and articles in magazines.<sup>1</sup>

Since the new government in America was just beginning, there were no precedents to follow. Everything had to be done without the guide of tradition. The new Union had been created in a period of anarchy and certain leading American politicians felt that the only way to prevent the return of chaos was for all Americans to support everything that the government did. Any dissension or difference in opinion was looked upon as a step in the direction of disorder and failure. In spite of this belief, the growing conflict between Jefferson and Hamilton led to formation of an opposition party. Still there was reluctance to recognize the existence of emerging parties. The framers of the Constitution thought the emergence of political parties would

---

<sup>1</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 536.

be an evidence of failure, not realizing that they would be the basic fundamentals which would insure its success. If the ideas of the Founding Fathers had come true, America would not have had political parties but the open expression of differences of opinion led naturally to their formation.<sup>2</sup>

Authorities differ as to the actual date and causes of the formation of American political parties. Schachner sets forth two events which he believes caused their formation: the adoption of Hamilton's fiscal policies and the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup> Miller claims that there were many other causes responsible for the formation of parties, but nothing acted more as a catalyst as did the French Revolution. It caused much more factional feeling than did Hamilton's fiscal policies.<sup>4</sup> DeConde agrees that the reaction of the United States toward the French Revolution became the most important political issue. "The French Revolution 'drew a redhot plough-share through the history of America as well as that of France.'"<sup>5</sup> Brown writes:

Though the controversy could never have reached such a height if there had not been domestic dissatisfactions and suspicions as its base, it was convenient for both parties to drag in the issue of the French Revolution. The Republicans found in France, "a clear-cut

---

<sup>2</sup>John C. Miller, The Federalists Era 1789-1801, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>Nathan Schachner, The Founding Fathers, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 86.

contest between monarchy and republicanism, oppression and liberty, autocracy and democracy"; the Federalists found there nothing but "a new breaking-out of the eternal strife between anarchy and order, atheism and religion, poverty and property."<sup>6</sup>

The leader of the Federalist party was Alexander Hamilton, the aristocratic Secretary of the Treasury. The Federalists, like Hamilton, were mostly national-minded conservatives and aristocrats, who believed that an "excess of democracy" could be remedied by a strong national government.<sup>7</sup> Hazen asserts that the Federalists believed that only by opposing French principles could American liberties be preserved; they thought that the kind of liberty the French wanted was a sham. They said that if the events that happened in France were a manifestation of liberty, then liberty must not be superior to anarchy.<sup>8</sup> Fisher Ames, a devout Federalist, made the following comparison of liberty as it existed in America and in France:

Here Liberty is restraint; there it is violence; here it is mild and cheering, like the morning sun of our summer, brightening the hills, and making the vallies green; there it is like the sun, when his rays dart pestilence on the sands of Africa.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 99.

<sup>7</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 295.

<sup>9</sup>Fisher, Ames, Works of Fisher Ames Compiled by a Number of His Friends to Which Are Prefixed Notices of His Life and Character, p. 127.



The Federalists believed that the French Revolution would lead to anarchy here if it were imitated. Already it had caused trouble in America and had led to the formation of a faction with exaggerated loyalty to a foreign nation, France. The Federalists maintained that the French had their supporters or parties in every country and in the United States, the French party was the Republican party.<sup>10</sup>

The Republican party was led by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. This party reflected the attitude of the majority of Americans, especially the viewpoint of the agrarian class. The Republican party warmly embraced the French Revolution.

Republicans aped French revolutionary fashions, hailed each other as 'Citizen', wore red caps of liberty or mounted the tricolor cockade, and dated their letters from Year I of the French Republic.<sup>11</sup>

Some Republicans thought that as soon as France had completed her reforms, all of Europe would surely follow her example. Even French conquests in the following years did not end the Republican support. They still saw a similarity between the American Revolution and the French Revolution because the French people were striving for freedom from oppression and the creation of a rational government.

As the French Revolution became more violent not so

---

<sup>10</sup>Shulim, The Old Dominion, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

many Americans still supported it, but those who did became more enthusiastic. In December, 1792, ships came to America bearing the news from France about the storming of the Tuileries, the halting of the Prussians at Valmy, the end of the monarchy and the advent of a republic. All of these events were reported in American newspapers throughout the land. DeConde says it produced a pro-French frenzy in which Americans became hysterical. Many celebrations were held and public and private feasts were held everywhere. Many Americans identified the success of the French with the preservation of American liberty.<sup>12</sup>

James Truslow Adams gives the following account of the reaction of many Americans after they heard of the establishment of a republic in France.

Enthusiasm for everything French suddenly knew no bounds. . . . French fashions, French modes of speaking, French holidays and French ideas became all the mode among her sympathizers. Even street names in Boston were altered and Royal Exchange Alley became Equality Lane.<sup>13</sup>

On December 14, 1792, the streets of Philadelphia were filled with excited people rejoicing over the news of French victories. At night the taverns were full of revellers singing and shouting and drinking toasts to France. On December 27, in New York City, the people were even more

---

<sup>12</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 179.

<sup>13</sup>James Truslow Adams, New England In The Republic 1776-1850, p. 214.

overjoyed than the people of Philadelphia had been, upon receiving the news of the establishment of a French republic. They devoted a whole day to feasting and to celebrating the French victories. When the citizens of Boston heard the news of the reaction in New York, they were determined to outdo them. They planned to have a "Civic Feast", which could never be exceeded. They collected the necessary money, appointed committees for planning and announced that the celebration would be held on January 24, 1793.<sup>14</sup> William Sullivan gives the following vivid account of this lavish feast:

A civic feast was undertaken in Boston; such a one as no rational being would desire to see repeated. A whole ox, skinned and dressed, leaving the head and horns entire, and the eyes protruding from their sockets, was turned on a great wooden spit, before a furnace. When the animal was sufficiently roasted, he was placed on a sledge or carriage, and there properly supported and propped up, was drawn through the principal streets of the town, and was followed by two cart-loads of bread and two hogsheds of punch. An immense concourse of people attended; there was but one mind and heart, and there was no reference to political divisions. The procession terminated in State Street, where a table was laid from the eastern end of the City Hall to near Kilby Street; and on this table it was intended that the friends of liberty should feast from the roasted ox. The scene soon changed; the cutting up and distribution of the animal became ridiculous; and soon riotous. The roasted fragments were thrown into the air, and hurled at female spectators who thronged the balconies, and crowded the windows. The end of this matter was, that a pole of fifty

---

<sup>14</sup>John Bach McMaster, A History of the People of the United States, From the Revolution to the Civil War, Vol. II, pp. 89-91.



or sixty feet in length was raised in what was thence, Liberty Square, and surmounted with the horns of the ox, where they remained several years.<sup>15</sup>

John McMaster recorded a similar account of this feast adding a paragraph on the meaning of the feast:

The fat ox, they were given to understand, was Aristocracy. The gaudy decorations were the titles of the political Hydra. The immolation of the beast on the altar of Democracy was a peace-offering to Liberty and Equality and the Rights of man.<sup>16</sup>

According to DeConde, on the same day in Plymouth, Massachusetts, the whole day was taken up in public demonstrations in honor of the French victories. The discharge of fifteen cannon started the day's activities. The people were addressed by French sympathizers on the value of the principles of the Revolution. Later a minister spoke to them about the Prophet Daniel and in the course of his sermon he indicated that God would remove all mortal kings. The choir sang such songs as "Down With These Earthly Kings" and "No King but God." After the church service, a ball was held that night to terminate the day's festivities.<sup>17</sup> After these celebrations were held, the rage for civic feasts spread to other towns such as Lexington, Roxbury, Dorchester,

---

<sup>15</sup>William Sullivan, Familiar Letters on Public Characters, and Public Events, From the Peace of 1783 to The Peace of 1815, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>Massachusetts Mercury, January 26, 1793, as cited by McMaster, A History of the People, Vol. II, p. 92.

<sup>17</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, pp. 179-180.



Cambridge, Charlestown, Portsmouth and Watertown. It seemed that people had been carried away with republicanism.

Both men and women seemed for the time to have put away their wits and gone mad with republicanism. Their dress, their speech, their daily conduct were all regulated on strict Republican principles. There must be a flaming liberty-cap in every house. There must be a cockade on every hat. There must be no more use of the old titles Sir and Mr., Dr. and Rev. It is time, exclaimed one of these ardent Republicans, it is time the use of these diabolical terms ceased. They are but imitations of the tottering remains of aris-<sup>18</sup> tocracy. They are offensive to Republican ears.

In Boston men began calling each other Citizen and they called the women "Citess." These titles were actually used on letters at the post offices, in the newspapers when they mentioned public men, and in announcing deaths or marriages. Another example of the influence of the French doctrine of equality on the Americans was that one writer during this period objected to the social societies at Harvard such as Phi Beta Kappa because it was an infringement of the natural rights of society.<sup>19</sup>

The American vernacular became infiltrated with French words, such as democrat, anarchist, aristocrat, mobocrat, monocrat, jacobin, clubbist, Anglomen and Gallomen. Badges, buttons, and cockades became popular and were symbolic of the French influence on the Americans.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>McMaster, A History of the People, Vol. II, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 215.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

McMaster claims that not all men were caught up by these republican fads—many people laughed at it and ridiculed it in prose and verse. This ridicule did not bother the friends of the French Republic. They remained loyal to the Revolution and its manifestations.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence presented thus far shows that the French Revolution altered the political and social lives of Americans. Hazen says it invaded another phase of life:

The French Revolution, with its stirring ideas and its striking episodes, naturally enough called forth a literature all its own in this country as in others . . . here it impelled the Adamses to write their Discourses on Davila and Essays of Publicola, while Noah Webster reviewed the Revolution in a widely read pamphlet, and Joel Barlow helped in the shaping of events by his various writings.<sup>22</sup>

In John Adam's Discourses on Davila, the doctrines of the French Revolution were severely attacked, arousing the wrath of the Republicans who were convinced that his articles should be refuted. Jefferson diametrically opposed the views of Adams on this subject but he did not wish to be a public antagonist of Adams. Soon after Adam's articles had been printed in the Gazette of the United States, Thomas Paine's pamphlet, The Rights of Man, of which the first part was written in defense of the Revolution, was published in England, and immediately sent to the United States for

---

<sup>21</sup>McMaster, A History of the People, Vol. II, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 220.

republication. Jefferson read the copy of this book which was to be used in its American version and when he finished with it, he sent it to the printer, along with an explanatory note, praising the book and expressing the belief that it would end the recent political heresies which had arisen in the United States. On his own initiative and without the consent of Jefferson, the printer, who thought that Jefferson's note would help sell the book, inserted it in the preface. This publicly aligned Jefferson against Adams in regard to the issues of the French Revolution.<sup>23</sup> Jefferson wrote Adams in July, 1791, in an attempt to explain the origin of this note which had appeared in the preface to The Rights of Man. Adams, who acknowledged Jefferson's explanation, condemned the printer by saying he had committed an unpardonable act.<sup>24</sup>

Soon after the publication of Paine's book, John Quincy Adams under the name "Publicola" wrote several articles which attacked Paine's arguments and defended his father against Jefferson's charge of political heresy. These articles were so well written that at first almost everyone believed that John Adams was the author.<sup>25</sup>

Noah Webster, a lexicographer and journalist, was in favor of the French Revolution from its beginning. Brown

---

<sup>23</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, pp. 175-6.

<sup>24</sup>Cappon, The Adams-Jefferson Letters, Vol. I, pp. 246-7.

<sup>25</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 176.

contends that in 1793 Webster was still optimistic about the Revolution, however, he did not overlook the violence which took place under the Jacobins and as a result, his attitude changed. Later in 1793, Webster began editing a daily newspaper in New York, the Minerva, which criticized the Revolution. As the Revolution progressed Webster's distaste for the Revolution increased steadily. His deep hostility to the Revolution was first revealed in his discussion of religion and morals. He coined the word demoralized to describe the condition of French society. Webster wrote:

The nation is now so totally demoralized by the current philosophy of the age, and the ferocious spirit of war and faction, that atheism is a creed perhaps most adapted to the blind and head-strong genius of the present generation.<sup>26</sup>

Webster believed that the legislators of France persecuted opinions and not the evils of France.

Joel Barlow, as his many writings reveal, was an ardent supporter of the Revolution. Early in 1792, "The Conspiracy of the Kings," which Barlow labeled a "little mad poem," was published. In it he vigorously attacked Edmund Burke's ideas of restoring monarchy in France and he warned the Kings of Europe that in the future their prestige and influence would decline. When Barlow mailed a copy of this poem to Jefferson, he noted that a king, Leopold of Austria, had died:

---

<sup>26</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 119.



Barlow noted when he sent a copy of his satire to Jefferson that "though one of my kings died while the poem was in the press, it was not my fault." He added: "If this had been the case with all of them, I should have been willing to have suppressed the publication for so good a cause."<sup>27</sup>

Barlow's "Advice to the Privileged Orders," an attack on royalty, however, was a more important work than "The Conspiracy of the Kings." Then in September, 1792, Barlow in his "Letter to the National Convention" wrote about the defects of the French Constitution of 1791, and proposed certain amendments which he felt would improve the government. Barlow continued throughout the course of the French Revolution to write poetry and pamphlets in support of its principles.

Several writers in America were severe critics of the French Revolution. One of the most violent critics was William Cobbett, who wrote under the name of Peter Porcupine. He was an Englishman who first came to America in October, 1792. He offered to write for Jefferson, who, unfortunately for the Republicans, turned him down. Cobbett then began writing independently. He first attracted public attention by an attack on Dr. Joseph Priestly, an English scientist and a devout friend of the French. Shortly, thereafter, Cobbett began the publication of a newspaper called Porcupine's Gazette and it became notorious overnight. The Federalists adopted this paper as their own because of the

---

<sup>27</sup>Woodress, A Yankee's Odyssey, p. 124.

attacks it made on the Republicans and the French Revolution.<sup>28</sup> He later wrote The Bloody Buoy . . . as a warning to French sympathizers in America. This book consists of a series of atrocity stories. He cites the following account concerning the Jacobins in France. A man named Philippe, living on the street of the Temple, came to the Jacobin Club, where he was a member, and made a speech. He had two heads in a box, the heads of his parents, which he had removed from their bodies because they would not take mass from a constitutional priest. His talk received wild shouts of applause from the other Jacobins.<sup>29</sup> Cobbett then wrote about the daily executions in Paris:

In the city the guillotine never ceased a moment; it was shifted three times; holes were dug at each place to receive the blood, and yet it ran in the gutters.<sup>30</sup>

Cobbett told of the cold-bloodedness of the leaders of the Terror. One of them supposedly said:

Admit none but real revolutionists; none but patriots who have the courage to drink a glass of human blood, warm from the veins.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Nathan Schachner, The Founding Fathers, p. 358.

<sup>29</sup>William Cobbett, (Peter Porcupine), The Bloody Buoy, Thrown Out as A Warning to the Political Pilots of America; Or a Faithful Relation of A Multitude of Acts of Horrid Barbarity, Such As the Eye never witnessed, the Tongue never expressed, or the Imagination conceived, until the Commencement of The French Revolution, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

The remainder of Cobbett's book is filled with tales of terror as exaggerated as the samples quoted above. This diatribe, needless to say, did affect American opinion. The Republicans denied the truth of all these stories, by charging that the enemies of the Revolution had fabricated them.

The contemporary newspapers exerted a tremendous influence on public opinion. Freneau, the publisher of the National Gazette, wrote with blind devotion for the French Revolution. He believed that France and America should stand together to defend the cause of freedom against tyrants. Brown wrote the following about Freneau and his paper:

On July 28 Freneau announced with satisfaction that judging "from the various Toasts that have been drank this year on the fourth and fourteenth of July, the republican spirit is very fast rising in this country . . . and the cause of France is becoming in a great degree our own." He referred not merely to Philadelphia celebrations, but to those held all over the United States, for he cited the "undisguised patriotism and honest simplicity" of the toasts drunk at Bennington, Vermont. In succeeding issues, as reports came in from the rest of the country, he continued to relay the most striking of these demonstrations. On August 8, 1792, for example, he devoted almost two columns of the front page to the Bastille Day celebrations in Charleston, South Carolina, quoting all the toasts.<sup>32</sup>

Freneau presented the Republican Party views in his newspaper and in his editorial policy, as DeConde contends, he was more Jeffersonian than Jefferson. Freneau's paper was challenged by John Ward Fenno in the Gazette of the United

---

<sup>32</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 110.

States founded in 1789 in New York and transferred to Philadelphia in 1790. Subsidies and editorial contributions from the supporters of Hamilton kept this paper consistently Hamiltonian in policy.<sup>33</sup>

Contemporary plays on the American stage were further proof of where American interests lay. Democratic ideas and politics dominated the stage. "Tammany," an early American opera was largely inspired by Paris and the French Revolution. Jones relates the following:

In New York, meanwhile, American interest in the French Revolution commenced to take form on the stage: when for example, Hodgkinson appeared on the scene as Captain Flash, wearing a British uniform, the play was interrupted by the tumult of the anti-British audience, until he explained that he was impersonating a coward and a bully.<sup>34</sup>

Many American playwrights took the occasion to write original themes on the French Revolution and related subjects.

In Boston, the Boston Theater considered most of its patrons as Federalists; therefore, they tried to cater to their views. However, to pacify the Republicans, the Bostonians built a new theater, the Haymarket, where their views might be presented.<sup>35</sup>

The French Revolution, as has been pointed out, penetrated every phase of American life. The influence of

---

<sup>33</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 347.

<sup>35</sup>Hazen, American Contemporary Opinion, p. 249.



the Revolution was present in American politics, social life, fashion, manner of speaking, literature and in the theater. The influence of the French Revolution was felt by all American people in all stations of life. It has been proved that almost everyone supported the Revolution initially, but in 1793 and in the following years, many Americans began to change their opinion.

## CHAPTER V

### EFFECT ON FOREIGN POLICY

Most Americans favored the French Revolution during its first three years, but as the revolution continued more and more Americans turned away from its principles. From an examination of some of the more outstanding events of 1793, it is possible to see a gradual growth of American opposition toward the French Revolution.

Because news traveled slowly Americans did not learn of the tragic 1793 events in France until several months after they had occurred. Louis XVI was executed in January, 1793, but the American public did not receive reliable news of this event until April when a British packet came into the harbor of New York. As the people of New York had been anxiously awaiting news from France, by the time the news-bearing ship docked, about a quarter of the population of the city was at the harbor to meet it. News of the King's execution spread throughout the city with considerable shock.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, Louis XVI was executed on January 24, the same day as the Boston Civic Feast. Sullivan recorded the following about the reaction of the public to the death of the King:

---

<sup>1</sup>McMaster, A History of the People, pp. 96-7.

This unexpected event seemed to open the eyes of many Americans to the true character of the French Revolution. It struck some of them with astonishment and horror; while it was to others, a matter of heartfelt pleasure. The latter, however, did not approve because they were gratified in the destruction of the man, for the common feeling was, that America was greatly indebted to Louis: but because a king had fallen; and a triumphant advance had been made in the cause of liberty.<sup>2</sup>

One American newspaper, Spooner's Vermont Journal, reported that the death of Louis XVI touched everybody as an unnecessary act of cruelty. Many leading Americans such as Washington, John Adams, Gouverneur Morris and Thomas Paine violently disapproved of the beheading of Louis XVI. John Adams, who abhorred the Revolution from its beginning was horrified by the death of the King. He remarked, "When will these savages be satiated with blood?"<sup>3</sup> Thomas Paine, an American citizen in France at the time of the King's execution, made several personally hazardous efforts to save the life of the King, not because he preferred a monarchy for France, but because he believed that the death of Louis XVI would contribute nothing to the cause of human freedom. This act, according to Paine, would do nothing except reveal savagery on the part of the revolutionists.<sup>4</sup>

Chinard wrote that Jefferson experienced little

---

<sup>2</sup>Sullivan, Familiar Letters, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, pp. 254-5.

<sup>4</sup>Woodward, Tom Paine: America's Godfather 1737-1809, p. 239.

personal regret over the fate of Louis XVI. Jefferson had never respected the King and he thought this might serve as a warning to other autocratic rulers.<sup>5</sup> Brown reports that Jefferson took the death of Louis XVI calmly. In March he reported to Madison:

The death of the King of France has not produced as open condemnation from the monocrats as I expected. . . . It is certain that the ladies of this city, of the first circle, are open-mouthed against the murderers of a sovereign, and they generally speak those sentiments which the more cautious husband smothers.<sup>6</sup>

Madison's attitude toward the execution of the King was very similar to that of Jefferson. He reported that sympathy for the French King was general in his neighborhood due to erroneous newspaper accounts of the King's innocence and of the bloodthirstiness of his enemies. Madison's personal reaction was that if the King were a traitor as he felt that he was, he should be punished in the same manner as anyone else.<sup>7</sup>

Barlow, who was in France at the time of the execution of Louis XVI, continued to campaign for election as the delegate from Savoy to their National Convention. This alone, indicates that Barlow's attitude toward the French

---

<sup>5</sup>Chinard, Thomas Jefferson, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 100.

<sup>7</sup>Brandt, James Madison, Vol. III, pp. 372-3.



Revolution was not altered because of the execution.<sup>8</sup>

The National Gazette published editorials in defense of the execution of the King.

Let any man recollect the conduct of Louis Capet, his many heinous sins, his flight after having taken an oath to be faithful to the nation, the impediments he constantly threw in the way of the revolution and the aid he afforded the enemies of France, and Lastly, his treason and reiterated instances of hypocrisy—I say when a man considers these things, let him reflect if Louis merits our tears or compassion.<sup>9</sup>

It is perfectly clear that Freneau had no compassion for Louis XVI. On April 23, 1793, Freneau printed this jest on his front page, "LOUIS CAPET has lost his CAPUT." Freneau indicated that the death of the French King affected him no more than the execution of anyone else.<sup>10</sup>

Many other vulgar insults were made about the death of Louis XVI. For instance, at a banquet held in Philadelphia the head of a pig, symbolic of the executed King of France, was passed around and mangled by members of the party.

Each one placing the cap of liberty upon his head pronounced the word 'tyrant'! and proceeded to mangle with his knife the luckless creature doomed to be served for so unworthy a company.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Woodress, A Yankee's Odyssey, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 256.

<sup>10</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 109.

<sup>11</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 183.

Obviously, the death of the King brought about a variety of reactions from the public. Hazen stated that if Americans did not condemn the execution of the King to whom they owed so much, they surely would not object to a similar fate for ordinary unknown people. This was proven by him by noting a similar reaction to the execution of the Girondists, the Queen and the Reign of Terror—some Americans attacked these events but most of the others defended them.<sup>12</sup>

The year 1793 proved to be a turning point for many Americans in regard to their attitude toward the French Revolution. After the news of the execution of Louis and Marie Antoinette had been received, New England, which had always been generally sympathetic to the Revolution, now became solid in their opposition.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time the American public learned of the fate of Louis XVI, they also learned of France's declaration of war on England. After becoming aware of this development, the Federalists had no doubts about the evils of the Revolution. Any of the Federalists, who had at first sympathized with the Revolution, now turned violently against it and began speaking out openly in defense of England.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>13</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 543.

<sup>14</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 181.

In the early part of the year 1793, France declared war against England. America was bound to France by alliance, therefore, a serious question arose as to the role of the United States in regard to this war. Was the country strong enough to combine their efforts either for or against any particular country?<sup>15</sup>

DeConde wrote that the Anglo-French War became a national issue for the emerging American political parties. However, at this time America was not prepared to aid any country. Spain was in full possession of the Mississippi; the Indians were on the war path on the frontier; the western country was in turmoil; and British troops were still stationed along the Canadian border. The United States should hardly defend herself, much less help France. If the United States could have aided France, the consequences would have been disastrous for America. Millions of dollars would be added to the public debt; trade would be destroyed; exports would be stopped; prices would fall and business would have been ruined. Did an ally have the right to demand this sacrifice especially since France was the aggressor in the war? Regardless of the circumstances, by the treaty of alliance, the United States guaranteed French possessions in America and by the treaty of commerce our ports were to be opened to the privateers and prizes of

---

<sup>15</sup>Sullivan, Familiar Letters, p. 40.

France.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the Treaty of Alliance with France, the United States owed a large monetary debt to France for her aid to America during the American Revolution. Widespread disagreements existed among the politicians and the public as to the course United States foreign policy should take. Some Americans, especially the Federalists, believed that the Treaty of Alliance terminated with the end of the American Revolution. Other New Englanders maintained that the United States made the treaty with the French monarchy, which no longer existed, and consequently, the United States had no obligations to the French Republic.<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton argued that even though there had been a change in government, the treaty still continued, but since there was no established permanent government in France, there was no one with whom to deal, therefore, the treaty could not be enforced. Furthermore, Hamilton contended that by the terms of the treaty America was to give aid to France only in case of a defensive war and France had declared war on England. Jefferson capably argued that the Franco-American treaties were between living nations, not their temporary agents. Therefore, the treaties must be upheld. Also, the United States could not accurately determine whether or

---

<sup>16</sup>McMaster, A History of the People, Vol. II, p. 96.

<sup>17</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 100.



not the war was defensive on the part of France. Jefferson wanted the United States to remain neutral, but he believed that they should receive certain trade concessions for maintaining neutrality.<sup>18</sup> Many Republicans thought that if America did not side with France, they would actually be aiding England.

George Washington, upon hearing of this French inspired crisis, immediately called a cabinet meeting in which he posed sixteen questions to his department heads relative to the course the United States government should pursue. Sullivan relates that the President and his cabinet were unanimously of the opinion that under the present circumstances the United States was not obligated to aid France.<sup>19</sup> On April 22, 1793, the Proclamation was issued. Part of the Proclamation reads:

. . . and the duty and interest of the United States require that they should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers;

I have therefore thought fit by these presents, to declare the disposition of the United States to observe the conduct aforesaid toward those powers respectively; and to exhort and warn the citizens of the United States carefully to avoid all acts and proceedings

---

<sup>18</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, pp. 128-9.

<sup>19</sup>Sullivan, Familiar Letters, p. 40.

whatsoever, which may in any manner tend to contravene such disposition.<sup>20</sup>

This presidential proclamation set off a series of reactions. In general, the Federalist were pleased but not the Republicans. Miller writes the following:

While Republicans were content that the United States should remain neutral, they hotly resented the use of the word "impartial" and the constraints placed upon their freedom of action by the President. Had Washington forgotten, they asked that France was "under God the saviour of America," and that upon the continued friendship of France "the future glory, honor, welfare, commerce, agriculture and manufactures of America essentially depend."<sup>21</sup>

Hugh Henry Brackenridge, a Republican party leader of western Pennsylvania, summed up the attitude of the Republicans when he said "the cause of France is the cause of man, and neutrality is desertion."<sup>22</sup>

Madison was shocked by the proclamation of neutrality because he thought that America should aid France and the longer he reflected about the proclamation, the more he disliked it:

The proclamation was in truth a most unfortunate error. It wounds the national honor, by seeming to disregard the stipulated duties to France. It wounds the popular feelings by a seeming indifference to the cause of liberty. And it seems to violate the forms and spirit of

---

<sup>20</sup>Sears, George Washington, pp. 174-5.

<sup>21</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 130.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

the Constitution by making the Executive Magistrate the organ of the disposition, the duty and the interest of the nation in relation to war and peace—subjects appropriated to other departments of the government. . . . If France triumphs, the ill-fated proclamation will be a millstone which would sink any other character and will force a struggle even on his.<sup>23</sup>

Congressional reaction to the proclamation was favorable. When the Congress convened at the end of the year, they gave it their hearty approval by saying:

We, therefore, contemplate with pleasure the proclamation by you issued, and give it our hearty approbation. We deem it a measure well timed and wise, manifesting a watchful solicitude for the welfare of the nation and calculated to promote it.<sup>24</sup>

Washington tried unsuccessfully to placate Jefferson and the Republicans by omitting the word "neutrality" from the proclamation.<sup>25</sup> The proclamation aroused some opposition, but a far more complicated task, its enforcement, remained to be accomplished. The first challenge to American neutrality came from France and more specifically, it came from the first Minister from the French Republic, "Citizen" Genet.

Edmund Charles Genet, a dedicated young revolutionist, first landed in Charleston, South Carolina, instead of Philadelphia, the capital of the United States. His explanation for this changed destination was that contrary winds and

---

<sup>23</sup>Brandt, James Madison, Vol. III, p. 375.

<sup>24</sup>King, The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, Vol. I, p. 438.

<sup>25</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 91.

not his own wishes had determined his landing site. Apparently he was in no hurry to reach Philadelphia to present his credentials, for he remained in Charleston for eleven days before beginning the journey to Philadelphia, a journey which usually required fourteen days, but in his case required twenty-eight. Undoubtedly the explanation for this slow pace was the warmth of the welcome he received all the way from Charleston to Philadelphia. William Jay described the Republican dinner given for Genet the day after his arrival in Charleston. The guests sang French songs and practiced the fraternal embrace. A tree of liberty served as a table decoration and red caps of liberty were distributed among the guests.<sup>26</sup> Genet was honored by banquets of similar form during these early days of his mission to the United States.

The revolutionary enthusiasm of the American "Jacobins" reached its high point in the welcome which they gave the new French minister, Edmond Charles Genet. This young man symbolized to the democrats the stupendous hopes and flaming idealism of the French Revolution. Disgruntled with their own Federalist administration, which they suspected of planning some rebuff to the emissary of France, they determined to make up for any official coolness. All the way north from Charleston, where he had landed, Genet was hailed by cheering throngs.<sup>27</sup>

Miller relates the following account of Genet's reception in Philadelphia:

---

<sup>26</sup>Jay, The Life of John Jay, Vol. I, p. 302.

<sup>27</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 103.



In Philadelphia, no pretense of neutrality was observed: "The bosoms of many hundreds of free-men beat high with affectionate transport, their souls caught in the celestial fire of struggling liberty." At a dinner given in honor of Genet, over a hundred prominent Philadelphians gathered to sing the "Marseillaise", "with two additional odes composed by Citizen Genet," who came attired in a liberty cap. A few days later, a French frigate brought into Philadelphia a British vessel as a prize. When the British colors were seen reversed and the French flag flying above, the large crowds lining the waterfront "burst into peals of exultation".<sup>28</sup>

Different authors express conflicting views in regard to the instructions given to Genet by the French government. Robert Goodloe Harper, a Federalist in Congress wrote the following:

All this he did in the avowed pursuit of the object of his instructions, which, to use their own words, enjoined him, "to excite to the utmost the zeal of the Americans, and induce them if possible, to make a common cause with France."<sup>29</sup>

DeConde asserts that the real reason Genet came to the United States was not to perform the customary duties of a Minister, but secretly, to arrange for the transfer of the King and royal family from France to the United States. The Girondins had planned this maneuver because they were afraid that if the King remained in France and was killed, it would cause bitterness in the United States against France. The Girondins, due to their poor political leadership, were

---

<sup>28</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 133.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Goodloe Harper, Observations on the Dispute Between the United States and France, p. 9.

never able to carry out this plan.<sup>30</sup>

Sullivan and Miller both assert that Genet came to the United States with the idea of converting the United States into a base of operations from which to conquer Louisiana, Florida, and Canada and to equip privateers to prey upon British shipping.<sup>31</sup> As proof they contend that Genet did bring numerous blank commissions for privateers to America. Many Americans joined in privateering ventures because it gave them a chance for making a huge profit and exhibiting their animosity toward England. Several American ships were converted into French privateers and Americans used them for capturing English vessels. Evidently, the President's proclamation had not changed the pro-French attitude of many Americans. Genet even advertised in American newspapers for sympathizers of France to enlist in the French service, thereby disregarding the proclamation of neutrality. Genet commissioned twelve privateers in the United States. These ships captured many British merchantmen, sometimes within the coastal waters of the United States. These ships, when brought into American ports, were sold by French consuls for whom Genet claimed extraterritorial privileges.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 132, and Sullivan, Familiar Letters, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

In August, 1793, Genet demanded that President Washington call Congress into special session in order that the representatives of the people could decide whether or not to aid the French people in their cause. In case the President refused to summons a special Congressional session, Genet threatened to appeal directly to the people. Jefferson, at this point, condemned Genet's activities. Less than six weeks after his arrival Jefferson wrote:

Never in my opinion, was so calamitous an appointment made, as that of the present minister of France here. Hot headed, all imagination, no judgment, passionate, disrespectful & even indecent towards the President in his written as well as verbal communications, talking of appeals from him to Congress, from them to the people, urging the most unreasonable & groundless propositions, & in the most dictatorial style.<sup>33</sup>

Jefferson wrote to Madison of Genet's activities and Madison, after having received a letter from Jefferson in July, replied:

Your account of G[enet] is dreadful. He must be brought right if possible. His folly will do mischief which no wisdom can repair. Is there no one through whom he can be effectually counselled?<sup>34</sup>

Madison suggested that the only way to repair the damage Genet had committed was to distinguish between the nation and its agent, between principles and events and to warn the public that the enemies of liberty and the enemies of

---

<sup>33</sup>Chinard, Thomas Jefferson, p. 294.

<sup>34</sup>Brandt, James Madison, Vol. III, p. 377.

France were constantly trying to drive them from their goal.<sup>35</sup>

Adams had a horror of mobs and was frightened by Genet's American support. Twenty years later he recalled the situation in a letter to Jefferson.

You certainly never felt the terrorism excited by Genet in 1793, when ten thousand people in streets of Philadelphia, day after day, threatened to drag Washington out of his house, and effect a revolution in the government or compel it to declare war in favor of the French Revolution and against England.<sup>36</sup>

Finally it was agreed that Genet should be recalled and at the same time, Gouverneur Morris, the United States Minister to France, should be recalled. His relations with the French government had become almost as strained as Genet's relations had become with the United States. In the month of December, 1793, Washington informed Congress that Genet's conduct was not characteristic of the nation that sent him.<sup>37</sup>

Brown stipulated that in the early stage of his mission Genet helped strengthen the Republican party, but his later actions severely hurt the Republicans by providing more propaganda for the Federalists.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>36</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 106.

<sup>37</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 138.

<sup>38</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 105.



The American policy of neutrality had successfully overcome its first test from the French. The second challenge to American neutrality came from England in 1794 when the Royal Navy suddenly began seizing American ships which were engaged in trade in the French West Indies. The English conveniently invoked the Rule of 1756 which states that trade prohibited in peace-time cannot be opened legally in time of war. Under this policy the English felt justified in committing hostile acts toward Americans. The British intensified their impressment of American sailors and interference with American trade. This action resulted in the growth of anti-British attitudes in America.<sup>39</sup>

Washington sent John Jay to England to settle these differences. Jay drew up a treaty which was probably the most unpopular agreement ever made in American history. The Republicans, who accused Jay of accepting bribes from the English, were not alone in their criticism. Many Federalists were not at all satisfied with the treaty. As much as Washington disliked the treaty he was willing to do anything to keep neutrality, therefore, he signed the treaty in the final days of June, 1795. His prestige alone won its ratification. Washington assured the American people that it was for the best interests of the country.<sup>40</sup> Jay wrote to

---

<sup>39</sup>Richard N. Current, T. Harry Williams, Frank Freidel, American History: : : A Survey, p. 142.

<sup>40</sup>Michael Kraus, The United States to 1865, p. 283.

George Washington on March 6, 1795, saying that he knew that the treaty would not please everyone, and that it would probably result in further trouble.<sup>41</sup>

Washington decided that since he had sent a Federalist, Jay, to England, it would only be fair to send a Republican, James Monroe, to France. After all, Morris had been recalled to improve relations with the French. Beverly W. Bond wrote that Monroe assured the French that Jay would do nothing to hamper Franco-American relations. Monroe was not aware that Jay's purpose was to negotiate a treaty with England. Bond contends that had Monroe known of this objective, he would never have agreed to go to France.<sup>42</sup> Monroe's enthusiastic support for the French Revolution caused him to make some mistakes, but by January, 1795, he had laid the groundwork for a successful mission. The Jay Treaty came as a complete surprise to both Monroe and France. Monroe, along with the officials of the French government, tried to prevent the American ratification of the Jay Treaty. As Washington and the Federalists were displeased with Monroe's pro-French activities, he was replaced by Charles Pinckney in September, 1796.

Mr. Monroe took offense at being displaced, and came home, published a volume of justification, which probably aided him in attaining

---

<sup>41</sup>Jay, The Life of John Jay, Vol. II, p. 251.

<sup>42</sup>Beverly W. Bond Jr., The Monroe Mission to France, 1794-1796, p. 13.

to the presidency. He therein assumes to say, that if a rupture should happen with France, it would not be occasioned by the misconduct of France, but by Washington's policy, which Monroe calls "short sighted and bad."<sup>43</sup>

One lasting result of Genet's mission and challenge was the rise of democratic societies. They multiplied throughout the land spreading pro-French views. The Democratic Club, founded in Philadelphia, proceeded to send out invitations for people elsewhere to form similar societies. They successfully started a kind of national movement, for soon societies spread all over the country.<sup>44</sup> The framework of these clubs was based on the Jacobin Clubs in France. The qualification for membership was to pay fifty-cents and to sign their constitution which stated that all members must be aware of foreign complications involving France and they must also be aware of domestic dangers such as the presence of aristocrats whose aim it was to try to abolish freedom and equality here. Many Americans thought these provisions were noble aims and joined the clubs.<sup>45</sup>

Jay charged that these societies attempted to control the government by claiming that they were the voice of the people, regardless of the fact that they passed their

---

<sup>43</sup>Sullivan, Familiar Letters, p. 63.

<sup>44</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 252.

<sup>45</sup>McMaster, A History of the People, Vol. II, p. 110.

resolutions in secret. They regarded any resistance to their acts as a crime against republicanism. Jay expressed a belief that had these societies succeeded in gaining all the power that they sought, the United States would have been subjected to a tyrannical oligarchy.<sup>46</sup>

The immediate aim of these societies was to curb the influence of Washington and to support the alliance with France. A Virginia society passed a resolution urging that the constitution be altered to make the President ineligible for a third term. The club in Charleston petitioned the Jacobin Club in Paris for the honor of claiming them. The Jacobins in France opposed their membership because the Americans had lost no blood in their cause, but despite this opposition, they were adopted.<sup>47</sup> These organizations were called "Democratic Societies" by their members and "Jacobin Clubs" by their adversaries. They approved of all the acts of the Revolution, violent or otherwise. Jones wrote the following statement about these societies:

Behind the Jacobin societies there was a seething mass of excitement such as the country had never before witnessed. For instance, when young Stephen Decatur and a friend, J. K. Hamilton, were returning from a fishing expedition, they found an enormous crowd at Buck's Head Tavern, Philadelphia, celebrating the presence of the French minister, wearing the tri-colour and singing

---

<sup>46</sup>Jay, The Life of John Jay, Vol. I, p. 317.

<sup>47</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 195.



Jacobin songs. Decatur, who wore the blue (American) cockade was involved in a general fight, for the mob insisted that he and his friend don the cockade of the French Republic; and only the arrival of his father's apprentices saved him. In the same city an innkeeper whose sign was a portrait of the Queen of France, was forced to daub a streak of red around the royal neck and stain her clothes with blood.<sup>48</sup>

McMaster recounted that the society at Charleston pressured the Legislature of South Carolina to take down the statue of Lord Chatham, an English Earl. As the statue was being torn down, the head of the statue broke off, giving substances to some Federalist propaganda. They unjustly charged the Republicans with chopping its head off. In April, 1794, members of Democratic Clubs of South Carolina put effigies of Fisher Ames, William Smith, Benedict Arnold, William Pitt, and the devil upon a wagon and dragged them around until sunset, then burned them. Ames and Smith had opposed Madison's Resolutions concerning trade duties and Smith, who represented South Carolina in the House, was opposed to Dayton's Resolutions to sequester British debts.<sup>49</sup>

The Democratic Societies were widespread and well-supported. DeConde writes that no one actually knows how large a national following these clubs had, or how much they represented public opinion, but from the amount of alarm they caused, they must have had a substantial following.

---

<sup>48</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, p. 541.

<sup>49</sup>McMaster, A History of the People, Vol II, p. 176.

However, the Federalists insisted that the societies, instead of representing the majority of the public, only represented a small minority.<sup>50</sup>

As the French Revolution progressed and as the violence of it increased, a large segment of the American public and national officials became increasingly suspicious of these societies. The Federalists considered the members of the democratic societies as synonymous with the French Jacobins. One Federalist newspaper wrote that the practice of beheading Federalists was so fashionable in France that the practice was sure to spread elsewhere. The American people began to believe that these societies plotted the overthrow of the government by force. Washington thought of these societies as "the most diabolical attempt to destroy the best fabric of human government and happiness, that has ever been presented for the acceptance of mankind."<sup>51</sup>

The Federalist used various methods to try to counteract democratic societies in America. An economic boycott was imposed on businessmen who participated in pro-French activities. Certain employers required their employees to vote for Federalist candidates or lose their jobs. They organized anti-democratic societies to combat the democratic clubs and they used the press to diminish their influence.

---

<sup>50</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 257.

<sup>51</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 161.

However, the Federalists insisted that the societies, instead of representing the majority of the public, only represented a small minority.<sup>50</sup>

As the French Revolution progressed and as the violence of it increased, a large segment of the American public and national officials became increasingly suspicious of these societies. The Federalists considered the members of the democratic societies as synonymous with the French Jacobins. One Federalist newspaper wrote that the practice of beheading Federalists was so fashionable in France that the practice was sure to spread elsewhere. The American people began to believe that these societies plotted the overthrow of the government by force. Washington thought of these societies as "the most diabolical attempt to destroy the best fabric of human government and happiness, that has ever been presented for the acceptance of mankind."<sup>51</sup>

The Federalist used various methods to try to counteract democratic societies in America. An economic boycott was imposed on businessmen who participated in pro-French activities. Certain employers required their employees to vote for Federalist candidates or lose their jobs. They organized anti-democratic societies to combat the democratic clubs and they used the press to diminish their influence.

---

<sup>50</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 257.

<sup>51</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 161.

Some of the Federalist controlled and supported papers were the Gazette of the United States, edited by John Fenno of Philadelphia; the American Minerva, edited by Noah Webster of New York; and the Columbian Centinel, edited by Benjamin Russell of Boston. By Federalist control of the press the influence of the societies could be reduced.<sup>52</sup>

The Whisky Rebellion which reached a crisis in 1794 was another challenge that the Federalist felt must be overcome. Federalized troops were led by Hamilton to western Pennsylvania to cope with the rebellion. When the soldiers arrived they met with no resistance, but they did discover liberty poles bearing placards with the words "liberty and no excise" inscribed on them. After being informed of developments in the west, George Washington wrote that he was witnessing:

. . . "the first formidable fruit of the Democratic Societies. I early gave it as my opinion to the confidential characters around me," he said, "that if these Societies were not counteracted (not by prosecutions, the ready way to make them grow stronger) or did not fall into detestation from the knowledge of their origin . . . that they would shake the government to its foundation." Under this conviction, he inserted in his message to Congress of November, 1794, a denunciation of the "self-created societies" as the prime movers of the Whisky Rebellion.<sup>53</sup>

DeConde and Miller both agree that the democratic societies

---

<sup>52</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, pp. 258-260.

<sup>53</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 160.



in general had no part in the Whisky Rebellion, however.<sup>54</sup>

Miller contended that George Washington should not have officially disapproved of the societies because by taking this course he impaired the real strength of his position in American politics. Now he was no longer aloof from partisan struggles. The democratic clubs faded away within a year, not because of Washington's condemnation, but because of the increasingly critical attitude of Americans toward the French Revolution, and because Jacobin clubs were suppressed in France.<sup>55</sup> The Democratic Societies which were devoted to the Republican party and to the French cause, were, for a while, important instruments in molding pro-French public sentiment. They served to intensify the hatred and opposition of Federalists and Republicans, and by so doing, made important contributions to the emerging political parties and to the course of American foreign policy.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 263, and Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 160.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>56</sup>DeConde, Entangling Alliance, p. 269.

## CHAPTER VI

### LATER REACTIONS

This discussion thus far has outlined briefly and indirectly certain phases and events of the French Revolution in which the reactions of the American public to these events could be to some degree determined. Opposition to the French Revolution existed from the very beginning of the Revolution, but this opposition consisted of only a minority of the public.

Three later aspects of the French Revolution clearly led to changes in American opinion--the increasing violence of the Revolution, the tendency toward atheism and their doctrine of equality. In regard to the violence of the first three years of the Revolution, it should be noted that the American people were not too concerned. Most Americans looked upon this violence as something necessary in a revolution. Some Americans, upon hearing of violence occurring during the Paris riots were shocked enough to begin questioning the Revolution, but in general, Americans were untouched by the early violence.<sup>1</sup> However, the execution of Louis XVI in 1793 opened the eyes of many Americans to the violent nature of the French Revolution and American criticism of the Revolution began to increase rapidly. But most

---

<sup>1</sup>Jones, America and French Culture, pp. 391-2.

of the Republicans and other French sympathizers still warmly supported the Revolution. The Reign of Terror brought about the most violent criticism of the Revolution.

Washington's dislike for the Revolution became more obvious as the Revolution continued, as he wrote:

Too much blood has already been spilled in the name of a liberty that forever was receding to justify enthusiasm for a cause so travestied. Genuine freedom would be best conserved by close attention to the interests of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

John Adams wrote to Jefferson in January, 1796, that fate would determine what happened in France now, for all reasoning is gone; passion, prejudice, interest and necessity now govern France. It will take at least a century for anything to become permanent in France.<sup>3</sup>

Even Joel Barlow, a devoted revolutionist, became disgusted with the Reign of Terror. For a time, Barlow halted his political activities in France and once again turned to business. By the end of 1794 he stopped making excuses for the Revolution and no further mention of the Revolution is found in his letters. His opinions concerning the Revolution probably had not changed because he retained his faith in the French and their Revolution long after it had ceased.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Sears, George Washington, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup>Cappon, The Adams-Jefferson Letters, p. 259.

<sup>4</sup>Woodress, A Yankee's Odyssey, p. 138.

Jefferson wrote in the year 1793 a defense of the French Revolution and its violence:

It was necessary to use the arm of the people, a machine not quite so blind as balls and bombs, but blind to a certain degree. A few of their cordial friends met at their hands the fate of their enemies. But time and truth will rescue & embalm their memories, while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives. The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little blood?<sup>5</sup>

As the Reign of Terror intensified, there was a correspondingly increasing American reaction. This spontaneous reaction was exploited by Federalist propagandists and minimized as much as possible by the Republicans. Yet it remains a mute question how much the violence of the French Revolution would have affected American opinion had no other complicating issue arisen.<sup>6</sup>

The tendency of the French Revolution to incline toward atheism was an important issue in turning many Americans away from the Revolution. Conservative papers in America capitalized upon speeches made and measures passed against the religious institutions of France. The Gazette of the United States printed a speech given in the Convention by Dupont de Nemours, which said that religion was a manifestation of ignorance, weakness and superstition.

---

<sup>5</sup>Sears, George Washington, p. 162.

<sup>6</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 101.



Then he confessed that he himself was an atheist. The New York Herald printed an article which revealed that certain people in this country wanted religion stamped out here as it had been in France and they wanted to establish a system of reason. Many anti-Christian pamphlets were published in America and this served to increase alarm over the spread of irreligion.

The Aurora, a pro-French paper, tried to prove that the charge of irreligion was unfounded by citing Article Seven of the French Constitution which said that the exercise of any religious worship cannot be forbidden. The National Gazette stated that France did not want to be ruled by crafty priests and no one could blame her. Later this paper approved of French suppression of the ringing of church bells and hoped that it would be copied here, since the bells were such a noticeable nuisance.<sup>7</sup>

The clergy in general in New England was a very influential body. At the beginning of the Revolution, they were not hostile toward it, in fact, they were sympathetic to France because of her aid to America and because the French were struggling for liberty. At first the clergy approved of the attacks on Catholicism, but when deism arose, they became afraid that it might spread to the masses in America, and on this assumption, their attitude began

---

<sup>7</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, pp. 267-270.

changing.<sup>8</sup>

Adams wrote that by the end of 1795, all of New England's clergy was denouncing the atheism of the Revolution along with the Federalists. Paine's Age of Reason came out in 1795 and created a sensation in religious circles. Yale and Harvard were charged with being hotbeds of infidelity in that same year.<sup>9</sup>

Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, was aware of "infidel philosophy" which had been widespread among the students as a result of the French Revolution. Dwight had this to say of the Revolution and infidelity:

At no period has the human mind discovered such impatience of moral restraint, broken with so bold a hand the bond of duty, defied in such haughty terms morals, religion, and the government of God.<sup>10</sup>

Shulim cites contrasting evidence of the French Revolution on American religion. Bishop James Madison, cousin of President Madison and a bishop of the Episcopal Church of Virginia, taught that the Christian religion would establish a pure democracy throughout the world.

Its [i. e., Christianity's] main Pillars are Equality, Fraternity, Justice, Universal Benevolence . . . The true X.<sup>n</sup> [sic for Christian] must be a good Democrat.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 131.

<sup>9</sup>Adams, New England in the Republic, p. 219.

<sup>10</sup>Brown, The French Revolution, p. 131.

<sup>11</sup>Shulim, The Old Dominion, p. 37.

The French Revolution aroused both support and opposition from the religious circles in the United States.

Another factor which turned many Americans away from the Revolution was the doctrine of equality. This was, to many people in America, the most unacceptable principle of the Revolution, however, more than any other doctrine, it won support in America. Resentment toward the doctrine of equality is best summarized by these statements from John Adams:

The equality of nature is moral and political only means that all men are independent. But a physical inequality, an intellectual inequality of the most serious kind is established unchangeably by the author of nature; and society has a right to establish any other inequalities it may judge necessary for its good.<sup>12</sup>

Other Americans, particularly those of lower stations in life, favored this doctrine. Many people, as has been mentioned, tried to make the French levelling principles popular. An example of this effort is found in the actions of American democratic societies.

Thus three broad aspects of the Revolution, its violence, its irreligion, and its doctrine of equality served to alienate many Americans from the French Revolution. Certain other events in America and in France brought about further changes in the attitudes of Americans toward the Revolution.

---

<sup>12</sup>John Q. Adams, Life of John Adams, Vol. II, pp. 185-189, as cited by Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, pp. 274-275.

French influence on American politics continued to be strong.

The year 1796 was a presidential election year and the French were intensely interested in the outcome. The French opposed a third term for Washington, because he did not favor their cause. Washington had never publicly aligned himself with the Federalists but most of the men whom he selected for responsible positions were professed Federalists and hostile to France. Washington, not desiring to run for a third term, left the Federalist nomination open to his Vice President, John Adams. The Republicans chose Jefferson to oppose Adams in the presidential campaign of 1796.<sup>13</sup> The French Directory supported Jefferson because they thought that he would be more favorable to France. The French did not like John Adams, who had always been hostile to their Revolution, and had endorsed the Jay Treaty. He had stated that it was impossible to make a republic out of twenty million atheists. Citizen Adet, the French Minister to America, appealed to the American people to vote for Jefferson, as the only way they could restore good relations with France. That the American people began to fear and resent foreign influence is evinced by the election of Adams as President in 1796.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Leonard D. White, The Federalists A Study in Administrative History, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, pp. 199-200.



After the election of John Adams, the French thought the United States had doubled the crime of Jay's Treaty in rebuffing France for the second time. Now the Directory, the ruling body in France, decided to show the Americans their displeasure by stepping up the seizure of American vessels and by confiscating their cargoes. In March, 1797, American sailors impressed by the British were ordered to be hung if they were captured by the French ships. Another French decree in 1797 provided that if any thing of English origin were found on an American ship, the vessel and cargo were liable to French confiscation without compensation. Charles C. Pinckney, the new American Minister to France, was ordered to leave the country and no new minister from America would be received until the French grievance had been redressed.<sup>15</sup> Adams decided to send a commission of three men, Charles C. Pinckney and John Marshall, Federalists, and Elbridge Gerry, a Republican, to France to work out some agreement between the two nations. The instructions given to them were to seek compensation for losses inflicted to American commerce and to free the United States from the obligation to defend the French West Indies as stipulated in the Treaty of Alliance of 1778. They arrived in France in the fall of 1797, and were met by three French agents, later known as X Y and Z who demanded a bribe from the

---

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

Americans, as well as a large loan for France, as a condition of negotiations. The Federalist Ministers, who refused to negotiate in this manner, returned home. The "X Y and Z dispatches" were published and this caused increased reaction against the French. Many Americans were so shocked and angry about this rebuff that they were ready to declare war against France.<sup>16</sup> Many Americans began chanting "Adams and Liberty," and "The President's March" became popular. Anyone who dared to sing a French tune was labeled as an enemy of the United States. When France continued to insult America by capturing American ships, the United States started building up her military forces, tripling the regular army, sending out ships to capture French ships and suspending the treaties of commerce and alliance of 1778.<sup>17</sup>

In June 1798, Adams informed Congress that he would not send another mission to France unless he was assured that they would be well received and respected. In 1799 when he had received this assurance, he sent another mission to France. Through the efforts of this commission, the Franco-American undeclared war was brought to a close. The United States secured its release from the alliance with France by abandoning its claim of indemnity for depredations committed by French ships of war. The Convention of 1800

---

<sup>16</sup>John D. Hicks and George E. Mowry, A Short History of American Democracy, p. 130.

<sup>17</sup>Miller, The Federalist Era, p. 205.

between France and America terminated this quasi-war between France and America and restored good relations which made possible the United States' purchase of Louisiana three years later.

With considerable justice, therefore, John Adams claimed that his action in sending a mission to France was "the most disinterested, the most determined and the most successful of my whole life."<sup>18</sup>

Although this anti-French feeling towards France was greatest in America from 1798-1799, some Americans never wavered in their faith in the French Revolution. Joel Barlow, who saw more in and of the Revolution than any other American, wrote in 1798:

Whoever will give himself the trouble of obtaining a competent knowledge of the French Revolution, so as to be able to judge it with intelligence and weigh the infinite complication of difficulties and incentives to ungovernable passions that have lain in the way of its leaders, must indeed be shocked at their follies and their faults; but he will find more occasion to ask why they have committed so few, than why they have committed so many.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>19</sup>Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion, p. 234.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The majority of the eighteenth century Americans were tremendously influenced by the events of the French Revolution. The French Revolution embodied certain principles which the ordinary people as well as the intellectuals of America, could understand and admire. At the outbreak of the French Revolution, most American people were sympathetic almost unanimously toward the Revolution. Certain influential Americans such as Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and Joel Barlow, enthusiastically and openly supported the Revolution. However, from its beginning, some few Americans were skeptical of its principles and of the methods used to obtain French acceptance of these principles. For example, John Adams was hostile to the Revolution from the very first. George Washington and Gouverneur Morris were at first skeptical of the Revolution and later became scornful of it. Thus, the French Revolution was both admired and disliked by the American public in general and by the leading contemporary Americans.

As the Revolution progressed, American opinion toward it became more clear-cut. This division of opinion could be seen best perhaps, as a split in Washington's cabinet—a division which later developed into definite political parties. This difference of opinion in regard to the French



Revolution was manifested in Congress, in state legislatures and in the general public.

The early years of the French Revolution brought about a strengthening of already present pro-French sentiment; accordingly, the hostility of those opposed to it increased. It wielded a tremendous degree of influence upon the daily lives of the American people. Certain Americans, particularly those affiliated with the Republican party, began to copy French fashions and the French manner of speaking and to join French clubs, such as the Jacobin Club. The American vernacular became infiltrated with numerous words of French origin; American literature was dominated with themes based on events of the French Revolution; and the American theater frequently produced plays reflecting the French ideas.

In the year 1793 American sympathy toward the Revolution reached its highest peak. The year opened with public celebrations held in honor of French principles and French victories. The famous "Civic Feasts" were held throughout the land and the rise of democratic societies, for the purpose of molding pro-French attitude and support in America, became widespread.

Although the majority of the Americans, in 1793, still favored the French Revolution, certain events occurred in France which served to change the minds of many Americans. Louis XVI was executed and France declared war on England.

These two events along with the continuing violence of the Revolution, reversed the opinions of numerous Americans who had formerly espoused the Revolution.

These events not only affected public opinion, they also affected the course of United States foreign policy, and America, under the able leadership of George Washington, chose a policy of neutrality. This declaration of American neutrality brought severe criticism from the Republican party and from the French government. The Federalists, who dominated Congress, along with the pro-British Americans, praised it. The American statement of neutrality was challenged by the French through the actions of Genet, by the British from the terms of the Jay Treaty, and by the Americans in the formation of democratic societies. Neutrality prevailed and the young, unprepared nation was not forced to exhibit her inadequate military strength.

During the years 1793-1794, many Americans became disgusted with the course of the Revolution and abandoned it. Three definite aspects of the Revolution served to withdraw much American support from it: the increasing violence, the atheistic tendencies, and the doctrine of complete equality.

Events in America helped separate many democrats from the French ranks. The unorthodox behavior of French Ministers to the United States such as Citizen Genet and Citizen Adet, was shocking to many Americans. Americans became

fearful of French influence, as was observed in the results of the election of 1796. The X Y Z incident and the following undeclared naval war between France and America caused a great increase of anti-French bias in the United States. Thus, within the scope of a decade, the majority opinion of the American people toward the Revolution evolved from one of extreme loyalty toward France to one of bitter hostility.

Having examined the relationship between France and America, primarily during the years of the French Revolution, one can make a few general observations.

First of all, America and France tremendously influenced and reacted upon each other near the close of the eighteenth century. The second observation is that American public opinion toward the French Revolution was formulated and developed to a large extent by certain influential American leaders. The third observation is that the French Revolution was possibly the greatest single factor responsible for the formation of American political parties. Fourth, it exerted a similar influence on American foreign policy by acting as a factor in determining the course it would take. Fifth, the Revolution caused many contemporary Americans to change their mode of living, by imitating French customs, ideas and social habits. Another observation is that the French Revolution became the popular topic of daily conversations, newspaper articles, contemporary literature and plays in American theaters. The final observation is that the

newly formed and inexperienced nation of America was able to cope with the dangerous problems imposed on her by the French Revolution in terms of foreign policy and in terms of restraining an undue amount of foreign influence within the country.

In conclusion, the French Revolution influenced every aspect of American life. It helped America to grow in maturity by benefiting from French mistakes, and at the same time, France benefited from her experiences with America.



# BOOKS

- Adams, James Truslow, New England In the Republic 1776-1850.  
Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1926.
- Aldridge, Alfred Owen, Franklin and his French Contemporaries.  
Washington Square: New York University Press, 1957.
- Ames, Fisher, Works of Fisher Ames Compiled By A Number of  
His Friends To Which Are Prefixed Notices Of His Life  
And Character. Boston: T. B. Wait and Company, 1809.
- Bond, Beverly W. Jr., The Monroe Mission To France 1794-1796.  
Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1907.
- Brandt, Irving, James Madison Father of the Constitution  
1787-1800. Volume III of six volumes. Indianapolis:  
The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1950.
- Brown, Esther E., The French Revolution and the American Man  
of Letters. Columbia, Missouri: The Curators of the  
University of Missouri, 1951.
- Cappon, Lester J., The Adams-Jefferson Letters The Complete  
Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail  
and John Adams. Volume I of two volumes. New York:  
The University of North Carolina Press, 1959.
- Chinard, Gilbert, Thomas Jefferson The Apostle of Americanism.  
Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1957.
- Cobbett, William (Peter Porcupine), The Bloody Buoy, Thrown  
Out As A Warning to the Political Pilots of America; Or,  
A Faithful Relation Of A Multitude of Acts of Horrid  
Barbarity, Such As The Eye never witnessed, the Tongue  
never expressed, or the Imagination conceived, until the  
Commencement of The French Revolution. Philadelphia:  
Benjamin Davies, 1796.
- Current, Richard N., Harry T. Williams, and Frank Freidel,  
American History : : : A Survey. New York: Alfred A.  
Knopf, 1961.
- DeConde, Alexander, Entangling Alliance Politics & Diplomacy  
under George Washington. Durham, North Carolina: Duke  
University Press, 1958.
- Haraszti, Zoltan, John Adams And The Prophets of Progress.  
Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,  
1952.

- Harper, Robert Goodloe, Observations on the Dispute Between the United States and France. Philadelphia: William Watson and Son, 1797.
- Hazen, Charles Downer, Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1897.
- Hicks, John D., and George E. Mowry, A Short History of American Democracy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956.
- Hirst, Francis W., Life and Letters of Thomas Jefferson. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1926.
- Jay, William, The Life of John Jay: With Selections From His Correspondence And Miscellaneous Papers. Two volumes. New York: J. and J. Harper, 1833.
- Jefferson, Thomas, Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson. New York: Capricorn Books, 1959.
- Jones, Howard Mumford, America and French Culture 1750-1848. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1927.
- Jusserand, J. J., With Americans of Past and Present Days. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1916.
- King, Charles R., The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King Comprising His Letters, Private and Official His Public Documents And His Speeches. Two volumes. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1894.
- Kraus, Michael, The United States to 1865. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959.
- Langer, William L., An Encyclopedia of World History Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, Chronologically Arranged. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, 1962.
- McMaster, John Bach, A History of the People of the United States, From the Revolution to the Civil War. Volume II of eight volumes. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1885.
- Miller, John C., The Federalists Era 1789-1801. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1960.
- Morris, Anne Cary, The Diary And Letters of Gouverneur Morris. Two volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888.

- Harper, Robert Goodloe, Observations on the Dispute Between the United States and France. Philadelphia: William Watson and Son, 1797.
- Hazen, Charles Downer, Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1897.
- Hicks, John D., and George E. Mowry, A Short History of American Democracy. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956.
- Hirst, Francis W., Life and Letters of Thomas Jefferson. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1926.
- Jay, William, The Life of John Jay: With Selections From His Correspondence And Miscellaneous Papers. Two volumes. New York: J. and J. Harper, 1833.
- Jefferson, Thomas, Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson. New York: Capricorn Books, 1959.
- Jones, Howard Mumford, America and French Culture 1750-1848. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1927.
- Jusserand, J. J., With Americans of Past and Present Days. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1916.
- King, Charles R., The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King Comprising His Letters, Private and Official His Public Documents And His Speeches. Two volumes. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1894.
- Kraus, Michael, The United States to 1865. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1959.
- Langer, William L., An Encyclopedia of World History Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, Chronologically Arranged. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, 1962.
- McMaster, John Bach, A History of the People of the United States, From the Revolution to the Civil War. Volume II of eight volumes. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1885.
- Miller, John C., The Federalists Era 1789-1801. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1960.
- Morris, Anne Cary, The Diary And Letters of Gouverneur Morris. Two volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888.



- Morris, Richard B., Encyclopedia of American History.  
New York: Harper and Row, 1961.
- Rosenthal, Lewis, America and France The Influence of the  
United States on France In The XVIIIth Century.  
New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1882.
- Schachner, Nathan, The Founding Fathers. New York: G. P.  
Putnam's Sons, 1954.
- Sears, Louis Martin, George Washington & The French Revolution.  
Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1960.
- Sears, Louis Martin, History of American Foreign Relations.  
New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1927.
- Shulim, Joseph I., The Old Dominion and Napoleon Bonaparte  
A Study in American Opinion. New York: Columbia  
University, 1952.
- Sullivan, William, Familiar Letters on Public Characters,  
and Public Events, From The Peace of 1783, To The Peace  
Of 1815. Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1834.
- Turner, Edward Raymond, Europe Since 1789. New York: Double-  
day, Page and Company, 1924.
- Wallbank, Walter T., and Alastair M. Taylor, Civilization  
Past and Present. Dallas: Scott, Foresman and Company,  
1956.
- White, Leonard D., The Federalists A Study in Administrative  
History. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948.
- Willson, Beckles, America's Ambassadors To France (1777-1927).  
New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928.
- Woodress, James, A Yankee's Odyssey The Life of Joel Barlow.  
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1958.
- Woodward, W. E., Tom Paine: America's Godfather 1737-1809.  
New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1945.



PERIODICALS

Corwin, Edwin S., "The French Objective in the American Revolution", The American Historical Review. 21:33-61, 1916.

Hazen, Charles D., "The French Revolution as Seen by the Americans of the Eighteenth Century", Annual Report American Historical Association. 22:455-466, 1895.

Tyne, C. H. Van, "Influence Which Determined the French Government to Make the Treaty with America, 1776", The American Historical Review. 21:528-541, 1916.

Vita was removed during scanning