

THE DECLINE OF
AMERICAN LIBERALISM

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Jeffersonian Compromise

NO PERIOD of American history has occasioned greater diversity in interpretation than the two decades divided by the year 1800. Heralded on the one hand as an era in which the ideals of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment were expanded as a result of the outbreak of the French Revolution, these years have also been referred to as an age of counter-revolution and conservative reaction. This paradox of Enlightenment and reaction is heightened when one looks at the period closely and perceives its even deeper inner contradictions. For example, how can the intellectual radicalism of the 1790's — popular deism, Democratic-Republican societies sympathetic with Revolutionary France, and the widespread circulation of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* and *Age of Reason* — be reconciled with the political supremacy of the conservative Federalist party of Washington, Adams, and Hamilton — all bitter critics of the French Revolution and of Paine's radical views?

The problem of interpretation for this period becomes even greater when it is recalled that after the Federalists attempted in the Alien and Sedition Acts to extend their political powers into the realm of intellectual life, thus enforcing a complete conservative reaction, they were overthrown, and the liberal followers of Thomas Jefferson came into office in the so-called Revolution of 1800. But the triumph of the radical Jeffersonians was short-lived. Their electoral victory

had been achieved in an era of increasing intellectual and social conservatism, in which deism, revolutionary radicalism, and even many of the cherished values of the Enlightenment were yielding their place to the new forces of religious orthodoxy, economic nationalism, and patrician control of thought. Thus the 1800's, reversing the procedure of the 1790's, united political liberalism with intellectual conservatism.

This confusion, although more marked in the first quarter century of the American republic, has not been entirely lacking in subsequent periods of the nation's development. Usually it is explained in terms of a frank dualism, in which United States history is contemplated as a continual struggle between radical and conservative points of view. Since these two compartments are not always neatly arranged to include all their various elements of thought and action, there results, on occasion, the paradox of a political reaction in the midst of a lingering period of antecedent intellectual revolt. In any case, the concept of a permanent war between the radical and conservative, or democratic and aristocratic, positions, however confusing in detail, has had the popular merit of enforcing an optimistic, progressive interpretation of American history. For, Americans have seldom doubted that ultimate victory will lie with the radical or, as it is usually expressed, the liberal, democratic position.

One of the traditional landmarks along this democratic and liberal, or even radical, pathway was the Jeffersonian era, which began with the election of 1800. The Jeffersonian heritage rightly deserves a prominent place in United States history, but along with its great popularity in recent years has gone an extensive re-evaluation of its actual achievements. Students of our political and economic history have united to minimize the effect of the Revolution of 1800. The judgment of a later scholar that "Jefferson, anti-Hamilto-

nian out of supreme office, became in good part Hamiltonian as President,"¹ repeated the shrewd contemporary opinion offered by Hamilton that "Mr. Jefferson's character warrants the expectation of a temporizing rather than a violent system."² And, of course, Jefferson in his inaugural address made the famous remark: "We are all Republicans — we are all Federalists."

The clue to the difficult problem of reconciling Jefferson, the liberal, and Jefferson, the Federalized Republican, lies in dissociating Jefferson, the intellectual and philosopher, from Jefferson, the President of the United States. Jefferson's liberalism and radicalism fell mainly within the periods when he was not holding an administrative public office — in other words, during the first years of the Revolution, again in the second Washington and the Adams administration, and finally in the last years of his life after his own presidency. The other consideration that bears on Jefferson's liberalism was the retreat or compromise forced by the external circumstances of war or the threat of war. John C. Calhoun, in his comment on the failure of Jefferson to undo the work of Hamilton and the Federalists, reiterated the view of the orthodox Jeffersonians — that troubles in foreign affairs were a large part of the reason. Jefferson himself probed deeper into the problem, giving an answer that came to grips with the heart of the liberal's dilemma. Familiar with the example of centralization in Europe, and sure that power always tends to corrupt those who possess it, he warned that there was danger that any government entrusted with authority would degenerate into one of force and tyranny. "I own, I am not a friend to a very energetic government," he wrote Madison in 1787. "It is always oppressive. It places the governors indeed more at their ease, at the expense of the people."³

In the eyes of his opponents and of many of his erstwhile

supporters, Jefferson as president illustrated his own dictum. But Jefferson, at least, recognized the problem and struggled harder perhaps than any other president to preserve the sinews of liberalism. His efforts point up the significance to American liberalism of the Jeffersonian tradition; his defeat was an early indication of the decline of that liberalism. The dichotomy is summed up in Parrington's belief that, although Jefferson was "by far the most vital and suggestive" of all thinkers of the early republic, "the one to whom later generations may return most hopefully," his efforts were "foredoomed to failure."⁴

The main outlines of Jefferson's liberal philosophy are well known and began with his very real contributions to the American Revolution. Author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson was also one of the leaders of the social revolution in Virginia that abolished primogeniture and entail, and disestablished the Anglican Church. His bill for religious freedom, which he had drafted as a part of a general revision of the laws of Virginia, was finally passed in 1786. Going beyond the simple enforcement of legal toleration for dissenters, it called for complete freedom of thought and worship. In the preamble to this justly famous Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom, Jefferson declared that governments should interfere with the expression of opinions only when they "break into overt acts against peace and good order." Meanwhile, toleration and truth provided the best defense against error. It was essential therefore that minority opinion be protected from assault if it was to have an equal chance to become, perhaps, the majority view of some future day.⁵ Jefferson's other important ambition for his native state, the institution of a comprehensive system of public education, met with paltry results except in the case of the later founding of the University of Virginia.

Jefferson's contributions to the Revolution were largely

of an intellectual sort. Adhering to the traditions and tenets of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, he used the typical weapons of a liberal intellectual — the pen and the legislative assembly — in his efforts to overthrow British rule and to lay the foundations for a more liberal American society. Thrust into the practical direction of affairs as war governor of Virginia from 1779 to 1781, Jefferson's experience was less happy and not especially successful. Then, after the death of his wife and conclusion of the Revolution, he undertook the important mission of following in Franklin's footsteps as United States minister to France. His sojourn in Europe not only gave him an excellent opportunity for intellectual stimulation but bestowed upon him as well a certain added maturity and breadth of view.

From his European experience Jefferson derived at first hand a number of conceptions that reinforced his own native liberal philosophy. As America's official representative in France, he was anxious to improve trade relations between the two countries. Here, however, he was confronted by the restrictions of French mercantilism, so exasperatingly reminiscent of the old British colonial trade regulations. Without being a doctrinaire physiocrat, Jefferson was nevertheless very critical of governmental restraints on trade and constantly compared the European practice in this regard with the more favorable situation of America. After an excursion to Great Britain in 1786, he found much to condemn in the system of land monopoly and the way in which industrialism in "scientific England" ground down the poor. Along with the wealth and civilization of Europe, Jefferson saw the grave dangers of its excessive centralization and consolidation. "What a cruel reflection," he wrote mournfully in 1785, "that a rich country can not long be a free one." ⁶

Although doubtful that it would work in Europe, Jefferson felt that a republican form of government was best for

the United States because it lent itself least to the centralization that characterized Old World countries. Yet, as he warned Madison, there was danger of any type of government degenerating into one of force and tyranny, and he feared that the large cities and corruption of Europe would be transferred to the New World as soon as the supply of vacant lands in America began to diminish. Jefferson's apprehension over a society predominantly urbanized and industrialized is well known and was often adverted to in his correspondence as well as in his *Notes on Virginia*. "When we get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become corrupt as in Europe, and go to eating one another as they do there." Such a society ran counter to all his agrarian principles and to his belief in individualism. With people working in factories and clustered together in great metropolitan areas, the individual would lose his freedom to an employer, to a government, or to the pressure of mass opinion.⁷

Jefferson's ideal economy emphasized the self-sufficiency of the individual, living in a self-contained community, and enjoying the economic advantages that went with ownership of land. Allied with this agrarian ideal was his preference for a limited government, in which as many powers as possible would be exercised on the local level. Although he recognized the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and the need for a government able to defend the United States from threats abroad, he desired to see the state and local instrumentalities sovereign in domestic matters. Jefferson accordingly admired the democracy of New England towns, and he included a similar system of local government in his suggested plans for organizing the Northwest Territory. In Virginia, he urged adoption of a type of local government extending down to the ward level. In his Autobiography, which he began at the advanced age of seventy-seven, he

complained bitterly over the way in which the Federal judiciary had consolidated power in the national administration, at the expense of the rights of state and local governments. Arguing that "it is not by the consolidation, or concentration of powers, but by their distribution, that good government is effected," Jefferson depicted as the ideal, a society in which

Every State again is divided into counties . . . ; each county again into townships or wards, to manage minuter details; and every ward into farms to be governed each by its individual proprietor. Were we directed from Washington when to sow, and when to reap, we should soon want bread.⁸

The strength of Jefferson's belief in local government and in participation by the citizen in the affairs of his "ward-republic" was illustrated by his remark to a correspondent that, like Cato, he could only conclude every bit of advice on government with the injunction "divide the counties into wards."⁹ This stress on local government continued to be one of the major themes of Jefferson's letter writing during his later years. Although he coupled his views with a support of the national government's strong foreign policy during the crucial period of the Madison administration, his reiteration of the importance of local and state rights almost carried him to the point of repudiating many of the steps that he had taken in his own administration. Fearful that a centralized government would assume absolute powers, he placed increasing emphasis upon education and local government as the two hooks upon which the preservation of republican institutions depended. It was especially ironic therefore that, in his own state of Virginia, Jefferson had so little success in securing the adoption of a system either of widespread common schooling or of responsible local government. These failures on the local scene were matched by an even greater

decline in Jeffersonian liberalism over the nation as a whole. In this decline, the greatest irony of all perhaps was that Jefferson's own presidency contributed so importantly to the defeat of his principles.

In his inaugural address on March 4, 1801, President Jefferson set forth in optimistic and conciliatory terms a philosophy of political liberalism that complemented his ideal agrarian economy. To the vision of a young nation, rich in resources, Jefferson added his confidence in the ability of the people to govern themselves under the Constitution and rule of law, and according to the "sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate which would be oppression." Spelling these rights out in detail, Jefferson proceeded to summarize the essential features of a liberal democratic government — equal justice, limited power, and freedom of the individual in all his pursuits.¹⁰

How well Jefferson's two administrations realized his high ideals has ever since been a matter of controversy, but there is little doubt that he began his task as president with a profound awareness of the dangers inherent in the exercise of national power. In a significant pre-election letter to Gideon Granger, a Connecticut politician who became postmaster general in the new administration, Jefferson expressed the opinion that widespread opposition in New England to Republican principles would compel the Jeffersonians, if victorious, to adopt a consolidated and enforced nationalism. This contradicted Jefferson's own view that an ideal government was one close to the citizenry, with its domestic affairs in the hands of the separate states. "Our country is too large to have all its affairs directed by a single government," he wrote, adding: "What an augmentation of the field for job-

bing, speculating, plundering, office-building and office-hunting would be produced by an assumption of all the State powers into the hands of the General Government!" But a simple and economical government, he feared, could not be realized if New England persisted in its contrary-minded Federalism.¹¹

Jefferson's letter to Granger was an interesting advance apology for some of the policies later pursued by his administration. Meanwhile, however, New Englanders abated their hysteria over Jefferson's election, and his first administration, at least, was able to move smoothly toward the achievement of most of the goals of Jeffersonian liberalism. Neither the Bank of the United States nor the national debt was repudiated, but taxes were cut, the hated whisky excise was repealed, and offenders under the Sedition Act were granted pardons and remission of their fines. Furthermore, the civil service, including especially the diplomatic establishment, and the personnel of the army and navy were both drastically trimmed. Although the Jeffersonians did not accomplish the complete administrative revolution they had threatened when in the opposition, there remained a Republican point of view that contrasted sharply with the Federalists' manner of operating the government. Greater emphasis was placed on the responsibility of the executive branch of the government to Congress, and there was more respect for the integrity and functions of the states and of the individual citizen. While accepting the structure of the government left by the Federalists, the Jeffersonians proposed to administer it in a different spirit.¹² But midway in Jefferson's first term this dream of an era of Republican tranquillity and agrarian virtue was rudely interrupted by events in Europe.

The rise of Napoleon from the ruins of the French Revolution's early idealism, his acquisition of Louisiana, and the

threat that this offered to American trade down the Mississippi, plus the possibility of a renewal of the European war, all operated to dispel Jefferson's Utopian Arcadia of simplicity and economy. Forced by the pressures of the frontiersmen's "agricultural imperialism," Jefferson abandoned his strict constructionist interpretation of the Constitution and eagerly grasped Napoleon's sudden offer to sell all of Louisiana to the United States. Although Jefferson drafted an amendment to the Constitution covering the right to add new territories to the Union, the deal for Louisiana could not wait, and Congress accordingly gave its quick approval to the purchase price of some fifteen million dollars, thereby almost doubling the national debt, which Jefferson and Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin had been at such pains to reduce. One further embarrassment to Jefferson in connection with Louisiana resulted from protests of local inhabitants at the arbitrary nature of the American government imposed upon them without their consent and in violation of the treaty terms. This, however, was soon corrected by the establishment for the more settled areas of the vast region of a territorial government comparable to that of the Old Northwest Territory.

On the whole, the modifications in Jeffersonian principles resulting from the purchase of Louisiana were mild indeed compared to the changes and difficulties enforced by the new outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1803. In the not unsympathetic judgment of the Beards, the events in Europe drew Jefferson and his supporters "into domestic policies more autocratic and sweeping than Hamilton's boldest enterprise; hurried them, pacific as they were in intention, into a struggle not of their own deliberate making; compelled them to resort to hated measures of revenue and finance . . ." ¹³ And to cap the climax, the Federalists now resorted to arguing a state rights position and to threatening secession, while

the Jeffersonian Republicans adopted, one after another, the nationalistic measures of their hated opponents. The Embargo Act, forbidding all American vessels to sail for European ports, which was passed by Congress in December 1807, involved the greatest threat to American individual liberties. This soon became apparent when a series of enforcement acts gave Federal agents the right to search out and seize ships and goods suspected of being in violation of the law. The much-hated Embargo Act has, however, to be understood in the light of Jefferson's efforts to preserve American neutral rights without going to war. But, despite his love of peace, Jefferson in his anxiety over violations of American neutrality also turned to a policy of building gunboats for the navy and of enlarging the size of the standing army. 488

The degree of nationalism, expense, and coercion implied in these various measures of Jefferson's second administration aroused the wrath of many of his followers, and resulted in a curious political alliance of conservative Federalists and radical doctrinaire Jeffersonians. Of the latter, none was more bitter or savage in his criticism than John Randolph of Roanoke. Randolph, who has been called an aristocratic libertarian, gave as his own epigram: "I am an aristocrat; I love liberty, I hate equality." This last comment explains something of his differences with Jefferson, although Randolph, like Jefferson, accepted equality in the sense of equality of opportunity. A strict constructionist, Randolph nevertheless was realistic enough to view the Constitution as a political instrument and not as a final authority. Only power, he argued, could restrain power, and he therefore desired to see the agrarian interests of propertied farmers preserved as a bulwark against the commercial and manufacturing power. Like John Taylor of Caroline and the hard core of original Jeffersonians, Randolph was strongly opposed to

the idea of a paternalistic, protectionist state. A government restricted in its powers, Randolph realized, could not furnish the degree of subsidy and protection required to build up an industrial order, which was precisely why he preferred a strict construction of the Constitution. Although no leveler, he held that government should not deliberately produce inequality through legislation favoring a particular interest or group.¹⁴

With help from a few of the old Republicans and the Federalist opposition, Randolph played a significant role in combating the centralizing tendencies in the Republican administrations of Jefferson and Madison. The embargo, foreign entanglements, preparedness legislation, War of 1812, tariff, internal improvements, and Second Bank of the United States all incurred his keen displeasure. But the war and expansionist policies of the Republicans were the especial targets of his sarcasm, Randolph complaining on one occasion in a typical speech in Congress: "We had vaunted of paying off the national debt, of retrenching useless establishments; and yet had now become as infatuated with standing armies, loans, taxes, navies, and war, as ever were the Essex Junto. What Republicanism is this?"¹⁵

In the opinion of his latest biographer, Randolph's liberalism was more limited than Jefferson's. While Jefferson changed with the times, preserved his optimism, and saved at least a part of the American dream, Randolph became increasingly embittered, retreating finally into an intransigent southern state rights position. In Randolph's case, the consistency of his old Jeffersonian liberalism was marred by his growing acceptance of the orthodox southern view in regard to Negro slavery. Although opposed to slavery on principle, Randolph was defensive about the institution in the South because of his fears of a slave insurrection and because of his firm opposition to Federal interference with

state rights. Slavery, he came to feel, was a matter of life and death to the South.¹⁶

Jefferson, like Randolph, also perhaps yielded some of his earlier antislavery convictions, but more significant was the way in which he drew closer to Randolph in other respects, thus returning to the liberal attitudes that had characterized his philosophy before the troubled years of his presidency. While the bulk of the Jeffersonians embarked on the nationalistic policies of the postwar era of good feeling, Jefferson himself beat a retreat to some of his earlier allegiances. Endorsing a strict constructionist work by John Taylor, *Construction Construed and Constitutions Vindicated*, Jefferson wrote in 1822: "I acknowledge it has corrected some erring opinion into which I had slidden without sufficient examination." A correspondent of Randolph's, alluding to some Jefferson letters he had seen, noted in 1826: "The old gentleman seems from this correspondence, to be more alarmed at the rapid and increasing encroachments of the Federal government than I could have imagined." And Jefferson himself, in referring to his endorsement of the Taylor book, wrote to Nathaniel Macon, stressing the urgency of two measures:

1st, how to check these unconstitutional invasions of states rights by the federal judiciary. . . .

2. to cease borrowing money to pay off the national debt, if this cannot be done without dismissing the army and putting the ships out of commission, have them up high and dry, and reduce the army to the lowest point at which it was ever established.¹⁷

In the Beards' view, the policies of the Jefferson administration, with their seemingly anti-Jeffersonian nationalism, were "a reversal of means not ends."¹⁸ Considered in economic terms, Jefferson was adapting his policies to the

changed world situation — the broad Jeffersonian agrarian goal remaining the same. Thus the Louisiana Purchase was dictated by Jefferson's desire to keep the United States an agricultural nation. But, as Jefferson himself seemed to have realized after he relinquished office, the old liberal goals had been subverted by the illiberal means that the Republicans had taken over from their Federalist opponents. While his Republican successors pursued a policy of economic nationalism as both an instrument and a goal of Republican statecraft, Jefferson returned to his old loves of widespread education and local self-government.

The transformation in Republican policies during the presidential administration of Jefferson and Madison, whether viewed as a realistic adjustment to changing circumstances or as an abandonment of earlier ideals, was related to the fatal dilemma posed by the long drawn-out war in Europe. The more intransigent of the followers of Jefferson probably agreed with John Taylor that it would have been better to abandon American neutral rights and let the New England merchants fend for themselves. Certainly, under Jefferson and Madison, the attempt to preserve American rights abroad seemed to have led only to increasing restrictions on individual liberties at home. The eventual result of such a policy was the yielding of the older agrarian principles of simplicity and economy that came with formal American entrance into the War of 1812.

John C. Calhoun, one of the War Hawks of 1812, in looking back upon this period, noted how war had absorbed the attention of government and arrested the efforts of Republicans "to carry out the doctrines and policy which brought the party into power." But the greatest impact of the war lay in the future, for, as Calhoun wrote, "the war, however just and necessary, gave a strong impulse adverse to the federal, and favorable to the national line of policy."¹⁹ Other ob-

servers also commented on the nationalistic effect of that war. Albert Gallatin, one of the peace commissioners and, as secretary of the treasury, an intimate associate of both Jefferson and Madison, believed that the war had exerted a beneficent influence in the impetus that it gave to patriotism and Americanism. On the other hand, Gallatin, perhaps recalling his own earlier efforts for peace and economy, was forced to admit that "the war has laid the foundation of permanent taxes and military establishments, which the Republicans had deemed unfavorable to the happiness and free institutions of the country."²⁰

By the 1820's the adoption of the nationalistic philosophy that held that government had a positive responsibility for the economic well-being of its citizens was resulting in modifications of the older liberal individualism. There was now a strong demand for government action to extinguish Indian claims, build roads, and provide a satisfactory banking and credit system. Instead of the rapidly diminishing debt of Jefferson's first administration, the country found itself saddled with a huge postwar indebtedness of some one hundred twenty million dollars. The Bank of the United States, allowed to expire on the eve of the War of 1812, had to be rechartered to facilitate the management of this national debt. A protective tariff became necessary to protect the manufacturing that had sprung up in the period of isolation from European markets during the embargo and the war. An enlarged military and naval establishment was authorized upon the earnest recommendation of President Madison. And finally, to meet the challenge posed by the extensive area of the new American empire stretching beyond the Mississippi, Madison, like Jefferson, urged an amendment to the Constitution granting Congress the power to build roads, canals, and other internal improvements. Pending such an amendment, Madison was unable to overcome the

remnants of his strict constructionist views, and in his last official act as president, he vetoed the bank bonus bill. Under the terms of this measure, which was introduced in Congress by Calhoun, the one and a half million dollars paid by the Second Bank of the United States as a bonus for its charter would have been set aside as a permanent fund for internal improvements.

Like his predecessor Madison, President James Monroe had difficulty adjusting his strict constructionist views to the nationalism of the postwar era. At the close of Jefferson's presidency, Monroe had reached the point of an open break with his superior over the nationalistic trend of the party's policies. And during his own term in office he vetoed a bill providing funds for the repair of the Cumberland Road, although he allowed the original construction to be completed. But any such inklings of a return to the older Jeffersonian state rights position were canceled by the nationalistic tenor of John Marshall's decisions as chief justice of the Supreme Court. In a period of Republican administrations, Marshall was a vital link in the chain that bound the older aristocracy of the Federalists to the later capitalism of the Whigs. Under his leadership, the Court seemed to bear out Jefferson's opinion that the judiciary was a "subtle corps of sappers and miners constantly working under ground to undermine the foundations of our confederated fabric. They are construing our Constitution from a co-ordination of a general and special government, to a general and supreme one alone."²¹ In a series of notable decisions, climaxed by that in the famous *McCulloch v. Maryland* case of 1819, Marshall defended the national as against the state power. He included in his argument the nationalistic interpretation of the origins of the Constitution, as well as the broad constructionist views originally voiced by Alexander Hamilton.

However much Jefferson and his older followers such as

John Taylor decried Marshall's decisions, there was little difference between the constitutional interpretations of the Supreme Court and the nationalism of the younger Republican leaders who had come into prominence since the War of 1812. Henry Clay, for example, offered a scheme to unite differing class and sectional economic interests in one comprehensive program — his famous "American system." To the old idea of a fundamental antagonism between agrarian and commercial interests, Clay opposed his plan for joining all sections behind a national bank, protective tariff, internal improvements, and generous land policy. Each area, excepting only the Old South, was promised some advantage, and the American system, Clay hoped, would provide an economic basis for the new nationalism of the 1820's. Clay thus tried to broaden the old Hamiltonian economic program in order to give it a greater mass appeal.

Hamilton's Federalist party had collapsed after the War of 1812. But a decade later when John Quincy Adams, a Republican converted from the Federalism of his father, entered the White House, the doctrines of the American system of Hamilton and Clay received their most enthusiastic presidential support. In his first message to Congress, Adams surpassed all previous recommendations for internal improvements and suggested government aid for cultural as well as economic endeavors. This message, which went too far for American taste and was consequently politically unwise, proved alarming to even Adams's friends. Of all the cabinet, only Richard Rush, temporarily the Secretary of State, approved the message when it was first read to them. Jeffersonians believed the Adams program to be full of unconstitutional doctrines, and to most Americans the ideas must have seemed more European than American. They interpreted the message as advocating legislation for the benefit of a class, and Adams's concept of a planned economy

they regarded as unmitigated consolidation and centralization. But if "The Message was, for its time, Caesarean," as a recent writer had put it, it was also fortunate that Adams "was the mildest of Caesars."²² He sincerely believed in the merits of his far-reaching plans and later in life complained bitterly at the defeat of his comprehensive program for internal improvements.

I fell and with me fell, I fear never to rise again, certainly never to rise again in my day, the system of internal improvement by means of national energies. The great object of my life therefore, as applied to the administration of the government of the United States, has failed.²³

In the quarter century between John Quincy Adams's message to Congress in 1825 and Jefferson's first inaugural address in 1801, the course of American life and thought underwent amazing shifts. Disappointed though he was over the failure of his administration to put into effect his nationalistic measures, the son of old John Adams nevertheless stood as a notable example of the metamorphosis of American politics. The Jeffersonians had become Federalists, and the Federalists had followed John Quincy into the ranks of their opponents. From this strange union, the older liberals in the Jeffersonian circle could derive little comfort. Under the overriding compulsions of the new nationalism that characterized the era of good feeling after the War of 1812, an eighteenth-century agrarian liberalism received scant support.