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# THOMAS JEFFERSON'S NATIONALIST VISION OF NEW ENGLAND AND THE WAR OF 1812

ARTHUR SCHERR

UNTIL RECENTLY, Thomas Jefferson's nineteenth-century image as a herald of freedom and Union embodying "the definitions and axioms of free society," as Abraham Lincoln put it, seemed secure.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, many current historians adopt an image of Jefferson as an ethnocentric Virginian supporter of states' rights without a developed concept of nationhood. They argue that his proslavery, agrarian bias, particularly in such matters as his presidency's Louisiana Purchase and Embargo Act, his sentiments in favor of the War of 1812, his objection to the prohibition of slavery in Missouri, and protests against national "consolidation" in old age, were especially harmful to mercantile, Puritan, antislavery New England.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Abraham Lincoln to Henry Pierce and others, 6 April 1859, quoted in Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005), 790. For Jefferson's influence on Lincoln, see also Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 220–22; Wallace Hettle, *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 10, 165–68; and Eric FONER, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 73, 75–77, 85.
2. See, for example, Ronald L. Hatzembuehler, "Growing Weary in Well-Doing: Thomas Jefferson's Life Among the Virginia Gentry," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101 (January 1993): 5–36; Robert E. Shalhope, "Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and Antebellum Southern Thought," *Journal of Southern History* 42 (November 1976): 529–56; James Roger Sharp, "Unraveling the Mystery of Jefferson's Letter of April 27, 1795," *Journal of the Early Republic* 6 (Winter 1986): 411–18; Peter S. Onuf, "Thomas Jefferson, Missouri, and the 'Empire of Liberty,'" in *Thomas Jefferson and the Changing West: From Conquest to Conservation*, ed. James P. Ronda (Albuquerque and St. Louis: University of New Mexico Press and Missouri Historical Society, 1997), 111–53; Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), esp. chap. 3–5; K. R. Constantine Gutzman, "The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions Reconsidered: An Appeal to the 'Real Laws' of Our Country," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (August 2000): 473–96; and Andy Trees, "Private Correspondence for the Public Good: Thomas Jefferson to Elbridge Gerry, 26 January 1799," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 198 (2000): 217–54.

This article opposes the claims of those historians. Jefferson, notwithstanding some angry outbursts, was essentially conciliatory toward New Englanders. During the War of 1812, he promoted a peaceful, gradualist strategy instead of urging the military overthrow and destruction of Massachusetts. This was perhaps inevitable, in light of his conviction that the New England town meeting best implemented direct democracy, which he considered the most legitimate form of government. A closer examination of Jefferson's view of New England may help us reassess his historical reputation and better comprehend the roots of sectionalism and nationalism in the early republic. After sampling some current scholarly assessments of Jefferson's outlook, this essay will analyze his opinions about the region, whose citizens' commercial and manufacturing lifestyle ostensibly offended his agrarian-provincial values. His attitudes during the War of 1812, the epoch of New England disunionism and the Hartford Convention, merit special attention.<sup>3</sup>

Several historians have recently examined aspects of Jefferson's opinion of New England. Ronald Hatzenbuehler discusses Jefferson's reactions, while U.S. minister to France, to Shays' Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786–1787. His main source is a letter from Jefferson to John Adams twenty-six years later that ignored the incident. Hatzenbuehler argues that the disorder appalled Jefferson, who thereafter regarded Virginians as exceeding New Englanders in competence for self-government. However, Jefferson's letters during 1786–1787 uniformly applauded Shays' Rebellion as a "good thing," which would ultimately enhance the rulers' responsiveness to the ruled. Moreover, rather than being extinguished by his alleged disgust at Shays' Rebellion, Jefferson's lifelong admiration for New England's democratic town meeting organization grew over the years.<sup>4</sup>

3. Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity From the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), conveys insights into outsiders' views of New England but surprisingly ignores Jefferson.
4. Ronald Hatzenbuehler, "Refreshing the Tree of Liberty with the Blood of Patriots and Tyrants": Thomas Jefferson and the Origins of the U. S. Constitution," in *Essays on Liberty and Federalism: The Shaping of the U. S. Constitution*, eds. John M. Murrin and David E. Narrett (College Station, Tex.: Texas A & M Press, 1988), 88–104, esp. 89, 94–95, 100–102. Jefferson wrote, "A little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical." Jefferson to James Madison, 30 January 1787, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Julian P. Boyd et al. 32 vols., in progress (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 11:93. For other examples of Jefferson's enthusiasm for Shays' Rebellion, see Jefferson to William Stephens Smith, 13 November 1787 (the "tree of liberty" letter), and Jefferson to Madison, 20 December 1787, in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 911, 917–18.

Garry Wills's provocative new work, *"Negro President": Jefferson and the Slave Power* (Boston, 2003), views Jefferson as an ambitious politician determined to maintain Southern hegemony in the new government. Heartened by such measures as the "three-fifths clause" of the constitution, he thought that adding slave states to the Union would stymie the political progress of selfish Federalist "Northern merchants." Jefferson could not forgive these men. Led by idealistic Timothy Pickering (whose odious historical reputation Wills seeks to rehabilitate), New England Federalists had attacked slavery, disobeyed his Embargo Act, and opposed the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812. A cabinet member under Washington's and Adams's administrations and senator and congressman from Massachusetts during Jefferson's and Madison's presidencies, Pickering, according to Wills, epitomized the selflessness, morality, and integrity that Jefferson lacked.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, Wills admits that Jefferson proposed the Embargo largely to protect New England shippers from British depredations, although they preferred to pursue unimpeded the lucrative profits derived from carrying Latin American tropical goods to continental Europe. Like Henry Adams and others, Wills notes that the Embargo more adversely affected Jefferson's "favorite" regions, Virginia and the South, which lost markets for staples like cotton, wheat, and tobacco, than New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, whose manufactures were indirectly assisted by the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Act's curtailment of imports.<sup>6</sup> These factors undermine Wills's thesis that Jefferson's embargo was inspired by malignity toward New England and aimed to damage its economy in order to weaken the power of "antislavery" Massachusetts Federalists like Pickering.

While developing a larger thesis about Jeffersonian nationalism, Peter S. Onuf of the University of Virginia asserts that revenge against New England, especially

5. See Garry Wills, *"Negro President": Jefferson and the Slave Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 227 and passim, for his admiration for Pickering. For historians' criticism of Wills, see, for example, Sean Wilentz, "The Details of Greatness," *The New Republic*, 29 March 2004, 31–35; Gordon S. Wood, "Slaves in the Family," *New York Times Book Review*, 14 December 2003, 10; and Earl Maltz, "Piling on Jefferson," *National Review*, 22 December 2003, 45.

6. Wills, *"Negro President,"* 156–57. For the embargo's adverse effects on the South, see Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*, 9 vols. (1891–1896; repr., New York: Antiquarian Press, 1962), 4:281–83; Louis Martin Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1927), 126, 228–52; Sears, "The South and the Embargo," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 20 (July 1921): 254–75; and Burton W. Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 171–72, 203.

during the War of 1812, was integral to Jefferson's nationalist ethos and a paradoxical outgrowth of his quest to cement the young republic's "ties of affectionate union and harmonious interest." In his recent book, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood*, and elsewhere, Onuf argues that Jefferson believed that national harmony, "affection," and uniformity could only be attained through the "destruction" of mercantile New England by the "loyal Republican states." This negated Jefferson's original idealistic, agrarian-republican goal: to counterpoise Britain's and Europe's "despotic imperial regime" with an independent, "new republican empire" whose prosperity would not "depend on the massive concentration of coercive force."<sup>7</sup>

Jefferson was alarmed that, after his first term's success, the unpopularity in New England of the Embargo Act and the War of 1812 had resurrected pro-British "sectionalists who sought to destroy the union and forge an alliance with their secret British sponsors." His agenda dictated that the Republican Party's permanent hegemony alone could guarantee the nation's survival: "One-party rule was the *sine qua non* of union and the best guarantee against foreign interference."<sup>8</sup> He therefore "began to imagine a more sanguinary, less principled sort of 'combat' against his old Federalist foes."<sup>9</sup> In Onuf's scenario, Jefferson (peacefully retired at Monticello) rashly concluded that national self-defense required that a Virginia-led Union militarily obliterate—"destroy"—New England, thereby thwarting its royalist scheme to return to the British Empire and endanger the states' republicanism.<sup>10</sup> Jefferson envisaged that, following a civil war in which Virginia and her allies devastated an increasingly depopulated New England, many of whose citizens would have fled to other, more

7. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 75. Onuf here extends his discussion of Jefferson's emotional conflicts between self-revelation and self-concealment, begun in "The Scholars' Jefferson," *William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (October 1993): 671–99.
8. Onuf, "Thomas Jefferson, Missouri, and the 'Empire of Liberty,'" 123; Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 70, 72, 122.
9. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 123.
10. Onuf, "Thomas Jefferson, Missouri, and the 'Empire of Liberty,'" 123. Although Onuf claims that historian Robert Shalhope corroborates "Jefferson's animus toward New England," Shalhope does not depict Jefferson as hostile. He cites the letter to James Martin, 20 September 1813, which Onuf employs as evidence of Jefferson's wish to "destroy" New England, to show Jefferson's desire that the New Englanders "go in peace," in Shalhope's words, if they refused to support the Union. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 215 n. 40, citing Robert E. Shalhope, "Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and Antebellum Southern Thought," 539–42.

democratic states, the wayward Puritans would eventually return humbly to the Union.<sup>11</sup>

In a sweeping conclusion, Onuf argues that Jefferson's objective in "destroying New England" was not merely to promote the Republican South's dominance, but to guarantee American nationhood: "The subsequent restoration of the union, purified of the last vestiges of monarchical corruption, would redeem the promise of the American Revolution."<sup>12</sup> In several letters Jefferson wrote during the War of 1812, Onuf maintains, he emphasized the need to neutralize Massachusetts' disloyalty by force, "because it justified the projection of his own 'deadly hatred' against his 'fellow citizens.'" He powerfully asserts, "Jefferson made Federalists foreigners and gave them a country of their own (Massachusetts) so that he could imagine making war on them—and so persuade himself that he was not violating the republican gospel of peace and affectionate union."<sup>13</sup> Onuf's challenging new interpretation necessitates a careful reexamination of Jefferson's ideas about New England and New Englanders.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to Wills, Onuf, and others, this article argues that Jefferson's attitudes toward New Englanders during the War of 1812 were sympathetic. Jefferson used his limited influence to foster a harmonious Union. At the same time, distressed by the region's persistent support of his enemies, he remained ambivalent toward its politics. This became particularly evident after Jefferson retired from public life and more stridently articulated his views.

Jefferson first visited New England in May 1784, shortly after his wife's death, when Congress appointed him to a European mission to negotiate trade treaties. He hoped to familiarize himself with New England's commercial and fishing requirements. Impelled by national feeling, he had explained to his old friend Edmund Pendleton, "It is very essential for us to obtain information of facts, of opinions, & of wishes from our own country." Unlike on earlier occasions, he meant the whole Union rather than the "country" (state) of Virginia.

11. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire*, 124.

12. *Ibid.*, 123. Onuf overlooks Jefferson's admiration for New England's democratic town meeting system.

13. *Ibid.*, 124–25. For Jefferson's depiction of the "deadly hatred" that the monarchical faction of New England Federalists felt for the "republican" citizens, see Jefferson to James Martin, 20 September 1813, in *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert E. Bergh (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 13:382–84, and Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress (online in "American Memory" series). Onuf bases his extreme claims on this letter.

14. See especially Onuf, "Federal Union," in *Jefferson's Empire*, chap. 4 of *Jefferson's Empire*, 109–46.

On 25 May 1784, he again wrote Pendleton of his concern for all regions. “I mean to go thro’ the Eastern States in hopes of deriving some knowledge [*sic*] of them from actual inspection and inquiry which may enable me to discharge my duty to them somewhat the better.”<sup>15</sup>

At this time, Jefferson evinced no bias against New England. Summarizing Northern and Southern traits for Revolutionary War veteran Marquis de Chastellux in 1785, Jefferson objected to the negative comments about Virginians in Chastellux’s memoir, *Travels in North America*. Jefferson insisted that Virginians were not avaricious as Chastellux had charged. On the contrary, “that warmth of their climate which unnerves and unmans both body and mind” caused Virginians to be “careless” in business transactions, overly “generous” and “disinterested.” Imputing selfishness to Northern (not only New England) merchants, he contrasted sectional traits: “In the North they are: cool, sober, laborious, persevering, independant, jealous of their own liberties, but just to those of others, [self] interested, chicaning, superstitious and hypocritical in their religion.” By contrast, lustful southerners ostensibly rejected the Protestant Ethic: “In the South they are: fiery, voluptuary, indolent, unsteady, independant [*sic*], zealous for their own liberties, but trampling on those of others, generous, candid, without attachment or pretentions [*sic*] to any religion but that of the heart.”<sup>16</sup>

Jefferson had long admired aspects of New England’s political culture. Although he never mentioned and probably disliked Massachusetts’ undemocratic constitution of 1780, with its high property qualifications for voters and officeholders and its state-established Congregational Church, in 1788 he praised its method of ratifying the U.S. Constitution. Residing in Paris as U.S. minister during the extensive debate, Jefferson had originally favored a second national convention to consider amendments proposed by the state ratifying conventions, especially the addition of a bill of rights, before the new government went into operation. But he enthusiastically converted to the Massachusetts convention’s suggestion that Congress discuss amendments after nine states had ratified and implemented the new Constitution, concluding that “the plan of Massachusetts

15. Thomas Jefferson to Edmund Pendleton, 16 December 1783 and 25 May 1784, quoted in Edward Dumbauld, *Thomas Jefferson: American Tourist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946), 57–58. Jefferson made a poignant allusion to Virginia as a “country” in Query VI of *Notes on Virginia*. Discussing the colony’s Native American tribes, he admitted, “An inhuman practice once prevailed in this country of making slaves of the Indians.” *Notes*, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 186–87.

16. Jefferson to Chastellux, 2 September 1785, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 826–27 (spelling in original). See also Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 157–58.



is far preferable, and will I hope be followed by those [states] who are yet to decide.”<sup>17</sup> He reiterated in July 1788, “The glorious example of Massachusetts, of accepting unconditionally, and pressing for future amendment, will I hope reconcile all parties.” He maintained that “The argument is unanswerable that it will be easier to obtain amendments from nine states under the new constitution, than from thirteen after rejecting it.”<sup>18</sup>

One notoriously recalcitrant New England state, Rhode Island, refused to call a ratifying convention. Several nationalists were determined to force Rhode Island to join the new union by imposing discriminatory tariffs. However, Jefferson preferred reason and persuasion to coercion. Despite his enthusiasm for the Constitution, he would not use force or economic sanctions on Rhode Island, insisting, “As long as there is hope, we should give her time. I cannot conceive but that she will come to rights in the long run. Force, in whatever form, would be a dangerous precedent.”<sup>19</sup>

A few years later, Jefferson showed an affinity for New England, taking a brief, relaxing vacation trip (or “botanizing expedition”), with his friend, Virginia nationalist James Madison. From 20 May to 16 June 1791, they toured the wooded countryside, lakes, and mountains of western Massachusetts (Berkshire and Hampshire counties, site of Shays’ Rebellion), Vermont, Connecticut, and New York. Although his Federalist foes charged that the trip had political motives, no solid evidence exists that the junket facilitated creation of a “Republican interest” against Alexander Hamilton in New York.<sup>20</sup> However, New York City Federalist merchant Nathaniel Hazard reported to Hamilton rumors that Jefferson and Madison had launched demagogic appeals in “Shayite” country, for which they “are supremely contemned by the Gentlemen of Connecticut, which State I found on a Review right as to national Matters.”<sup>21</sup>

17. Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 27 May 1788, in *Jefferson Papers*, 13:208.

18. Jefferson to John Brown Cutting, 8 July 1788, *Jefferson Papers*, 13:315.

19. Jefferson to Carrington, 27 May 1788, *Jefferson Papers*, 13:209.

20. For accounts of Jefferson’s and Madison’s trip through New York and New England in the spring of 1791, during which Jefferson gained relief from a tormenting migraine headache, see Dumbauld, *American Tourist*, 7, 8, 19, 172–73; Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic-Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 194–201; Adrienne Koch, *Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 114–16; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Rights of Man* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), 359–63; and Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 240–42.

21. Nathaniel Hazard to Hamilton, 25 November 1791, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett, 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961–87), 9:534.



Jefferson respected New Englanders' devotion to majority rule, which they implemented directly through their unique town meetings. He was disappointed by the New England states' support for the Hamiltonian Federalists at the outset of party conflict in the 1790s, but thought that, if accurately informed, the voters would repudiate them. Convinced that a few self-interested leaders were misleading Massachusetts' voters, he hoped that Philip Freneau's newspaper, the Philadelphia *National Gazette*, begun in October 1791 to compete with John Fenno's Federalist *Gazette of the United States*, would convert the people to Jeffersonianism and defeat congressman Fisher Ames' reelection bid. "Freneau's paper is getting into Massachusetts under the patronage of [John] Hancock and Sam Adams," he wrote to his son-in-law, "and Mr. [Fisher] Ames, the colossus of the monocrats and paper men, will either be left out or hard run. The people of that state are republicans; but hitherto they have heard nothing but The [sic] hymns and lauds chaunted by Fenno."<sup>22</sup> Later, insisting that Massachusetts' citizens were "republican," Jefferson observed that, despite Ames' reelection, its voters had also elected a Democratic-Republican to Congress, one who echoed the views of "the mass of the state, and who will fulfil [sic] the only object needed, that of carrying back to the faithful accounts of what is doing here [i.e., at the nation's capital, Philadelphia]." He optimistically concluded, "This they have never had, and it is all they need."<sup>23</sup>

Although Jefferson praised New England's democratic procedures during the 1790s, he overlooked its restrictive suffrage, which may have hindered Republican success in the region. In an era when most Anglo-American politicians somewhat hypocritically argued that party organizations formed to win elections were an illegitimate, "factionous," and demagogic type of political activity, Jefferson blamed Federalists' "immoral" enforcement of party unity for his defeat by three electoral votes (sixty-eight to seventy-one) for the presidency in 1796. He denounced the actions of the Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Connecticut town meetings, whose electors had voted unanimously for John Adams. "The event of the election has never been a matter of doubt in my mind," he wrote Madison. "I knew that the Eastern states were disciplined in the school of their town meetings to sacrifice

22. Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., 16 November 1792, in *Jefferson Papers*, 24:623. Gary J. Kornblith, "Artisan Federalism: New England Mechanics and the Political Economy of the 1790s," in *Launching the Extended Republic*, eds. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 249–72.
23. Jefferson to Randolph, 3 March 1793, *Jefferson Papers*, 25:314. Jefferson was probably referring to Henry Dearborn, who was elected to the Third Congress from the Maine district of Massachusetts. He served from 1793 to 1797, and was secretary of war during Jefferson's presidency.

differences of opinion to the great object of operating in phalanx, and that the more free and moral agency practised in the other states” would result in his losing some of their electors because his party lacked cohesion. Jefferson concluded that political discipline was facilitated by the Federalist-dominated town meetings’ direct democracy.<sup>24</sup> Despite his disappointment that the town meetings had ostensibly rejected nonpartisan “classical republican” ideology by denying him support, he assured Madison that “the vote comes much nearer an equality than I had expected.”<sup>25</sup>

Jefferson was acutely aware of New Englanders’ contributions to achieving American independence, their “unquestionable” republicanism, and democratic politics. Thus, he lamented that their support of Federalist belligerence toward revolutionary France repudiated republican ideals. “If a prospect could be once opened upon us of the penetration of truth into the Eastern states, if the people there, who are unquestionably republican, could discover that they have been duped into the support of measures calculated to sap the very foundations of republicanism we might still hope for salvation, and that it would come, as of old, from the East,” he wrote New York Republican politician Aaron Burr. “But will that region ever awake to the true state of things? Can the middle, Southern and Western states hold on till they awake?”<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, Jefferson stood ready to forgive New England’s ostensible deviation from the republican credo during the Quasi-War with France in 1798. He rejected the suggestion of his friend, Virginia planter and states’ rights philosopher John Taylor of Caroline, that Virginia and North Carolina should consider forming an independent federation rather than remain within a “monarchical” Union run by New England Federalists like President Adams. Eventually, Taylor warned, “the southern states must lose their capital and commerce—and that America is destined to war—standing armies—and oppressive taxation, by which the power of the few here, as in other countries, will be matured into an irresistible scourge of human happiness.”<sup>27</sup>

Jefferson’s response acknowledged that the Southern states had reaped few benefits from Federalist fiscal programs and Anglophile foreign policies. But he opposed severing the Union merely to assuage Southern Republicans’ pique at

24. Jefferson to Madison, 1 January 1797, in *Jefferson Papers*, 29:247. Adams had obtained nine votes south of the Delaware, including one from Jefferson’s Virginia.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Jefferson to Aaron Burr, 17 June 1797, in *Jefferson Papers*, 29:439.

27. John Taylor to Thomas Jefferson, n.d., received 13 May 1798, *ibid.*, 30:348.

New England. “It is true that we are compleatly [*sic*] under the saddle of Massachusetts & Connecticut, and that they ride us very hard, cruelly insulting our feelings as well as exhausting our strength and substance,” he admitted. “If to rid ourselves of the present rule of Massachusetts & Connecticut we break the Union, will the evil stop there?” He believed political disputes, inherent in human nature, would not be eliminated if sister states Virginia and North Carolina formed their own nation. Envisaging the unlikely secession of Massachusetts and Connecticut, he argued, “Suppose the N. England States alone cut off, will our natures be changed? Are we not men still to the south of that, & with all the passions of men?” In Jefferson’s view, “an association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or vestry.” “In every free & deliberating society,” he concluded, “there must, from the nature of man, be opposite parties & violent dissensions & discords; and one of these, for the most part, must prevail over the other for a longer or shorter time.” No federal government could exist if every disgruntled party seceded to escape its opponent’s “temporary superiority.” “If we reduce our Union to Virginia & N. Carolina, immediately the conflict will be established between the representatives of these two States, and they will end by breaking into their simple units.” Therefore, he humorously advised, “Seeing that we must have somebody to quarrel with, I had rather keep our New England associates for that purpose than to see our bickerings transferred to others.”<sup>28</sup>

Applying Montesquieu’s environmentalist social theories to regional political character, Jefferson assumed that the pressure of an increasing population on a limited land supply caused New Englanders’ natural argumentativeness. With a hint of ethnic prejudice, he compared their supercilious temperament to that of the Jews, and implied that this was one reason their relative population and political power would decline: “They [New Englanders] are circumscribed within such narrow limits, & their population so full, that their numbers will ever be the minority, and they are marked, like the Jews, with such a peculiarity of character as to constitute from that circumstance the natural division of our parties.” By contrast, the more spacious South and West, where, as he wrote fifteen years later, “every one may have land to labor for himself,” were Republican. Perhaps Jefferson thought that New England farmers, with their small, scrabbly landholdings, were similar in personality to “the Man of the old world, crouded [*sic*]

28. Jefferson to John Taylor, 4 June 1798, in *ibid.*, 30:388–89, and Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1049–50.

within limits either small or overcharged.”<sup>29</sup> Consequently, Jefferson perceived the puritanical New Englanders as natural foils to the freewheeling Virginians, and he regarded what was natural as good.

Ironically, even the acrimonious Taylor viewed Connecticut’s town meeting democracy as epitomizing his ideal of political harmony.<sup>30</sup> Jefferson likewise gained inspiration from New England’s political institutions, especially its town meetings, viewing them as miniature democracies enforcing the majority’s will. During his presidency, he was mortified that the popular town meetings of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont denounced his administration and vigorously resisted his harsh policy of embargo on Great Britain from 1808–1809. The New England states nullified the embargo by overland smuggling through Canada and blatantly circumvented its transatlantic nonshipment provisions. New England’s hardheaded opposition to Jefferson’s policy, even within his own Democratic-Republican Party, played a major role in securing repeal of the measure in March 1809. That opposition also impelled the Madison administration’s vigorous although ultimately unsuccessful efforts to reach agreement with British ministers George Rose and David Erskine on British wartime trade regulations.<sup>31</sup>

Like many other “War Hawks” on the eve of the War of 1812, Jefferson assured President Madison that, despite Northern opposition, Virginia supported war with Great Britain and the seizure of Canada: “Your declaration of war is expected with perfect calmness, and if those in the North mean systematically to

29. Jefferson to Taylor, 4 June 1798, in Boyd et al., eds., *Jefferson Papers*, 30:389, and Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1050; Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813, in *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, ed. Lester J. Cappon, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 2:391. See also Jefferson to François de Marbois, 14 June 1817, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1410: “My hope of its [the republic’s] duration is built much on the enlargement of the resources of life going hand in hand with the enlargement of territory, and the belief that men are disposed to live honestly, if the means of doing so are open to them.”
30. Taylor to Jefferson, 25 June 1798, *Jefferson Papers*, 30:432–34. See also Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 98–99.
31. See Spivak, *Jefferson’s English Crisis*; Leonard W. Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963); Richard Buel, Jr., *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Joshua M. Smith, “Murder on Isle Au Haut: Violence and Jefferson’s Embargo in Coastal Maine, 1807–1809,” *Maine History* 39 (Spring 2000): 17–39, and Brian Schoen, “Calculating the Price of Union: Republican Economic Nationalism and the Origins of Southern Sectionalism, 1790–1828,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (2003): 173–206.

govern the majority it is as good a time for trying them as we can expect.”<sup>32</sup> Rather than advocating a sectional vendetta, Jefferson’s belligerent tone reflected his expectation that Congress’s imminent war vote would expose the unpopularity of New England’s peace policy. He was confident that Madison would win reelection over New York’s Governor De Witt Clinton, a former Republican and the “peace candidate.”

Despite the narrowness of Congress’s vote for war on 18 June 1812, Jefferson remained enthusiastic. Alluding to radical crowds’ tarring and feathering of loyalists during the American Revolution, a conflict he often compared to the present one, Jefferson wryly acknowledged some minor local “federalist” resistance, “but they are poor devils here, not worthy of notice. A bunch of tar to each state South of the Potomac, will keep all in order, and that will be freely contributed without troubling government.”<sup>33</sup>

If timid Virginia Anglophiles deserved this transitory punishment, Jefferson suggested, the more vigorous Northern opposition might require something stronger. In phrases that the editors of the early printed editions of his writings deleted, perhaps for fear of damaging his reputation for moderation, Jefferson wrote Madison, “To the North they will give you more trouble. You may then have to apply the rougher drastics of Governor Wright, hemp [for hanging traitors] and confiscation [of property].”<sup>34</sup> Robert Wright, Republican ex-governor of Maryland and congressman during the War of 1812, had spoken in Congress several weeks earlier. Responding to New York Federalist Harmanus Bleecker’s warnings of internal conflict if war occurred with England, Wright had asserted that if “the signs of treason and civil war discover themselves in any quarter of the American Empire . . . the evil would soon be radically cured, by hemp and confiscation.”<sup>35</sup> As Jefferson usually referred to New Englanders as “easterners,” he apparently had New York in mind in parroting Wright’s rhetoric. At a juncture when tension

32. Jefferson to Madison, 25 May 1812, in *The Republic of Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*, ed. James Morton Smith, 3 vols. (New York: Norton, 1996), 3:1695.

33. Jefferson to Madison, 29 June 1812, in *ibid.*, 3:1698–99.

34. *Ibid.*, 3:1699. Donald R. Hickey’s *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 345, n. 27, mistakenly asserts that the editors of Jefferson’s writings omitted the entire letter, when in fact they even more misleadingly omitted *only* the portion where Jefferson advocated violent reprisals against antiwar elements. Even Hickey, a historian unsympathetic to Jefferson, comments, “Doubtless Jefferson was speaking half in jest,” *ibid.*, 56.

35. Robert Wright, speech to Congress, 6 May 1812, in *Annals of Congress*, 12th Cong., 1st sess., 1413.

and divisiveness plagued the nation, nationalistic Southern Republicans, intent on preserving the republic's independence from obstructive, potentially secessionist elements, conveyed bellicose messages.<sup>36</sup>

Perceiving the war as a struggle for “political principle,” involving issues transcending even America's unimpeded access to world trade, Jefferson emphatically distinguished between New England's odious Federalist patrician leaders and the party's patriotic majority. In January 1813, Jefferson predicted the outcome would decide whether the United States remained a republic or submitted to renewed colonial status under Britain. He pessimistically assumed that many “Eastern” Federalist leaders, headed by Pickering's Massachusetts “Essex Junto,” favored the United States' eventual return to monarchy. Jefferson feared that a “weighty minority” were prepared for immediate secession, “with a view to a commencement of their favorite government, from whence the other States may gangrene by degrees, and the whole [Union] be thus brought finally to the desired point.” He labeled this “eastern fragment . . . the hot-bed of American monarchism,” deriding their expectation that other states would join their projected monarchical federation. Indeed, Jefferson insisted, even Massachusetts, “the prime mover” in secessionist talk, was economically “dependent on the other states,” which would retaliate against its trade if it seceded.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Jefferson was convinced that the majority even of the Federalist leaders, whom, in an allusion to his great, dead rival, he labeled “Hamiltonians,” vehemently opposed secession. He explained, “Anglomany [i.e., support for England against France], monarchy, and separation, then, are the principles of the Essex federalists, Anglomany and monarchy, those of the Hamiltonians, and Anglomany alone, that of the portion among the *people* who call themselves federalists.” The “people” were otherwise devoted to a popular, republican union.<sup>38</sup>

Jefferson believed that most of the New England Federalist rank and file rejected monarchy. Although they preferred English styles to French and hoped for Britain's victory over Napoleon, they were “as good republicans as the

36. Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Buel, *America on the Brink*; and Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

37. Jefferson to John Melish, 13 January 1813, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1268–69. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 71–125, emphasizes the United States' insecure position in the world conflict between Great Britain and France.

38. Jefferson to John Melish, 13 January 1813, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1269.

brethren [Democratic-Republicans] whom they oppose.” Jefferson was confident that, if the extremist Federalist minority “should avowedly propose a separation of the Union, or the establishment of regal government, their popular adherents would quit them to a man, and join the republican standard; and the partisans of this change, even in Massachusetts, would thus find themselves an army of officers without a soldier.”<sup>39</sup> Jefferson concluded that, like his own Democratic-Republican Party, most Federalists were loyal to a republican union.

In September 1813, Jefferson wrote a letter to English immigrant and New York Democratic-Republican activist James Martin, which Onuf cites to prove Jefferson’s desire to obliterate New England. Over a year before the Hartford Convention, New England’s state governments had disloyally refused to serve under federal military authorities, participate in the invasion of Canada, pay their quotas of national taxes, or contribute according to their ability to national loans and treasury notes.<sup>40</sup>

Especially aware of Massachusetts’ irascibility, Jefferson theoretically favored allowing the state’s peaceful departure from the Union if its people so desired, but he believed they did not. He estimated that half of Massachusetts’ citizens were “republicans” and most of the remainder appreciated their state’s dependence on the Union. Therefore, he anticipated that Massachusetts would remain in the republic, if only for fear of losing markets for its manufactures in the South and Middle States and the conveyance of their exports abroad. If Massachusetts declared independence, he predicted that England, eager to destroy a competitor, would attempt to negotiate an anti-Massachusetts commercial treaty with a cooperative, although diminished, Union.<sup>41</sup>

Jefferson’s observations, despite a residual anxiety, exhibited a fundamental optimism. He predicted that Massachusetts, cognizant “that in case of war with the Union, which occurrences between coterminous nations frequently produce, it would be a contest of one against fifteen,” would ultimately reject secession.<sup>42</sup>

39. *Ibid.*

40. Hickey, *War of 1812*, 257–65; Scott A. Silverstone, *Divided Union: The Politics of War in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 103–04. For Jefferson’s relationship with Martin in the 1790s, see James Martin to Jefferson, 20 July 1796, in *Jefferson Papers*, 29:156–57, and Jefferson to James Martin, 23 February 1798, in *Jefferson Papers*, 30:131.

41. Jefferson to James Martin, 20 September 1813, in Albert Ellery Bergh, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 20 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1907), 13:383.

42. *Ibid.*



Although in writing to Martin he calculated that the monarchical Massachusetts Federalists who “bear deadly hatred to their republican fellow-citizens” and would prefer English “despotism” to republican government might amount to one-fourth of the voters, Jefferson doubted that they could manipulate the republican majority in favor of secession and civil war. Even should the “monarchical” minority somehow induce the state to secede, Jefferson professed little alarm, observing, “I see, in their separation, no evil but the example” they would serve to other states in espousing secession’s legality. At the same time, he thought that rational discussion of the pros and cons of secession, even during wartime, would be salutary. If Massachusetts *did* finally secede, Jefferson warned, “Their refractory course . . . will not be unpunished by the indignation of their co-States, their loss of influence with them, the censure of history, and the stain on the character of their State.” Indeed, Jefferson envisioned a mass exodus from an independent Massachusetts to the more fertile (and Republican) soils of the other states.<sup>43</sup>

Although pondering the possibility of war, Jefferson did not engage in saber rattling. His merely hypothetical observations echoed Hamilton’s twenty-five years before.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, Jefferson, rather than Hamilton, his great centralizing rival, ultimately proved the better nationalist, because of his greater confidence in his fellow citizens’ patriotic republican zeal.

Understandably, Jefferson remained bitter toward the “Eastern” states during the War of 1812. He undeniably resented what he considered New England’s treason against the United States, and felt particularly betrayed by Massachusetts. Its stalwart Republican minority had vigorously opposed the state’s Federalists, and, employing the famous Gerrymander (soon repealed by the Federalists), had elected Elbridge Gerry governor along with several Jeffersonian congressmen. Once the unpopular war began, the Republicans were defeated, and Massachusetts neglected the common cause. For the first two years, complying with a covert bargain, the British exempted the New England states from blockade in exchange for their trading with British troops and ships, violating the Embargo Act, and refusing to assist the United States Army.<sup>45</sup>

Such blatant disloyalty aroused Jefferson’s alarm and contempt. In December 1813, voicing his anger to David Bailie Warden, American consul at Paris, he

43. *Ibid.*, 13:383–4.

44. [Alexander Hamilton], *Federalist No. VI*, in *The Federalist; or, the New Constitution*, ed. William Ranulf Brock (London: J. M. Dent, 1961), 20.

45. Donald R. Hickey, “New England’s Defense Problem and the Genesis of the Hartford Convention,” *New England Quarterly* 50 (December 1977): 587–604; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 257–65.

insisted that Massachusetts-born General William Hull, although a Republican, deserved death by court-martial for deserting the fort at Detroit and disobeying presidential orders to invade Canada. Jefferson was even more enraged that the “Eastern states” refused, despite their proximity, to contribute resources to the Canadian campaign, leaving the “Middle & Southern states, most remote from the scene of action,” to bear the burden. He was especially bitter that Massachusetts’ Federalist government had cajoled the British with promises of eventual secession in order to win exemption from the blockade. He maligned Massachusetts’ government, while retaining his respect and confidence in its citizens’ bedrock republican integrity. He concluded, “The game playing by a few base & cunning leaders in Massachusetts, however degrading to the state, is a compleat [*sic*] dupery of the English.” “If the question of separation, with which they are tantalising the English were ever to be proposed to the people of that state not one tenth even of the federalists would countenance it. Yet by decieving [*sic*] the enemy on this head they keep themselves unblockaded and their trade little disturbed.”<sup>46</sup>

In this case, as in others, Jefferson showed no animosity toward the people of Massachusetts. He resented the greater concern of the state’s legislature and governor with the region’s economic interests than with its political freedom and autonomy. Perhaps he feared that they confused the two and tarnished their “republican virtue.” Far from eagerly advocating a preventive war against a “monarchical” Massachusetts, Jefferson expected the state to remain in the Union. Nevertheless, he would not interfere if Massachusetts chose a peaceful departure, although he believed the rest of the Union would be justified in retaliating with economic and diplomatic sanctions. Of course, should Massachusetts attack the United States as Great Britain’s ally, Jefferson expected Americans to defend themselves.

The latter scenario was the topic of Jefferson’s letter of 28 November 1814 to his old friend William Short, while the New England states were preparing for their momentous convention at Hartford. On 18 October 1814, the Massachusetts legislature (also called the General Court) had proposed that a convention of New England states, to which it chose a set of delegates, meet at Hartford, Connecticut, to consider “a radical reform in the national compact.” On 12 November, the General Court’s resolutions and report were reprinted in Hezekiah Niles’ popular *Niles’ Weekly Register* [Baltimore], and appeared elsewhere.

46. Jefferson to David Bailie Warden, 29 December 1813, in “Some Jefferson Letters,” ed. Sigmund Diamond, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 28 (September 1941): 232. Spelling in the original.

Jefferson, who subscribed to *Niles*, had probably seen them by the time he wrote Short.<sup>47</sup>

Contemplating the dire military situation, with British troops occupying Castine, Maine, and parts of Michigan and upstate New York, Jefferson considered the possibility that Massachusetts might secede and attack the Union. Hardly awestruck by the state's military power, he balked at a preemptive attack on the Anglophile haven. "If they [Massachusetts] become neutral," he bluntly asserted, "we are sufficient for one enemy without them, and in fact we get no aid from them now." Thus, the United States would be no worse off militarily even if Massachusetts formally left the Union and assumed a posture of "neutrality." If the state's "administration" attempted to join the English, Jefferson expected that the majority of citizens' revulsion would precipitate intrastate war, and "their force will be annihilated by equality of division among themselves. Their federalists will then call in the English army, the republicans ours, and it will only be a transfer of the scene of war from Canada to Massachusetts." As he had written Martin earlier, he expected Great Britain to offer the United States peace in exchange for abandoning Massachusetts' right to the fisheries and all demands for freedom of the seas, which, according to Jefferson, his party had undertaken largely to protect New England shipping. "Every one, too, must know that we can at any moment make peace with England at the expense of the navigation and fisheries of Massachusetts," he asserted. He viewed the war as a crusade to safeguard New England's maritime prerogatives.<sup>48</sup>

Encouraged by Vermont's and New Hampshire's refusal to appoint delegates to Hartford, Jefferson derided the possibility of civil war between the United States and Massachusetts. "It will not come to this," he wrote Short. "Their [Massachusetts'] own people will put down these factionists as soon as they see the real object of their opposition [i.e., secession]; and of this Vermont, New Hampshire, and even Connecticut itself, furnish proofs."<sup>49</sup> Jefferson's prediction proved accurate.

47. "Massachusetts Legislature." *Niles' Weekly Register*, 12 November 1814, 148–55. For Jefferson's subscription to *Niles*, see "Catalogue of Jefferson's Second Library, Offered for Sale at Public Auction, 27 February 1829," Series 7, Miscellaneous Bound Volumes, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Warfare, and Diplomacy in the Early American Republic, 1783–1830* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 471–72.

48. Jefferson to William Short, 28 November 1814, in Bergh, ed., *Writings*, 14:218.

49. *Ibid.*; Robert A. Rutland, *The Presidency of James Madison* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1990), 176.

Distrusting British motives, Jefferson suspected the British of dragging out the Ghent talks in hopes that the Hartford Convention would approve an Anglo-Massachusetts alliance. In his analysis, British demands for a Native American Midwestern buffer state “designedly put [negotiations] into an impossible form to give time for the development of their plots and concerts with the factionists of Boston, and . . . they are holding off to see the issue, not of the Congress of Vienna, but that of Hartford.”<sup>50</sup> Although expecting Massachusetts to remain peacefully in the republican “orbit” and reject British attempts to disrupt the “federal system,” Jefferson condoned economic discrimination if necessary to cajole its return to the Union. “That [matter], of reducing, by impulse instead of attraction, a sister planet into its orbit, will be as new in our political as in the planetary system,” he metaphorically explained. “The operation, however, will be painful rather than difficult.” While predicting that the republican portion of the state would thwart its “monarchical” minority, whatever the outcome Jefferson expected his party to resist secession. In his murky phraseology, “The sound part of our wandering star [Massachusetts] will probably, by its own internal energies, keep the unsound [the monarchical Federalists] within its course, or if a foreign power is called in, we shall have to meet it but so much the nearer, and with a more overwhelming force.” Indeed, he predicted that a defensive struggle against invasion by an alliance between a seceded Massachusetts and Great Britain would unite the nation, and “probably shorten the war.”<sup>51</sup>

Strongly exhibiting his nationalistic affections and sympathy for Massachusetts at the nadir of American fortunes, Jefferson hoped U.S. peace negotiators would uphold the state’s claim to the fisheries. In a seldom-cited letter to Adams from their much-quoted correspondence, Jefferson expressed alarm at rumors that Great Britain sought to deny Massachusetts’ rights to fish in Labrador and southern Newfoundland. He favored the Union assisting Massachusetts in the fight to retain the fisheries, even though Massachusetts had disdained assisting the other states. Jefferson queried Adams, “What will Massachusetts [*sic*] say to this? I mean her majority, which must be considered as speaking, thro’ the organs it has appointed itself, as the Index of it’s [*sic*] will. She chose to sacrifice the liberty of our seafaring citizens, in which we were all interested, and with them her obligations to the co-states, rather than war with England. Will she now sacrifice the fisheries to the same partialities?” Hoping the Union would exhibit its “affection”

50. Jefferson to John Melish, 10 December 1814, in Bergh, ed., *Writings*, 14:220–21.

51. *Ibid.*

for Massachusetts by defending its right to the fisheries, he expected its cooperation. In an imaginary conversation with the “refractory sister” state, Jefferson wrote:

I know what, as a citizen of the Union, I would say to her. ‘Take this question ad referendum. It concerns you alone. If you would rather give up the fisheries than war with England, we give them up. If you had rather fight for them, we will defend your interests to the last drop of our blood, chusing [*sic*] rather to set a good example than follow a bad one.’ And I hope she will determine to fight for them.<sup>52</sup>

In this instance as in others, Jefferson recommended benevolent treatment of Massachusetts despite its refusal to cooperate during the war. Like Jefferson, Adams supported the war and deplored his state’s conduct. Both men were relieved when the Hartford Convention disbanded on 4 January 1815, after merely proposing a long list of constitutional amendments to safeguard the commercial states from national embargoes and immigrant politicians and to limit the political power of the South and West.<sup>53</sup>

Jefferson’s letters during this period show no desire to suppress Massachusetts’s resistance by violence, much less “exterminate” New England. Rather, Jefferson favored a policy of watchful waiting, reasonable accommodation, and a defensive posture against invasion by a hypothetical alliance between Britain and New England. He never suggested a preemptive U.S. military expedition to “destroy” Virginia’s fellow states.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the reputedly more rational President Madison was more fearful than Jefferson that New Englanders, “deluded” by their “leaders and priests,” would undertake “revolts & separation” with British assistance. Luckily, the Hartford Convention’s peaceful adjournment, Jackson’s victory at the Battle of New Orleans, and the Treaty of Ghent resolved Madison’s crisis.<sup>55</sup>

52. Jefferson to John Adams, 5 July 1814, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:432.

53. On Adams’s support for the War of 1812, see Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 107–12; and David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 606, 616–17.

54. This contradicts Onuf’s assessment of these letters. See Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire*, 123, where he examines the following letters: Jefferson to James Martin, 20 September 1813; Jefferson to William Short, 28 November 1814; and Jefferson to John Melish, 10 December 1814, all in *Writings of Jefferson*, 13:382–84; 14:217–18, 220–21.

55. Madison to Wilson Cary Nicholas, 26 November 1814, in *Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt, 9 vols. (New York: Putnam, 1900–10), 8:319; Ralph Ketcham, “James Madison and the Nature of Man,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19 (January 1958): 65. For

Symptomatic of Jefferson's hope for sectional reconciliation following the war were his renewed correspondence with John Adams and his amiability toward George Ticknor and Francis C. Gray, two New England scholars for whom Adams had written letters of introduction to Monticello. After they spent three days there in early February 1815, Jefferson observed, "They are fine young men, indeed, and if Massachusetts can raise a few more such, it is probable she would be better counseled as to social rights and social duties." Jefferson commissioned Ticknor, "the best bibliograph I have met with," to buy him rare editions of the classics during his tour of Europe. Although Jefferson opposed southern youth attending Northern institutions, which promulgated antislavery and anti-Southern opinions, he eagerly requested Dartmouth-educated Ticknor to teach at the University of Virginia, but Ticknor's prior commitment to Harvard intervened.<sup>56</sup>

Sharing in the magnanimous nationalism following Jackson's victory, Jefferson sought to exculpate New Englanders from accusations of disloyalty. He now argued that the Hartford Convention, although initiated by Massachusetts, was the brainchild of British spies who had bribed its legislature. In February 1815, writing to his friend the Marquis de Lafayette, he boasted that the defeat of convention secessionists had thwarted the British ministry, which would be "force[d]" to make peace with the United States. Jefferson surmised that the Hartford Convention's uneventful ending shattered British expectations of victory. "They have hoped more in their Hartford convention" than in the collapse of the U.S. government's finances, he asserted. Recalling the 1790s, Jefferson compared Massachusetts legislators with Robespierre, whom he thought the British had bribed to undertake mass executions and suppress freedom of speech during the Reign of Terror: "The Marats, the Dantons and Robespierres of Massachusetts are in the same pay, and under the same orders, and making the

the convention's termination, see [Washington] *Daily National Intelligencer*, 11 January 1815, cited in C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers of the War of 1812* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 208n.

56. Jefferson to John Adams, 10 June 1815, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:443; Orie W. Long, *Thomas Jefferson and George Ticknor: A Chapter in American Schoolship* (Williamstown, Mass.: McClelland Press, 1933), 11–34. By 1820, during the crisis over Missouri's admission to the Union as a slave state, Jefferson had become fearful that Southern youth who attended northern universities like Harvard would learn hostility to southern institutions. He recommended that they attend the University of Kentucky instead, "because she has more of the flavor of the old cask [Virginia] than any other." Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 22 January 1820, in *Works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul L. Ford, 12 vols. (New York: Putnam, 1904–1905), 12:155.

same efforts to anarchise us, that their prototypes did there.”<sup>57</sup> Although he confessed that not “all who met at Hartford were under the same motives of money,” he imputed selfish partisan ambitions to the rest. The Federalist “Outs” sought to expel the Republican “Inns [*sic*]; some the mere dupes of the agitators, or of their own party passions.”<sup>58</sup>

At the war’s conclusion, as at its beginning, Jefferson sympathized with the citizens of Massachusetts, believing that the majority remained loyal to the Union. He insisted that property-owning, democratically-inclined New England farmers would never submit to reunite with the mother country. British secret agents’ efforts to foster secessionist sentiment had floundered because “the yeomanry of the United States are not the *canaille* of Paris.”<sup>59</sup> Most New Englanders were devoted to the republic; only “gambling merchants and silk-stocking clerks” would join a British plot “to separate from the Union.” As he saw it, “The cement of the Union is in the heart-blood of every American.” In words reminiscent of his first inaugural address, Jefferson said, “I do not believe there is on earth a government established on so immovable a basis.”<sup>60</sup>

Jefferson included Massachusetts within the patriotic community. Envisaging a nationalist upsurge there, he wrote, “Let them [British sympathizers], in any State, even in Massachusetts itself, raise the standard of separation, and its citizens will rise in mass, and do justice themselves on their own incendiaries.” He was gratified that Madison had treated the Hartford Convention with “silent contempt,” not deigning to dispatch troops to oversee it. “If they could have induced the [United States] government to some effort of suppression, or even to enter into discussion with them,” he wisely remarked, “it would have given them some importance, have brought them into some notice.” Relieved at the convention’s collapse, Jefferson concluded, “They have not been able to make themselves even a subject of conversation, either of public or private societies.”<sup>61</sup> Several weeks after the Convention adjourned, Jefferson voiced no regrets at the Army’s missed opportunity to disrupt the meeting or arrest the delegates. Such action would have

57. Jefferson to Lafayette, 14 February 1815, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1364. On nationalist sentiment after the War of 1812, see Watts, *Republic Reborn*, chap. 6, and Andrew Burstein, *Sentimental Democracy: The Evolution of America’s Romantic Self-Image* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999), 240–42.

58. Jefferson to Lafayette, 14 February 1816, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1364.

59. *Ibid.* Apparently, he meant by this that the city workers of Paris had initially supported Robespierre when he promised to advance their economic reform program.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, 1364–5.



violated the democratic ideals for which he stood and which the New England states had implemented through the convention itself. By contrast, even two years later General of the Army Andrew Jackson denounced the Hartford Convention Federalists as “traitors to the constituted Government” who deserved hanging, as he wrote President-elect James Monroe, who called them “monarchists.”<sup>62</sup>

For some time Jefferson himself was bitter at New England’s wartime inertia and the Hartford Convention’s threat of “civil schism.” He sardonically rejoiced that the nation had repelled the British onslaught, “when, with four eastern States tied to us, as dead to living bodies, all doubt was removed as to the achievements of the war, had it continued.” Yet he never abandoned the perspective he had adopted from the outset of partisan competition in the early 1790s, insisting that most New England “federalists” were patriots who rejected the party’s “mere Anglomen.” By 1817, he acclaimed the “complete suppression of party” as the conflict’s “best effect.” He was exhilarated that contrite Federalists, “received with cordiality into the republican ranks,” were electing Jeffersonian candidates. “Even Connecticut, as a State, and the last one expected to yield its steady habits (which were essentially bigoted in politics as well as religion), has chosen a republican governor, and republican legislature.” He hoped that postwar Federalist victories in Massachusetts were only temporary: “Massachusetts indeed still lags; because most deeply involved in the parricide crimes and treasons of the war. But her gangrene is contracting, the sound flesh advancing on it, and all there will be well.”<sup>63</sup> Jefferson praised Connecticut’s democratic advances, including its abolition of the Congregational Church’s special privileges in 1817–1818 disestablishing “popedom.” At the same time, he ingratiatingly saluted “our ancient sister state of Massachusetts, once venerated and beloved, and still hanging on our hopes, for what need we despair of after the resurrection of Connecticut to light and liberality.”<sup>64</sup>

As Jefferson aged, he sought to strengthen Virginia’s Democratic-Republican organization by adopting the modes of the New England town meetings. He wished to copy their procedures by devising new “wards” or “hundreds” in

62. Andrew Jackson to James Monroe, 6 January 1817, in *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, eds. Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and Georg H. Hoemann; 6 vols. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980–), 4:81. Monroe to Jackson, 14 December 1816, in *Writings of James Monroe*, ed. Stanislaus M. Hamilton, 7 vols. (New York: Putnam, 1898–1903), 5:344–46. See also David Brown, “Jeffersonian Ideology and the Second Party System,” *The Historian: A Journal of History* 62 (Fall 1999): 18.

63. Jefferson to Lafayette, 14 May 1817, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1407–8.

64. Jefferson to Adams, 5 May 1817, Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:517. Massachusetts disestablished the Congregational Church in 1833.

Virginia.<sup>65</sup> This accorded with his belief, expressed as early as his 1779 bill for universal public education and in *Notes on Virginia* in 1781, that local, democratic self-government most effectively inspired the people and increased their attention to public affairs. His approval emanated as well from his perverse admiration for their successful negation, paradoxically enabled by his Kentucky Resolutions' "nullificationist" doctrines, of his administration's most important measure, the Embargo. Consequently, he concluded that town meetings were the ideal form of government, worthy of emulation by his state and throughout the nation. Linking his intention to duplicate the New England town meetings' direct democracy and his quest for a system of public education in Virginia, he relied on both projects to extend popular government. As he explained to Virginia's Governor John Tyler, a leading Tidewater Democratic-Republican, and father of the tenth president:

I have indeed two great measures at heart, without which no republic can maintain itself in strength. 1. That of general education, to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom. 2. To divide every county into hundreds, of such size that all the children of each will be within the reach of a central school in it.<sup>66</sup>

He intended the hundreds to be fundamental seats of local government and town meetings as well as schools. "Every hundred, besides a school, should have a justice of the peace, a constable and a captain of militia," he asserted. "These officers, or some others within the hundred, should be a corporation to manage all its concerns, to take care of its roads, its poor, and its police by patrols, &c., (as the select men of the Eastern townships.)."<sup>67</sup> Jefferson framed the region as integral to the Union ("the Eastern townships") rather than as external and alien, seldom using the phrase, "New England."

Radically proposing that Virginia's voters rather than county sheriffs choose jurors, Jefferson hoped that his projected districts or hundreds would eventually

65. Jefferson to John Tyler, 26 May 1810, and Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1226, 1399–1400. In medieval England, and later in Ireland and such North American colonies as Virginia (as early as 1621), Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, counties were divided into vestigial subdivisions called "hundreds." In Great Britain, they had their own courts; some counties were divided into similar divisions called "wards." *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., "hundred," defs. 5a, 5b. See also H. Trevor Colbourn, "Thomas Jefferson's Use of the Past," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 15 (January 1958): 56–70.

66. Jefferson to John Tyler, 26 May 1810, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1226.

67. *Ibid.*

conduct elections for all state offices. Suggesting that local militia units (“captaincies”) temporarily perform the functions of election districts, he envisioned that “these little republics would be the main strength of the great one.” He was dazzled by the success of his democratically organized Eastern political opponents, who had initiated both the Revolution of 1775 and the counterrevolution of 1808. He wrote, “[w]e owe to them [the town meetings] the vigor given to our revolution in its commencement in the Eastern States, and by them the Eastern States were enabled to repeal the embargo in opposition to the Middle, Southern and Western States, and their large and lubberly division into counties which can never be assembled.” Perhaps Jefferson speculated that a modernized public education system combined with a town meeting arrangement might ultimately render Virginia’s Republican political structure as effective as its stubbornly Federalist New England opponents. He likened these miniature democracies to invincible military machines, in which “general orders are given out from a centre to the foreman of every hundred, as to the sergeants of an army, and the whole nation is thrown into energetic action, in the same direction in one instant and as one man, and becomes absolutely irresistible.” If such assertive local democratic institutions took shape in the Democratic-Republican South, Jefferson proclaimed, he would “consider it as the dawn of the salvation of the republic.”<sup>68</sup>

Jefferson expanded on his ideas relating to what he now called “wards,” and their roots in the New England town meeting in a letter in 1813 to his old Massachusetts friend and political rival, John Adams. Recommending that a “natural aristocracy of virtue and talents” hold office, he attested his democratic faith, trusting the voters to “elect the real good and wise. In some instances, wealth may corrupt, and birth blind them; but not in sufficient degree to endanger the society.”<sup>69</sup>

In this letter, Jefferson expounded on the reasons for New England voters’ Federalism. Pondering previous visits to Massachusetts and Connecticut and carefully reading Adams’s description of its political culture in *Defence of the Constitutions of Government* (1787–88), he concluded that Adams’s preference for a separate aristocratic legislative branch arose from a “difference of character” between Virginians and New Englanders. Despite their participatory institutions, the latter showed greater deference, “a traditionary [*sic*] reverence for certain families, which has rendered the offices of the government nearly hereditary in

68. *Ibid.*, 1226–7.

69. Jefferson to John Adams, 28 October 1813, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:388–89.

those families.” Jefferson presumed that these venerated families had initially earned the people’s confidence by possessing “virtue and talents [which they] have honestly exercised . . . for the good of the people.” However, eventually public opinion, unduly influenced by the involvement of the tax-supported Congregational Church establishment in politics, had “canonised” them. Jefferson thought this alliance of clergy and politicians to be a scheme he contemptuously described as, “you tickle me, and I will tickle you.” He thought this explained Massachusetts’ Federalism and low rate of rotation in office. “Altho’ this hereditary succession to office with you may in some degree be founded in real family merit,” he wrote Adams, “yet in a much higher degree it has proceeded from your strict alliance of church and state.”<sup>70</sup>

Jefferson claimed that Virginians had more democratic temperaments than New Englanders, had greater turnover in elections, and were less subservient to their apolitical clergy. The wealthiest planters, he argued, had been “unpopular” since colonial times, when they usually allied with the king against the “people” (House of Burgesses). Indeed, Jefferson’s laws to establish religious freedom and abolish entails and primogeniture in the late 1770s had overthrown Virginia’s “Pseudo-aristocracy.”<sup>71</sup> Thus, for Jefferson, New Englanders’ obsequiousness to old established families, their established church, and their poor soil and small acreages, which limited their enjoyment of America’s agrarian plenty, explained their anti-Republicanism.

Despite his critique, Jefferson extravagantly praised the “perfectly” governed New England towns as his paradigm for extending local democracy in Virginia through the creation of wards. He asserted, “These wards, called townships in New England, are the vital principle of their governments, and have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government, and for its preservation.” Revealing an appreciation for political stability, Jefferson praised Federalist Connecticut for the consistent outcomes of its direct popular elections of local officials, which other states usually appointed. Proposing that Virginia adopt direct popular election of state judges, Jefferson remarked, “In one State of the Union, at least, it has long been tried, and with the most satisfactory success. The judges of Connecticut have been chosen by the people, every six months, for nearly two centuries, and I believe there has hardly ever been an instance of change, so powerful is the curb of incessant responsibility.” In New England towns, Jefferson said, direct involve-

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 2:389–90.

ment with the neighborhood's local government and services gave "to every citizen, personally, a part in the administration of the public affairs." He urged Virginia to adopt this "vital principle" of New England's government.<sup>72</sup>

In other letters Jefferson wrote in 1816, supporting Virginians' demands for a new, more democratic state constitution with reforms like universal manhood suffrage and proportional representation for counties, he expressed the desire that his state adopt New England's township mode of local government and its direct forms of governance and election.<sup>73</sup> Writing to John Taylor, Jefferson defined authentic republicanism as the greatest practicable exercise of governmental power by the voters. "Were I to assign to this term [republic] a precise and definite idea," he explained, "I would say, purely and simply, it means a government by the citizens in mass, acting directly and personally, according to rules established by the majority; and that every other government [i.e., other than direct democracy] is more or less republican, in proportion as it has in its composition, more or less of this ingredient of the direct action of the citizens. Such a government is evidently restrained to very narrow limits of space and population," he noted. "I doubt it would be practicable beyond the extent of a New England township," which to him epitomized the "pure element" of democracy/republicanism. In Jefferson's ideal republic, as in most New England communities, government officials would be elected for short terms or perform specific duties.<sup>74</sup>

Although Jefferson applauded "direct action," he identified this concept with the sober, well-ordered New England town meetings rather than the ancient, turbulent, slave-holding democracies of Athens and Sparta, the dissolute citizenry of republican Rome, or the more recent bloody, revolutionary Paris communes, committees of safety, and mob rule.<sup>75</sup> Because New England voters directly elected

72. Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1400 (first quote), 1399 (second quote).

73. See also Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (1943; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964), 162–65; Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 61–72, 84–88; Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist View* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 81–90; and Jean Yarbrough, "Republicanism Reconsidered: Some Thoughts on the Foundation and Preservation of the American Republic," *Review of Politics* 41 (January 1979): 61–95.

74. Jefferson to John Taylor, 28 May 1816, in Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 10 vols. (New York: Putnam, 1892–1899), 10: 28–29.

75. In old age, Jefferson became disillusioned with the ancient Greek and Roman republics. Decrying their imperialistic policies and ignorant masses, Jefferson preferred New England's town meetings and the U.S. Constitution's "extended" polity. Pointing out that direct democracy was suitable only for a small area, he observed, "So different was the state of

more public officials than other states, and personally decided a greater variety of local issues, their polities most closely approximated his democratic optimum. As he wrote to Taylor about the New England towns, “This I should consider as the nearest approach to a pure republic, which is practicable on a large scale of country or population.”<sup>76</sup>

Even taking into account the objectionable established churches of Connecticut and Massachusetts, Jefferson considered their state governments as models of “the nearest approach to a pure republic . . . which, if not poisoned by priest-craft, would prove its excellence over all mixtures with other elements.” Defining republicanism as direct democracy rather than representative government, Jefferson said: “The further the departure from direct and constant control by the citizens, the less has the government of the ingredient of republicanism; evidently, none where the authorities are hereditary.” Ideally, Jefferson preferred the annual election of all government officials by the people. He regarded the constitutions of Virginia and the United States as less democratic (he used the term “republican”) than desirable, because “the people have less regular control over their agents, than their rights and their interests require.”<sup>77</sup>

Jefferson lamented that New England’s direct political modes, invariably exercised to support Federalist policies, were more effective than those of Virginia’s Republican counties. Jefferson viewed the townships or wards as “elementary republics.” He thought that, together with parallel “higher republics” at the county, state, and national levels, they composed “a gradation of authorities, standing each on the basis of law, holding every one it’s [*sic*] delegated share of powers, and constituting truly a system of fundamental balances and checks for the government.” Envisaging his state’s imitation of the New England town’s direct action, he thought that the erection of wards would infuse Virginia’s jaded republicanism with new, democratizing energy. “Where every man is a sharer in

society then, and with those people, from what it is now and with us, that I think little edification can be obtained from their writings on the subject of government. . . . They knew no median between a democracy (the only pure republic, but impracticable beyond the limits of a town) and an abandonment of themselves to an aristocracy, or a tyranny independent of the people.” Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, 26 August 1816, Lipscomb and Bergh, ed., *Writings of Jefferson*, 15:65–66.

76. Jefferson to John Taylor, 28 May 1816, in Ford, ed., *Writings*, 10:29. Likewise, Jefferson, who favored direct election of juries and judges respectively by townships and counties, complained that, under the state’s 1776 constitution, county jurors were “picked up by the sheriff from the loungings of the court yard, after everything respectable has retired from it.” He concluded that “the spirit of the people,” not the undemocratic constitution, had maintained “our republicanism.” Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 12 July 1816, Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1397.

77. *Ibid.*

the direction of his ward-republic, or of some of the higher ones, and feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs not merely at an election, one day in the year, but every day; when there shall not be a man in the state, who will not be a member of some one of its [*sic*] councils, great or small," Jefferson asserted, "he will let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte."<sup>78</sup>

While praising New Englanders' political means, Jefferson deplored their objectives. He bitterly recalled the "Eastern" town meetings' resistance to his Embargo Act, which had forced him to acquiesce in its repeal by Congress in 1809 after a year's operation:

How powerfully did we feel the energy of their organisations in the case of the Embargo? I felt the foundations of the government shaken under my feet by the New England townships. There was not an individual in their states whose body was not thrown, with all its momentum, into action, and altho' the whole of the other states were known to be in favor of the measure, yet the organization of this little selfish minority enabled it to overrule the Union.<sup>79</sup>

He self-deceivingly avoided considering the possibility that New Englanders' selfish individualism was a concomitant of the direct, liberal democracy (as modern historians term it) of their town meeting politics.<sup>80</sup>

Perhaps exaggerating the support for his Embargo in other states, Jefferson ascribed their failure to counter New England hostility to the comparative feebleness and unruliness of their political organization. "What could the unwieldy counties of the middle, the South and the West do?" he rhetorically asked. "Call a county meeting, and the drunken loungers at and about the courthouses would have collected, the distances being too great for the good people and the industrious generally to attend." Unfortunately, what Jefferson conceived as the lowly

78. Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, 2 February 1816, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

79. Jefferson to Cabell, 2 February 1816, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. Spelling and punctuation as in the original, except that I have capitalized lower-case letters to begin each sentence (a practice Jefferson almost never followed).

80. Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy, 1801–1816* (New York: Harper, 1965), Appendix; Louis P. Masur, "'Age of the First Person Singular': The Vocabulary of the Self in New England, 1780–1850," *Journal of American Studies* 25 (August 1991): 189–211.



social standing of participants in county meetings would have an adverse impact on “the scale of public opinion” even when they supported Jefferson’s policies.<sup>81</sup>

Jefferson hoped Virginia’s legislature would immediately “divide the counties into wards.” After being used “for a single purpose; they will soon shew [*sic*] for what others they are the best instruments,” he assured Albemarle County Senator Joseph C. Cabell. In emulating New England’s local township form, Virginia would find political salvation, “to fortify us against the degeneracy of our government, and the concentration of all it’s [*sic*] powers in the hands of the one, the few, the well-born or but [*sic*] the many.”<sup>82</sup> Jefferson argued that the New England town meeting, or ward, form of government was best not only for Virginia but even for Great Britain, whose long-awaited republican revolution he had fruitlessly predicted for over twenty years.<sup>83</sup> One can hardly disagree with John Ferling’s assertion (albeit in a different context) that “[w]hether or not he realized it, what Jefferson sought was to make Virginia more like Massachusetts.”<sup>84</sup>

In his twilight years, Jefferson was distressed by the progress of the Second Great Awakening. He considered it an irrational, intolerant religious revival. He feared Connecticut clergymen like Lyman Beecher and warned that the Pennsylvanian “Presbyterianism” and Virginian “fanaticism” dominant in the churches would eventually outlaw free thought. He charged that the established churches were comprised of greedy, power-hungry “priests.”<sup>85</sup> Although eschewing involvement in public controversy, Jefferson professed alarm when Horatio Gates Spafford, a New York editor, informed him of New England Congregationalists’ plans to propagandize their religion in Virginia. Observing the union

81. Jefferson to Cabell, 2 February 1816, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Jefferson to Adams, 25 November 1816, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 496. For Jefferson’s enthusiasm for a revolution in England as early as 1794, see Jefferson to Tench Coxe, 1 May 1794, in Boyd et al., ed., *Jefferson Papers*, 28:67; Jefferson to Coxe, 1 June 1795, and Jefferson to William Branch Giles, 27 April 1795, in Boyd et al., eds., *Jefferson Papers*, 28:373–74, 337.

84. John Ferling, *Setting the World Ablaze: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 165.

85. Jefferson to Dr. Thomas Cooper, 2 November 1822, and Jefferson to Rev. Jedidiah Morse, 6 March 1822, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1463–65, 1454–58; Jefferson to Charles Clay, 29 January 1815, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

of Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the Andover Seminary, he called them all “Presbyterians.”<sup>86</sup>

For both theological and political reasons, therefore, Jefferson applauded the growth of Unitarianism.<sup>87</sup> From his Monticello hilltop, Jefferson exulted over Boston’s liberal religious trends. He wrote to his friend Dr. Thomas Cooper, an *émigré* English scientist and religious freethinker, “In Boston, and its neighborhood, Unitarianism has advanced to so great a strength, as now to humble this haughtiest of all religious sects [Congregationalism]; insomuch that they condescend to interchange with them and the other sects, the civilities of preaching freely and frequently in each others’ meeting houses.” Though alarmed by the increasing popularity of “Presbyterian” revivalism in Virginia towns surrounding Charlottesville, the seat of his university, Jefferson was confident that “the diffusion of instruction, to which there is now so growing an attention, will be the remote remedy to this fever of fanaticism; while the more proximate one will be the progress of Unitarianism. That this will, ere long, be the religion of the majority from North to South, I have no doubt.”<sup>88</sup>

Along with his political ideal, the town meeting form of government, Jefferson thus found in Boston a model of theological perfection: Unitarianism. The incipient egalitarianism of its American representative, William Ellery Channing, perhaps also impressed him. Although a member of the Federalist elite and in many respects a social conservative, Channing lauded every man’s capacity for self-improvement, or “self-cultivation,” perceiving “greatness to be most common among the multitude, whose names are never heard.”<sup>89</sup> Jefferson preferred Unitarianism’s mild rationalism to the new evangelicalism’s histrionic orthodoxy. He was therefore silent when Adams wrote him, “I wish You could live a Year in Boston, hear their Divines, read their publications, especially the *Repository*. You

86. Jefferson to Horatio Gates Spafford, 10 January 1816, in Ford, ed., *Works*, 10:15. Jefferson included a diatribe against Beecher and other evangelizing New Englanders, which he struck out of this letter to Spafford, as a passage in a letter to Thomas Ritchie, 21 January 1816, printed by Ritchie anonymously in his newspaper, the *Richmond Enquirer*, 27 January 1816. Dumas Malone, *Sage of Monticello*, vol. 6, *Jefferson and His Time* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981), 249n.

87. For Jefferson’s adherence to Dr. Joseph Priestley’s Unitarian creed, see Jefferson to John Adams, 22 August 1813, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:367–69, and Jefferson to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, 26 June 1822, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1458–59; Koch, *Philosophy of Jefferson*, 26–27, 136–37.

88. Jefferson to Thomas Cooper, 2 November 1822, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1464.

89. William Ellery Channing, “Self-Culture” (1838), quoted in Masur, “‘Age of the First Person Singular,’” 204.

would see how spiritual Tyranny and ecclesiastical Domination are beginning in our Country: at least struggling for birth.”<sup>90</sup>

Massachusetts therefore assumed special significance in Jefferson’s final years. He was exhilarated when Adams, whose views had grown closer to his own late in life, was elected Quincy’s delegate to the constitutional convention of 1820. Jefferson praised his proposal to repeal the third article of the Massachusetts bill of rights, which had established Congregationalism as a tax-supported religion, and which Adams had written thirty years before. “I was quite rejoiced, dear Sir,” Jefferson wrote him, “to see that you had health and spirits enough to take part in the late convention of your state for revising it’s [*sic*] constitution, and to bear your share in it’s [*sic*] debates and labors.”<sup>91</sup>

Jefferson was optimistic that, under Adams’s guidance, the Massachusetts constitutional convention would repeal the Congregational establishment. “The amendments of which we have as yet heard prove the advance of liberalism in the intervening period; and encourage a hope that the human mind will some day get back the freedom it enjoyed 2000 years ago. This country, which has given to the world the example of physical liberty, owes to it that of moral emancipation also,” he asserted, reiterating his long-held belief in religious liberty and dread of excessive religious zeal. “For, as yet, it is but nominal with us. The inquisition of public opinion overwhelms in practice the freedom asserted by the laws in theory.”<sup>92</sup> Jefferson probably learned later, to his chagrin, that the state convention, while extending the vote to all taxpaying adult males (which Adams had opposed), had resoundingly rejected Adams’s proposal for religious freedom.<sup>93</sup>

Jefferson’s final years were disturbed by the “firebell in the night,” as he called the congressional battle over slavery in Missouri in a letter to John Holmes, a representative from the Massachusetts frontier district that became the state of Maine. During the critical debates, he downplayed the extent of New England’s

90. Adams to Jefferson, 25 June 1813, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:334. Adams was referring to *The General Repository and Review*. A quarterly founded by Andrews Norton, it was the mouthpiece for Boston Unitarianism from January 1812 to October 1813, when it folded. Frank L. Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741–1850* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 277–78.

91. Jefferson to John Adams, 22 January 1821, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 569.

92. *Ibid.*

93. Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760–1860* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 191–95; Harlow W. Sheidley, *Sectional Nationalism: Massachusetts Conservative Leaders and the Transformation of America, 1815–1836* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 35–36.

opposition. Instead, he stressed Massachusetts' congressional delegation's contribution toward achieving agreement between North and South. He praised Maine's Democratic representative Mark Langdon Hill and former Federalists Holmes and Jonathan Mason of Boston, who supported the Missouri Compromises (1819–1821) permitting slavery. Jefferson reserved his wrath primarily for New York politicians, led by Senator Rufus King and Governor De Witt Clinton, whose demands for slavery's prohibition in the Louisiana Purchase fanned sectional hostilities. "The Missouri question . . . is the most portentous one I have ever contemplated," he wrote President Monroe in March 1820. "King is ready to risk the union for any chance of restoring his party to power and wriggling himself to the head of it, nor is Clinton without his hopes nor scrupulous as to the means of fulfilling them." When the crisis ended with Maine's admission as a free state to balance Missouri's entry with slavery, Jefferson congratulated Hill on "the sleep of the Missouri question," and applauded the election of pro-Missouri Democrat William King (Rufus's half-brother) as Maine's first governor. Writing to William Short, Jefferson argued that the "laws of nature" limited slavery's expansion. Attesting to his nationalism, in a letter to Richard Rush, U.S. minister to Great Britain, in October 1820, he optimistically concluded that "both parties" opposed the "hideous evil" of slavery, and that "duty and interest" would bring about "a practicable process of cure" for the nation's malaise. He predicted that any breakup of the Union would be temporary. The voters, if not Congress, would demand a "convention" to restore the Union, reconciling the sections "like quarrelling lovers to renewed embraces, and increased affections." Nevertheless, his suspicion of New York's "Federalists" persisted. He feared they would foment "eternal discord," "seducing" antislavery Democrats in their quest for political gain. He appreciated the role played by the three Massachusetts congressmen, whose vote to admit Missouri as a slave state had provided the margin of victory for temporarily preserving the Union.<sup>94</sup>

94. Jefferson to John Holmes, 22 April 1820, and Jefferson to Mark Langdon Hill, 5 April 1820, in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, 15:249, 242–43; Jefferson to James Monroe, 3 March 1820, James Monroe Papers, Library of Congress, reel #7; Jefferson to William Short, 13 April 1820 ("laws of nature" and "eternal discord"), in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, 15:247–48; Jefferson to Richard Rush, 20 October 1820, in Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., *Writings of Jefferson*, 15:283–84 (hypothesizing secession and "convention"). Jefferson to David Bailie Warden, 26 December 1820, in Ford, ed., *Works*, 12:180 ("Federalists" and "seducing"); See also Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy, 1819–1821* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1953), 140, 203, 216–17, 277–78, and Robert P. Forbes, "Slavery and the Meaning of America, 1819–1837" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1994), 178.

Despite his ostensible predilection in this instance for the South, slavery, and states' rights, Jefferson was essentially a nationalist.<sup>95</sup> Invariably opposing disunion, he conceived the federal union as an association of "sisters," as he called Massachusetts. Jefferson well understood that the voluntary association of states he envisioned could be attained only if they treated each other with mutual respect, reciprocity, and even self-sacrifice. In the early republic, neither he nor any other statesman, including Adams, who viewed the prospect of Southern secession with equanimity during the Missouri crisis, proposed coercing New England or other disgruntled states to remain within the Union. The Constitution had not outlawed secession, and fifty years later, only a bloody civil war would make it illegal.<sup>96</sup>

After Jefferson retired from the presidency, he exerted little influence on government. Neither his proposals during the War of 1812 for a United States government monopoly on currency issuance nor his recommendation in 1823 for cooperation with Great Britain against the Holy Alliance was adopted by the respective sitting presidents, his closest friends, Madison and Monroe. Even on minor political appointments, Jefferson's former *protégé* Monroe ignored his suggestions.<sup>97</sup> However, Jefferson threw what little influence he possessed on the side of moderation toward New England, despite its refusal to cooperate during the national emergency.

He thought that eventually the state's voters would see the light, join the Republicans, and cooperate with the Union, although his phraseology was some-

95. For an older, brief, insightful depiction of Jefferson's nationalist views, see Harris G. Mirkin, "Rebellion, Revolution, and the Constitution: Thomas Jefferson's Theory of Civil Disobedience," *American Studies* 13 (Fall 1972): 61–74. More recent studies stressing Jefferson's nationalism include: Joseph H. Harrison, "*Sic et Non*: Thomas Jefferson and Internal Improvement," *Journal of the Early Republic* 7 (Winter 1987): 335–49, esp. 344; James R. Sofka, "The Jeffersonian Idea of National Security: Commerce, the Atlantic Balance of Power, and the Barbary War, 1786–1805," *Diplomatic History* 21 (Fall 1997): 519–44; Stephen H. Browne, *Jefferson's Call for Nationhood: The First Inaugural Address* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A & M Press, 2003); Brian D. Steele, "Thomas Jefferson and the Making of an American Nationalism" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003); Bernard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 37–59; and Jeremy David Bailey, "Executive Prerogative and the 'Good Officer' in Thomas Jefferson's Letter to John B. Colvin," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34 (December 2004): 732–54.
96. Jefferson had earlier shown a resigned, almost tolerant attitude to the possibility that the western territories would secede if the United States surrendered the right to free navigation of the Mississippi River. See Jefferson to Madison, 30 January 1787, and 20 June 1787, in Boyd et al., eds., *Jefferson Papers*, 11:93–94, 481. On Adams, see Adams to Jefferson, 21 December 1819, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:551.
97. On Jefferson's lack of influence on Madison, his closest friend and erstwhile political ally, see Roy J. Honeywell, "President Jefferson and His Successor," *American Historical Review* 46 (1940): 64–75.

times starkly laced with vivid metaphors of gangrenous flesh. While rejecting capital punishment for New England's antiwar elements, he charged them with a heinous type of murder—"the parricide crimes and treasons of the war." Negotiating and trading with the British and refusing to assist the republic, their offense was reprehensible. Still, Jefferson opposed violent reprisals against them.

Despite the Hartford Convention's potential threat to national unity, during that critical period Jefferson espoused Massachusetts' interests, even defending its right to the Canadian fisheries. He had long desired Federalists and Republicans of all regions to join in a Union based on "harmony and affection." Throughout Jefferson's career, notwithstanding such rhetorical deviations as the Kentucky Resolutions and letters he wrote in old age to assuage the anger of extreme Virginian states' righters and former political allies, his "affections" and "sentimental attachments" remained loyal to New England and the Union as a whole.<sup>98</sup>

As president, Jefferson had adhered to a thoroughgoing nationalist program. His major policies—reduction of the public debt, the Louisiana Purchase (most of which was unsuited for plantation agriculture and not designed solely to benefit slaveholders), repeal of internal taxes, the naval war against the Barbary pirates, and the Embargo Act, with its concomitant encouragement of domestic manufacturing—were designed to benefit the whole Union by securing the nation prosperity, free trade, and respect for its commercial rights. Moreover, Jefferson was scrupulously fair to New England in distributing shipbuilding contracts (mainly for gunboats) and appointments to the U.S. Army officer corps during his presidency. Seeking to appease New England and convert it to republicanism, he assisted its merchants, supporting drawbacks of duties on re-export of colonial goods and the exemption of domestic shipping from lighthouse fees and other imposts. During his retirement, he further asserted his nationalist predilections, favoring U.S. annexation of slaveless Canada to an ultimate "empire for liberty."<sup>99</sup>

98. As Jefferson's first inaugural address asserts: "Let us, then, fellow citizens, unite with one heart and one mind; let us restore to social intercourse that harmony & affection, without which Liberty, & even Life itself, are but dreary things." Ford, ed., *Works*, 9:195. See also Andrew S. Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Harold Hellenbrand, *The Unfinished Revolution: Education and Politics in the Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990).
99. Jefferson to Madison, 27 April 1809, Smith, ed., *Republic of Letters*, 3:1586 (quotation). Sean M. Theriault, "Party Politics During the Louisiana Purchase," *Social Science History* 30 (Summer 2006): 293; Gene A. Smith, "For the Purposes of Defense": *The Politics of the Jeffersonian Gunboat Program* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 90–91; Theodore J. Crackel, *Mr. Jefferson's Army: Political and Social Reform of the Military Establishment, 1801–1809* (New York: New York University Press, 1987); Frank A. Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill

Indeed, Jefferson's tolerance of New England's provocations during the War of 1812 and his consistent admiration for its town meeting democracy suggest that, had statesmen of his caliber and nationalist "affections" been in power in the South before the Civil War, a peaceful resolution of sectional differences might have taken place and the fratricidal conflict averted.<sup>100</sup>

and Wang, 2005). For Jefferson's favoritism toward New England's shipping as president, see Schoen, "Calculating the Price of Union," 180–183. In 1809, Jefferson defended his administration's promotion of manufactures against "federalist" merchants. Jefferson to Thomas Leiper, 21 January 1809, in Ford, ed., *Works*, 11:90–91.

100. Richard Mannix, "Gallatin, Jefferson, and the Embargo of 1808," *Diplomatic History* 3 (Spring 1979): 151–72, emphasizes Jefferson's misgivings over the Embargo and his reluctance to oversee its enforcement. Susan-Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), reveals that anti-Southern pre-Civil War New England intellectuals, like Pickering in Jefferson's time, sought to justify Northern hegemony in the Union by depicting the slave-holding South as materialistic, barbaric, and "inferior."