

Formulation of a Uniquely American Strain of Republicanism and Putting Those Ideals into Practice

Barbara Newton¹, Ph.D.

During the last half of the eighteenth century, colonists in British North America began to formulate and express their opinions of what constituted a just civil government. Perceived mistreatment by the British Parliament gradually led Americans to question traditionally accepted theories of fair and honest governance. At this time, the differences between the British Parliament and the colonial governments became more pronounced, and from the period beginning with the end of the French and Indian War up until the commencement of the American Revolution colonists began to feel more and more alienated by the actions of the British government in London. Different ideas about the meaning of a representative government made up part of the resentment toward Parliament. American colonists had come to support the idea of direct representation in their colonial assemblies and the British espoused the theory of virtual representation.

Throughout all the British colonies in North America, men began to write letters and pamphlets expressing their concerns and delineating concepts of a representative type of government that would ensure the rights of all colonists. Preachers delivered and published sermons outlining new ideas relating to Christian duty toward governmental authority. Ministers no longer admonished their parishioners to blindly follow the dictates of their rulers; instead, the church leaders often encouraged their congregations to question and even defy government acts that offended the political and moral ideals that were rapidly gaining in popularity. Peter Oliver, a loyalist historian of the late colonial and Revolutionary era, wrote that Congregational ministers in Massachusetts took an active part in stirring up resistance against Great Britain. Understandably, Anglican ministers in the southern colonies, Virginia, in particular, did not advocate disobedience to the British crown; however, the increasing number of dissenters, mostly Presbyterians and Baptists, resulted in ministerial rhetoric against the actions of the British government.²

Educated Americans were using their knowledge of Aristotelian political thought and Roman history, interlaced with the history of the English struggle for a balanced government dating back to the Magna Carta. Colonists referred to the British common law while intermingling seventeenth and eighteenth-century British opposition views, combining this with bits and pieces of contemporary thought, adding ideas of various Enlightenment philosophes, and applying these concepts to their distinctive situation to create a unique brand of republicanism. American Revolutionary-era republicanism cannot be identified as the classical republicanism of Greece, Rome, or Florence. The American variant has similarities to classical republicanism; however, important differences are quite evident. In England, Country versus Court politics in the late 1600s and early 1700s pitted the country squires against members of the king's court whom they saw as corrupt. The country element of this dichotomy felt that people who attached themselves to the royal court were a self-seeking group who wallowed in patronage and cared nothing for the welfare of the British subjects. Two of the main objectives of the Country faction was to reduce the number of placemen in Parliament and to have more frequent elections. The Country faction were basically an oppositionist group that flourished when resisting another political entity while looking backward for what it conceived to be a better situation in the past. The Court portrayed the Country as a jealous group of troublemakers who only wanted to wield power for their own benefit. The Country ideology gained popularity in the British North American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century.

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of History Political Science and Philosophy, Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia

² Douglas Adair, John A. Schutz, eds., *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Revolution: A Tory View*, Stanford University Press: SanMarino, 1961, 41-42. Brett Tarter, "Church of England in Colonial America," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol.112, no. 4 (2004), 353-4.

The writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon resonated freely in the newly emerging American political discourse. For example, Letter Fifty-nine includes the familiar sentiments “All men are born free,” and “Liberty is a gift which they receive from God himself; nor can they alienate the same by consent, though possibly they may forfeit by crimes.”³

By 1775, many Americans had fashioned and become dedicated to their distinct form of republican thought. Revolutionary American republicanism was a rather broad construct that allowed the disparate American colonies to find common ground for resisting the actions of the British government that colonists viewed as open attacks on their basic rights as Englishmen. The basic tenets of republicanism held by leaders from all thirteen colonies remained dominant in the young nation’s persona as Americans fought a war for independence and later struggled to form a new government.

Following the Seven Years’ War, British colonists in North America formed their own political ideology in opposition to a series of actions by the mother country. The relationship between the colonists and England deteriorated in the 1760s with many factors contributing to the breakdown of goodwill that had previously existed between the two. Historian, Bernard Bailyn, who in the 1960s brought forth the idea of Americans creating a unique ideology, republicanism, to deal with the troubling actions of Parliament, contends that at this time a large segment of the American public began to harbor strong suspicions that “an active conspiracy against liberty existed and involved the colonists directly.” The source of this suspicion, according to Bailyn, came from the seventeenth-century English opposition literature. American colonists, viewing their situation in light of their understanding of historical tendencies, saw “the destruction of the English constitution, with all the rights and privileges embedded in it.”⁴ Historian, Gordon Wood, Bailyn’s former student, agrees with the idea that English political concepts, often referred to as Country ideology, greatly influenced the British American colonies prior to 1776. Instead of seeing this new political concept as backward looking, Wood contends that for all of its references to classical and even Greek and Roman ideas American Revolutionary-era republicanism was basically a modern construct.⁵

The English gentry, many of whom embraced the country ideology, warned colonists that the British court was corrupt and provided a reason for Americans to oppose imperial policy. Americans easily adopted and adapted the language of Country ideology to suit their specific needs. The series of pamphlets written by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, from 1721 through 1723, using the pseudonym of Cato, in response to the South Sea Bubble scandal supported the Country point of view, while also incorporating many of John Locke’s theories on natural law and natural rights. *Cato’s Letters*, first published in England during the 1720s, influenced American colonists. Historian J. G. A. Pocock, another early proponent of American republicanism, traces the American republican ideal back even further than seventeenth-century Britain, in fact, he places the origins all the way back to Renaissance Italy and does not view it as a movement toward modernity.⁶ Also, the colonist’s frequent use of Trenchard and Gordon’s work and other enlightened language supports claims of historians, such as Joyce Appleby, that early American political thought was highly influenced by liberal ideals.⁷

Thus, the republicanism that developed in the North American colonies was never a “purely classical” form of republicanism because it incorporated the British Country traditional and contained aspects of Lockean liberalism. All of these ideals, often seen as contradictory to modern minds, blended forming a uniquely American form of republicanism. Over the span of about one decade, events and actions of the British government prompted the creation of this uniquely American ideology. Republican ideals of the Revolutionary era held that for a republic to survive its inhabitants and public officials must be just, temperate, moderate, frugal and virtuous.

³ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato’s Letters*, Ronald Hamoway, ed., Vol. 1, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995, 405.

⁴ Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, 60-1; Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Interpretations of the American Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, 45.

⁵ Gordon S Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969, viii.

⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and Atlantic Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, 14.

⁷ Appleby’s work concerning the liberal aspect of American society and politics of the Revolutionary era include “Liberalism and the American Revolution,” *New England Quarterly*, vol. 49 (1976) 3-26, The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 66 (1978) 935-58, “The New Republican Synthesis and the Changing Political Ideals on John Adams,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 25 (1973) 578-595.

Colonists embracing those ideals abhorred and feared power, which they believed could corrupt even a virtuous man. They believed that property ownership gave men the independence necessary to make political decisions without undue influence from others. The idea that yeoman farmers were the backbone of a successful republic resonated throughout their writings. Debt threatened independence and was to be avoided by individuals and the government. Standing armies were anathema to republicans. They thought that a standing army in time of peace could lead to a loss of liberty. Revolutionary-era republicans much preferred the idea of the militia, made up of volunteers. These ideas coalesced following the French and Indian War when the colonists began to feel that the British government was usurping their rights.

The Proclamation of 1763, the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, and numerous other actions by Parliament only served to reinforce the colonists' conspiratorial apprehensions, which, according to Bailyn, already existed throughout the colonies. News of the passage of each of these acts brought about angry responses within the American colonies. A pamphlet written by Stephen Hopkins, colonial governor of Rhode Island, reveals one such reaction to the Sugar Act of 1764, in which he extolled the virtues of liberty and lamented the "curse of slavery" in America.⁸ Hopkins began his work with praise for the British constitution in what seems to be an endorsement of Locke's contract theory of government. "This glorious Constitution" he said, "the best that ever existed among men, will be confessed by all to be founded by compact and established by consent of the people." According to Hopkins's pamphlet, "the adventurers who left England" to settle the wilds of North America did so with a written promise that "they were to receive protection and enjoy all the rights and privileges of freeborn Englishmen."⁹ Rhode Island's governor continued his argument in favor of the rights of colonists by referring to the colonization methods of the ancient Greeks. Hopkins labeled Thucydides "that grave and judicious historian," and quoted several of his remarks concerning the rights and obligations of the inhabitants of the Greek colonies. Thucydides described the privileges of Greek colonists, in general, when he wrote, "They were all sent out not to be slaves, but to be equals to those who remain behind." The responsibilities of the Greeks, who set up the new colonies, to the mother state were few. "Tis true," Hopkins wrote, "they were fond to acknowledge their origin, and always confessed themselves under obligation to pay a kind of honorary respect to, and show a final dependence on the commonwealth from which they sprang."¹⁰ These sentiments, however, were voluntary, the product of affection, not force.

The Romans, according to Hopkins, followed the Greeks in allowing their colonies full political rights. He maintained that Roman colonization took a different course than that of the Greeks, and Roman settlements did not become separate states and were not ruled by different laws. Instead, Hopkins's interpretation of Roman history maintained that Roman colonies "always remained a part of the mother state; and all that apply free of the colonies were also free of Rome, and the right to an equal suffrage in making all laws and appointing all officers for the government of the whole commonwealth." He also used the biblical story of Paul as a perfect example to bolster his argument stating, "For the truth of this we have the testimony of St. Paul, who although born at Tarsus, yet assures us he was born free of Rome." Hopkins relied on citing specific ancient examples and authorities to give support to his arguments about the rights of American colonists.¹¹

Governor Hopkins was not alone in using the models of Greeks and Romans to support American grievances against England. Numerous colonial writings referred to these ancient republics in their criticism of the British government; however, those references were only a small part of the developing political perspective of the colonists.

⁸ The Sugar Act of 1764 was actually a renewal of the Molasses Act that had been in place since 1733. The earlier law had never been strictly enforced in the colonies and was largely ignored. News of the Sugar Act of 1764 and the belief that the British government actually meant to strictly administer the new duties caused an immediate response from the New England colonies as well as from New York. Stephen Hopkins, "The Rights of Colonies Explained," in *American Political Writings during the Founding Era, 1760-1805*, vol. 1, Charles S. Hyneman and Donald Lutz, eds., Independence: Liberty Fund, 1983, 445-61. This pamphlet was written in 1764 and published in Providence, Rhode Island. At that time Hopkins was governor of Rhode Island, and his essay received the support of his state's legislative assembly. Hopkins's arguments used the New England colonies as examples of his specific complaints, but he declared his reasoning could just as easily apply to all British colonies.

⁹ Locke contended that the function of government was to protect the life, liberty, and property of its citizens and that if a government or ruler broke the contract all claim to their subject's loyalty was forfeited. Hopkins, "The Rights of Colonies Examined," 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47-8.

Bailyn argues convincingly that most allusions to the political history of the ancient world were sketchy and based on a superficial understanding of the classics, and “appear to have been dragged in as window dressing with which to ornament a page or a speech and increase the weight of an argument.”¹² American political writers, even when they did not specifically mention the earliest republics, used Greek and Roman pseudonyms revealing their desire to identify with ancient governments.

One example of using the Roman Empire as a means of legitimizing political views of the colonial writers criticizing the British government appeared in a Boston paper in 1766. An essay, written under the pen name, *Aequus*, asked the question, “Whether the mother-country has a right of imposing local taxes on all her American colonies?”¹³ Although generous sprinklings of Latin phrases and the use of a Roman pen name emphasized the importance of time honored Roman political ideals, the content of the essay supported ideas more closely associated with the Enlightenment and eighteenth-century political ideologies, particularly the Country versus Court dichotomy. A decade before the American Revolution, *Aequus* and countless others presented their ideas concerning liberty, justice, and the misuse of power that would become common currency within the next decade. The American brand of republicanism was forming and it needed the validation that association with ancient republics could provide; however, the political ideology that Americans created also contained the enlightenment ideals of Locke and never closely resembled that of Greece and Rome.

Republicanism, as it developed in the pre-Revolutionary period, grew stronger when it had something to oppose, and in the 1760s the British provided much for the colonists to contest. As the British government announced its imperial decisions, colonial leaders began voicing their objections. Some more closely reflected Locke’s view of government while others were quite similar to the Country philosophy popular in Great Britain several decades earlier. While discontented colonists became familiar with the enlightened ideas of Locke, and the oppositional language of the Country tradition, the English Parliament began passing a series of acts that further sparked American anger.

Samuel Adams, cousin of John Adams and early proponent of American independence, attempted to explain the strong reaction of many Americans to the passage of the Stamp Act. In a letter to a friend in England, Adams wrote, “But there is another consideration which makes the Stamp Act obnoxious to our people here and that is, that it really annihilates, as they apprehend, their essential rights as Englishmen.” Adams’s letter clearly indicates that in 1765, he had no idea of advocating independence; he simply wanted to enjoy the liberties and rights due to all Englishmen. Adams, just as Hopkins, praised the British constitution and stated, “it admits of no more power over a subject than is necessary for the support of the government which was originally designed for the preservation of the inalienable rights of nature.”

This statement, while definitely Lockean in origin, was followed by Adams’s guarantee that the concept of virtual representation would never be acceptable to the American public and explained that no American could be convinced that they were truly represented in a governmental body to which they sent no elected representative.¹⁴ The insistence on actual representation and liberty became a resounding note in the political rhetoric of colonial Americans.

Another Bostonian, the prominent Congregational minister, Jonathon Mayhew, explained his concept of liberty in a sermon denouncing the passage of the Stamp Act and rejoicing at its repeal in 1766. The language of his message paralleled the rapidly developing American republican vocabulary, which clearly included Lockean ideas concerning freedom and connected the loss of liberty to the lack of civic virtue in the English government. Mayhew vividly described liberty and slavery when he spoke of his childhood and being raised to the “love of liberty, tho’ not licentiousness; which chaste and virtuous passion was still increased in me, as I advanced towards, and into manhood.” He referred to the passage of the Stamp Act by commenting, “I was, accordingly, penetrated by the most sensible grief, when, about the first of November last, the day of darkness, a day hardly to be numbered with the other days of the year, She seemed about to take her final departure from America, and to leave that ugly hag slavery, the deformed child of Satan, in her room.”

¹² Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 24.

¹³ *Aequus*, “From the Craftsman,” *Massachusetts and Boston Newsletter*, March 6, 1766.

¹⁴ Sam Adams, Letter to John Smith, 19 December 1765, in T. J. Stiles, ed., *In Their Own Words: Founding Fathers*, New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1999, 13-4.

In this sermon delivered after the act's repeal, Mayhew rejoiced in the return of "Liberty." He continued by praising America as a refuge for other Europeans seeking a safe haven from the "luxury, debauchery, venality, intestine quarrels, or other vices," that plagued their society.¹⁵ Mayhew's view of liberty and his statement concerning the corruption of Europe conformed to ideals of the republican discourse-taking root in the colonies.

Americans embracing republicanism believed that submitting to what they perceived as unconstitutional taxation represented by the Stamp Act would result in a loss of liberty, which would render them slaves to the corrupt powers of the British government. Power, according to republicanism, was a malignant force that could sully even a just man or leader. Luxurious living represented by the lavish lifestyles of the members of royal families and their households and those who clung to the perimeters of European courts was seen as morally bankrupt. This element of the country faction, distaste for and fear of the consequences of a decadent lifestyle, was incorporated into the developing political discourse in colonial America. These changing political views occurred in not only the New England colonies, but within their southern neighbors as well.

Richard Bland, a Virginia planter and member of an elite Chesapeake family, wrote a pamphlet entitled, "An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies."¹⁶ Bland's essay, originally published in March 1766, in pamphlet form and reprinted in the *Virginia Gazette* on May 30, 1766, and in London in 1769, responded to an earlier anonymous essay, entitled, "The Regulations Lately Made Concerning the Colonies and the Taxes Imposed upon Them Considered." Bland argued against the concept of virtual representation and maintained that while Parliament might have the power to tax inhabitants of the British colonies; it had no right to do so. He contended that power and right are very different and accused the British Parliament of using power to impose a tax it had no right to enact. Bland stated, "I say that *Power* abstracted from *Right* cannot give a just title to dominion."¹⁷ The deep distrust of power and loathing of taxes that Bland considered unjust was one of the lasting hallmarks of American republicanism, and adherents to these beliefs vigorously opposed governments or leaders who attempted to increase power at the expense of the people's freedom. "An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies" revealed Bland's reliance on John Locke's concept of the laws of nature and his deeply held conviction concerning the rights of propertied British subjects. Bland argued that "nine tenths of the people of Britain are deprived of the high privilege of being Electors."

He claimed that too much power, held by the British Parliament, corrupted the "present Constitution," and concluded that "the Gangrene has taken too deep hold to be eradicated in these Days of Venality."¹⁸ Bland's pamphlet was one of the first written criticisms of the British government in the colonies; however, in the years to follow many more American colonists would echo his sentiments and go beyond his conclusions as they formulated an American political theory, Revolutionary-era Republicanism. In the same month that Bland's pamphlet appeared in the *Virginia Gazette*, an untitled piece circulated in Boston published under the pen name, Britannus Americanus. This brief essay, written in response to the passage of the Stamp Act, attacked Parliament, arguing that this governmental party was trying to deprive legitimate subjects of their rights. The anonymous author reasoned that the inhabitants of British North America were loyal subjects to the king, but that the "parliament of England has no more lawful power to make an act which shall deprive people of *New* England of those rights than they have a right to deprive the people of *Old* England of the same rights..."¹⁹ Even though the author declared his and his fellow colonists' loyalty to the crown, he contended that parliamentary acts created a definite distinction between the inhabitants of Old England and New England.

The idea that Parliament and the king's advisors denied colonists their traditional and natural rights harkened back to the "Country versus Court" politics of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in Britain. The author's pen name, Britannus Americanus revealed that he considered New England colonists a distinct category of Englishmen, but he also made it clear that they deserved the same rights and privileges due all subjects of the king.

¹⁵ Jonathon Mayhew, "The Snare Broken: A Thanksgiving Discourse," 23 May 1776, in Elis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1998, 259.

¹⁶ Richard Bland was born in the colony of Virginia in 1710. He attended the College of William and Mary and served as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses for thirty-three years. He was the maternal great-uncle of John Randolph of Roanoke, who later became a prominent defender of the republican ideals that were evident in Bland's 1766 pamphlet.

¹⁷ Richard Bland, "An Inquiry into the Rights of British Colonies," Charles Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, , 67-87.

¹⁸ Bland, "Inquiry," 73-4.

¹⁹ Britannus Americanus, Untitled, *Boston Gazette*, 17 May 1766.

In condemning the Stamp Act, Britannus Americanus, maintained that New England consented to be subject to the king; however, he argued that “the people of England could have no more political connection with them or power of jurisdiction over them, than they now have over the people of Hanover who are also subjects of the same king.” The perceived corruption of parliament weighed heavily in his essay, and the writer clearly viewed this body as having been corrupted and trying to subvert the English constitution.²⁰ The negative aspects of power, dominating, as they seemed to colonial minds, had a strong foil, and that was a virtuous citizenry.

Civic virtue, in republican thought, referred to a “particular role that a person might occupy, the role of citizen.” Occasionally, a citizen might be called upon to sacrifice his own interests in the name of civic virtue. Historian Shelly Burtt provides a convincing definition by stating that civic virtue is “the disposition to further public over private good in action and deliberation.”²¹ The republican concept of virtue had its basis in three fundamental elements: fear of corruption, fear of dependence, and the importance of liberty. Colonial American adherents of republican beliefs feared both the passive and active forms of corruption. The passive type resulted from the evils of luxurious living. Citizens who spent too much time in pursuit of personal pleasures often avoided participating in governmental affairs and performing their civic duties. An even more unfortunate variety was active corruption, which resulted when one used his position to subvert the common good. Wealthy, influential individuals who became greedy and exhibited a strong desire for power could eventually lead to tyranny. Virtuous citizens abhorred dependence because “the person who is completely dependent on another person may be ruled, but is surely in no position to rule.” Property ownership allowed one to avoid the dreadful state of dependency. As much as the early Americans despised dependency, they revered liberty. Freedom relied on virtuous citizens who possessed personal independence, exercised their rights, and when necessary sacrificed their welfare for the good of the community. The ideal citizen would embrace the idea of civic virtue and at the same time remain ever vigilant against the encroaching nature of power.²² An essay printed in the *South Carolina Gazette* on October 6, 1766, contended that “the security of freedom can only be in public virtue,” and that “luxury leads to Corruption.” Tribune, the pseudonym of the author of the piece, maintained that the members of the British Parliament had become venal and because of the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the English members of parliament, American colonists were “now groaning under an insupportable load of debts, taxes, pensions, sine-cures, and employments, with an universal spirit of rapine and combination, to supply the cravings of avarice, luxury, and prostitution.”

The American colonies were likened to a workhorse whose master had “undertook to make his horse live without eating.” Growing disgust with the British Parliament, depicted in this essay as a group of corrupt men living opulently, promoted the idea that American colonists were the virtuous heirs of the true English way. The colonists began seeing themselves as sturdy agrarians who formed the bedrock of English social and political tradition. Agrarianism and the importance of small yeoman farmers to public virtue was a vital element of the newly developing American brand of republicanism.²³ Americans looked at the British members of parliament and found reason to believe they had turned from the acceptable agrarian model. Bernard Bailyn maintains that everyone agreed, “there was corruption in the adroit manipulation of parliament by a power-hungry ministry, and corruption generally in the self-indulgent, effeminizing luxury, and gluttonous pursuit of gain of a generation sunk in new and unaccustomed wealth.”²⁴ The idea that England had grown corrupt became more widespread throughout the colonies.

Benjamin Franklin, while serving as a colonial agent in England in the 1760s, developed a quite critical opinion not only the British government but also of the society and economy as well. He depicted the Mother Country as an old, too densely populated, and starkly inegalitarian society. Franklin looked to the French physiocrats for a clear understanding of economic politics in Europe, and more specifically, England. Franklin concluded that mercantilist countries such as Britain were “fond of their Manufactures beyond their real value.”²⁵ In an essay entitled “Remarks on Agriculture and Manufacturing,” Franklin offered the following condemnation of Britain’s political economy and praise for agriculture. He wrote, “

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Shelly Burtt, “The Good Citizen’s Psyche: On Psychology of Civic Virtue,” *Polity* 23, Fall 1999, 24.

²² Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 14-5.

²³ The Tribune, Untitled, *South Carolina Gazette*, Charleston, South Carolina, 6 October 1766.

²⁴ Bailyn, 51.

²⁵ Benjamin Franklin to Caldwell Evans, 20 February 1768.

There seems to be but three Ways for a nation to acquire Wealth. The first is by *War* as the Romans did for plundering their conquered neighbors. This is *Robbery*. The second is by *Commerce* which is generally Cheating. The third is by *Agriculture* the only *honest Way*; wherein Man receives a real increase in the seed thrown into the ground, in a kind of contained Miracle wrought by the Hand of God in his favour, as a Reward for his innocent Life and virtuous Industry.²⁶ Franklin saw America in stark contrast to England, which according to him was an ‘aged society,’ in which “many men were forced to become dependent wage-laborers who worked for a master.” Because of the agricultural character of American society, Franklin believed that inhabitants there would remain relatively equal in wealth and power. The opportunity to own land allowed men to be independent. In an essay entitled, “The Interests of Great Britain Considered,” Franklin not only claims that in England there is “a multitude of poor without land” and that they “must work for others at low wages or starve,” he also stated that “no man who can have a piece of land of his own, sufficient by his labor to subsist his family in plenty is poor enough to be a manufacturer and work for a master.”²⁷ He believed the abundance of land would deliver Americans from ever being pushed into the evils of manufacturing.

John Adams respected the value of the farmer to Massachusetts and revealed this in an essay on agriculture published in the *Boston Gazette* in 1763. In this article, Adams stated, “Agriculture, the Nursing Mother of every Art, Science, Trade and Profession in civilized society, has been most ungratefully despised. It has been too much so in Europe, but infinitely more so in America, and perhaps not the least so in the Massachusetts Bay.”²⁸ Adams encouraged colonial Americans to consider the value of agriculture to the prosperity of the colonies. He contended that it was through the efforts of farmers that the colony had survived and prospered.

This essay, written in response to an earlier letter signed by Humphrey Ploughjogger, gave advice on the proper method of cultivating hemp and recommended that professionals, particularly lawyers and physicians, should become involved in raising the crop.²⁹ His essay warned professionals and those who had “greater intellectual Abilities than mankind in general, Consider, that nature intended them for Leaders of Industry.”³⁰ Adams believed that these successful lawyers, doctors, and other professionals should not turn their backs on the colonies’ agricultural origins. According to Adams, it would be too easy for men with too much leisure to fall into luxurious and evil habits. He echoed American republican theory by declaring that wealth and success could result in the downfall of its possessors. Adams praised the independence of small farmers and revealed a significant connection between the strong Puritan work ethic and the republican ideal of the importance of yeomanry. Then, events in 1765 turned Adams’s attention to more pressing matters.

The passage of the Stamp Act and Mutiny Acts in 1765 gave Adams much to consider. As the year was drawing to a close, he ruminated about the current state of affairs and made an entry into his diary that would in the early part of the coming year find its way into the *Boston Gazette* under the pseudonym Claredon. Adams described America in glowing terms. His narrative contained phrases that would later become common currency in republican rhetoric. In praise of American colonists he wrote, “If ever an infant Country deserved to be cherished it is America, if ever People merited Honor and Happiness, they are her Inhabitants.” He, in the style of other colonial leaders of the time, compared Americans to the citizens of Rome. “They have the high sentiments of Romans in the most prosperous and virtuous Times of that Commonwealth. Yet they have the tenderest feeling of Humanity and the Noblest Benevolence of Christians. They have the habitual sense of Liberty, and the highest reverence for Virtue.”³¹ Adams publicly praised his fellow colonists for their virtue; however, he also worried about the possibility that they might lose their rights and liberties. As the year 1765 drew to a close, Adams, on Christmas Day, recorded that he was at home and “thinking, reading, searching, concerning Taxation without Consent.”³²

²⁶ Benjamin Franklin, “Remarks on Agriculture and Manufacturing,” Leonard W. Larabee, et al., eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 18, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, 273-274.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 9, 73-74.

²⁸ John Adams, Essay on Agriculture,” *Boston Gazette*, 18 July 1763, in L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 1, 1755-1790, New York: Antheneum, 1961, 246.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 250. The editor of Adams’s diary suggests that Adams also wrote the letter signed by Humphrey Ploughjogger and actually carried on a written dialogue with himself. Ploughjogger’s essay was written in a way that led readers to believe it had been penned by a poorly educated farmer asking his betters for some advice on the proper method of growing hemp.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ John Adams, 272.

³² *Ibid.*, 273.

The recent actions of the British Parliament greatly troubled Adams and references to the evils of power and its ability to subvert liberty filled his writings. New Englanders, at least those in Adams's circle, opposed recent actions of the British parliament and the concepts of liberty and virtue were becoming more popular than the earlier idea of obediently submitting to authority. The political atmosphere in Boston was often reflected in the religious rhetoric of the day. After attending church on the Sabbath, Adams scrutinized the sermon for what he called signs of a "Tory Sermon," but found no overt support for the Stamp Act. To the contrary, Adams suspected that the minister had tailored his message to suit his anti-Stamp Act audience. Adams contended that this was becoming common practice among New England ministers, and referred to a sermon preached by Mr. Gay on Thanksgiving Day. "Mr. Gay admonished the people to submit to authority, particularly in reference to the Stamp Act; however, the sermon so inflamed members of his church that they accused him of favoring the despised Stamp Act and actually leveled threats against him."³³ The following Sunday, he adjusted his stance to suit the demands of his congregation. "This sermon advocated, Honor, Reward, and Obedience to Good Rulers, and a Spirited Opposition to bad ones, interspersed with a good deal of animated Declamation upon Liberty and the Times."³⁴ The tenets of Revolutionary-era republicanism, with the fear of power and its corrupting force, began to grow more popular than ever, and ministers in New England realized the necessity of conforming to fashionable political ideals. Therefore, after altering his message concerning the Stamp Act, instead of being threatened by his congregation, Mr. Gay now found it praising him and considering having his sermon against the Stamp Act published.³⁵

Adams also questioned the character of the colonists who sought positions from the crown. He called these men seekers and openly held them in contempt. In a diary entry entitled "A Dissertation Upon Seekers of Elections, Of Commissions from the Governour, of Commissions from the Crown," Adams warned, "These Seekers are actuated to be a more ravenous sort of Ambition and Avarice and merit a more aggravated Condemnation. These ought to be avoided and dreaded as the Plague, as the destroying Angels. Let no such man be trusted."³⁶ No sense of civic virtue existed in these men, and in republican belief, virtue was the vital element to protect the liberty of all men.

Revolutionary-era Americans were well versed in the necessity of having virtuous leaders and citizens; however, they also realized that power could corrupt even virtuous men and that unscrupulous leaders might gain control of a standing army or even wrest power from a legitimate ruler. Fear of a standing army became one of the cornerstones of American republican thought. These ideas were not original to the colonies and examples of this dread of a strong military exist in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century British writings. Thomas Gordon, in a series of letters entitled "Considerations upon the Condition of an Absolute Prince," forcefully condemned standing armies calling them a "curse in every country under the son [sic] where they are more powerful than the people." He claimed that any monarch who depended on an army could not truly rule because "he will find them armed against himself, as well as his people or his neighbors: and he cannot relieve his subjects if he would. As armies long kept, and grown part of the government will soon engross the whole government, and can never be disbanded; so liberty long lost, can never be fully recovered." Gordon's warning against standing armies asked the question, "Is not this an awful lesson to free states, to be vigilant against a dreadful condition, which has no remedy?"³⁷ Eighteenth-century Americans were well aware of the British "Country" view of standing armies and had their own fears and suspicions concerning maintaining armies in times of peace.

Adams's diary contained notes for a speech he delivered at Braintree, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1772, in which Adams focused on the necessity of civic virtue and the dangers of a standing army in time of peace. In this oration, Adams presented his thoughts on the ideal form of government and warned his audience of the many dangers to liberty. People, according to Adams, "must be on guard because they may be deceived, and their Simplicity, Ignorance, and Docility, render them frequently liable to deception." Adams referred to the "late Innovations" of the British government to warn inhabitants of Braintree against threats to their liberty. New taxes, the Court of Admiralty, and the "introduction of a standing army into our Metropolis" all signaled serious threats to the inhabitants of North America.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 280.

³⁶ Ibid., 277.

³⁷ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, Ronald Hamowy, ed., vol.2, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995, 983-4.

His language referring to the presence of British troops contained strong words of warning. He asked, "Have you not seen horrid rancour, furious Violence, infernal Cruelty, shocking Impiety and Profanation, and shameless Debauchery, running down the Streets like a stream?" Adams's speech warned that liberty was always in danger and stated, "The Love of Power is insatiable and uncontrollable." Countries could not always rely on the virtue of their leaders to protect liberty, because the lure of power seduced even strong men. In closing, Adams strongly advised, "be upon your Guard, my Countrymen."³⁸ He was certainly not alone in his fears and concern for the worsening relationship between the American subjects and Britain government grew in all colonies.

George Washington, from his home in Mount Vernon kept abreast of the political scene through his correspondence. From Londoner Robert Stewart in January 1764, Washington received word of the sentiments of the British government toward their North American colonies.³⁹ Stewart wrote, "American affairs is becoming a standing Topic- It is said, I'm afraid from too good authority that the Colonies will be Saddled with a tax of no less than three hundred pounds sterling[per annum]: in order to support the Troops Judg'd necessary for defense."⁴⁰

Stewart wrote several letters to Washington in which he included news of the British government that pertained to the American colonies in general and Virginia in particular. In several pieces of his personal correspondence, Washington included news of the Stamp Act and the legislation's unfavorable reception in Virginia.

In a letter to Francis Dandridge, Martha Washington's uncle, Washington explained the local reaction to the passage of the Stamp Act. He wrote, "The Stamp Act Imposed on the Colonies by the Parliament of Great Britain engrosses the conservation of the Speculative part of the Colonists, who look upon this unconstitutional method of Taxation as a direful attack upon our liberties, & loudly exclaim against the Violation – what may result of this and some other (I think I may add) ill judged Measures, I will not undertake to determine."⁴¹

Washington echoed these sentiments in several letters written in 1765. In every instance, he stressed that colonists saw the acts as a means to deprive them of their liberties. The passage of the Stamp Act impassioned colonial leaders and prompted a great deal of discontent. Both public and private discourse revealed the growth of American republicanism. Even as colonists rejoiced at the repeal of the contentious Stamp Act, they continued to nurture their republican ideology.

Difficulties arising from implementation of the Mutiny (or Quartering) Act of 1765, soon overshadowed the joy surrounding the repeal of the Stamp Act.⁴² Colonists influenced by the conspiracy theory saw Parliament's actions as further proof that a powerful and corrupt segment of the British government was trying to enslave the colonists and deny them the rights to which they were entitled as British subjects.⁴³ Americans refined their arguments against England and began formulating their own concept of a just government. The creation of the Sons of Liberty in 1765, revealed the deep dedication to freedom shared by an ever-growing number of colonists. Later, the Townshend Acts brought about another outpouring of colonial protest.⁴⁴

³⁸ L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol.2, Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1961, 242.

³⁹ Robert Stewart had served under Washington's command during the Seven Years' War and was a frequent correspondent.

⁴⁰ Robert Stewart to George Washington. London, January 4, 1764, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series, vol.7, January 1761-June 1767, W. W. Abbott and Beverly H. Runge, eds., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999, 281-283.

⁴¹ George Washington to Francis Dandridge, Mount Vernon, September 20, 1765.

⁴² The Mutiny Act of 1765 required colonists in America to provide quarters and supplies for British troops in America. American colonists had been voluntarily (albeit somewhat reluctantly) doing so.

⁴³ British colonists in North America began to think they could discern a definite pattern in the acts of parliament. Many who wrote pamphlets and essays declared there was a conspiracy afoot, and that parliament was taking away the liberties of the colonists in a pre-planned and systematic manner.

⁴⁴ The Townshend Acts, sponsored by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, were British legislations enacted on June 29, 1767. Their intent was to raise revenue, tighten customs enforcement, and assert imperial authority over the unruly American colonies. The key statutes levied import duties on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea. Its main purpose was to provide salaries for some colonial officials so that the provincial governments could not coerce them by refusing them their wages. Other bills authorized Writs of Assistance, created three additional vice admiralty courts, which operated without juries, established a Board of Customs Commissioners headquartered in Boston, and suspended the New York Assembly for not complying with the Quartering Act of 1765.

John Dickinson, a preeminent Philadelphia lawyer, member of Pennsylvania's colonial legislature, and vocal opponent of British policies whose remonstrations appeared in the form of a series of open correspondence collectively entitled *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer*, presented another example of the developing republican thought. His articles clearly stated the colonists' oppositions to the newly imposed duties and delivered a point of view representative of many Americans.

Dickinson's first essay provides a very apt characterization of the ideal lifestyle of a conscientious colonial subject. The introduction, in which he proclaims, "I am a farmer," although it does not accurately portray the author, confirms the importance of small independent farmers to the developing political ideology of the colonists. Dickinson continued to describe his idealistic version of a small independent farmer. He wrote, "My farm is small; my servants are few, and good; I have a little money at interest; I wish no more; my employment in affairs is easy; and with a grateful mind (undisturbed by worldly hopes or fears, relating to myself) I am completing the number of days allotted to me by divine goodness."⁴⁵ Dickinson later explained falsely representing himself as a small, independent farmer because he felt compelled to write his essays due to his strong sense of civic virtue.

After no one else came forth to shed light on the objectionable actions of the British Parliament, which assaulted the liberties of the colonists, Dickinson reluctantly took pen in hand to enlighten the American public concerning the impending danger they faced. In his letter concerning the Townshend Acts, Dickinson used his knowledge of history to bolster his argument against the duties placed on manufactured goods. The Carthaginians, according to Dickinson, decreed that the Sardinians could not grow corn and were only allowed to import it from the Carthaginians. He wrote that "whenever the oppressed people made the least movement to assert their liberty, their tyrants starved them to death or submission." The most important question concerning the new taxes levied by the Townshend Acts, Dickinson contended, was whether parliament could legally impose duties "to be paid by the people of these colonies only, for the sole purpose of raising a revenue. . . ." He concluded, "If they can, our boasted liberty is but a sound and nothing else."⁴⁶

In letter VI, Dickinson continued to warn the colonists to remain ever vigilant concerning their liberty. He reminded them of the Caesars, who, in his words, "ruined the Roman liberty, under the titles of tribunical and dictatorial authorities." James II, Dickinson wrote, "talked of liberty" when he "meant to establish popery." The idea that liberty always faced danger from attempts of rulers to increase their power resounded throughout this essay. Dickinson warned, "All artful rulers, who strive to extend their power beyond its just limits, endeavor to give their attempts as much semblance of legality as possible. Those who succeed them may venture to go a little further; for each new encroachment will be strengthened by a former."⁴⁷

The influence of Dickinson's political essays spread throughout North America. The pieces were presented in pamphlet form and distributed, reprinted in major newspapers in the colonies, and collected and published together. His "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer" espoused almost all of the concepts that made up American republican thought in 1767. He praised the small independent farmer, warned against the English government's attacks on liberty, repeatedly cautioned colonists to remain vigilant against the dangers of a standing army in time of peace, and reminded his readers that history contained many examples of others who had lost their liberty by failing to recognize and guard against the evil, corrupting nature of power.

As the British government enacted more measures affecting the colonists and the colonists responded with often-rebellious actions, Americans began to embrace openly the ideals of republicanism. These concepts, including elements of ancient republican principles of Greeks and Romans, the Whiggish Country discourse of seventeenth-century British politics, and the enlightened ideals of men such as Locke bound the disparate settlers of British North America together as they moved ever closer to a break with Great Britain. Revolutionary-era republicanism brought Americans together as they prepared to fight a common enemy. It was a time to put aside earlier social, political, and economic differences in favor of a moralistic set of ideals that bound the colonies together. American Revolutionary republicanism provided justification for Americans to proceed in their righteous struggle against a corrupt and unjust government that had tried to enslave them.

⁴⁵ John Dickson, "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer," in *The Writings of John Dickinson*, vol. 1, Political Writings, 1762-1774, ed. Pail Liecester Ford, Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1889, 307.

⁴⁶ John Dickinson, "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer," 321-2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 345-6.

In due course, Americans fought and won the Revolutionary War, and American republicanism, the unifying discourse in the years leading up to the American Revolution and throughout the war years, lost its power to hold the new nation together. The central government under the Articles of Confederation, as well as the early state constitutions, reflected the former colonists' republican beliefs. Now, without a common enemy to oppose, the idealistic tenets of Revolutionary-era republicanism lost their appeal to many Americans. Gordon Wood maintains that it was during this time that some Americans came to doubt the feasibility of operating a government according to the republican ideals, which had been so popular during the period just prior to independence.⁴⁸ Tristan Dalton, one of many Americans discontented with the lack of effectiveness of the new government, expressed his disappointment in the Articles of Confederation in a letter to John Adams in 1786. He wrote, "No people ever had a fairer opportunity to be what they anxiously wished to be – none ever neglected their interest more." Dalton clearly recognized the lack of unity among the members of the new nation. "From the seeds of division among us, much is to be dreaded."⁴⁹ Dalton's pessimistic comments concerning the state of the new nation reflected a growing disillusionment with the government. Even before the first federal charter took effect in 1781, individuals drafted proposals to amend the Articles of Confederation. Since amending them required unanimous approval, it proved virtually impossible to do so. Support for the national government lagged far behind commitment to state and local authorities. With no eminent threat to liberty, the cohesion and patriotic enthusiasm of the 1770s vanished. No amendment proposed by the legislative body of the Continental Congress ever passed; therefore, prominent leaders in several states began to cast about for ways to reform the national government. Virginia called for a meeting of representatives of all states to discuss interstate commerce. Although this meeting, called the Annapolis Convention, attracted delegates from only five states, it set the stage for a convention to be held during May in Philadelphia. This meeting, later called the Constitutional Convention, led to the creation of a government under a newly written Constitution.⁵⁰

On February 21, 1787, the Confederation Congress adopted a resolution authorizing the convention. Congress's mandate empowered delegates to revise the Articles of Confederation. From the initial meeting, and even before they actually gathered in Philadelphia, it was understood by many of the participants that the convention would ignore the legitimate purpose of the gathering and create a new Constitution.⁵¹ From May 25 until September 17, 1787, delegates grappled with the problems of creating a new government. Disagreements abounded and careful political maneuvering and skillful compromises were necessary to reach an agreement. There was never unanimous approval of the new constitution among the convention members, and five delegates refused to sign the finished document. As the procedure for forming a new government moved into the ratification stage, two groups appeared: Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Federalists supported the new Constitution and Anti-Federalists opposed it. Both groups used the still popular Revolutionary-era republican rhetoric to bolster their positions.

Pamphlets, articles, and open letters, which were circulated and often printed in newspapers, relied upon Revolutionary-era discourse to convince the population to vote for delegates who would accept or reject the new Constitution. Federalists, those who supported the Constitution, couched their arguments in the popular republican language and argued that the liberty so recently won would not be compromised by the new Constitution. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison wrote a series of essays in support of the Constitution. These essays, collectively known as *The Federalist Papers*, supported the concept that the Constitution allowed the Federal government very limited powers that were plainly expressed.⁵² Following ratification of the Constitution, those who opposed the direction of the new government used the *Federalist Papers* to remind members of the government of their promises concerning the limits of the new United States government.

⁴⁸ Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1972, 430.

⁴⁹ Tristan Dalton to John Adams, Boston, July 11, 1786, in John Adams, vol.5 of *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961, 246.

⁵⁰ Jack N. Rakone, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997, 25-33.

⁵¹ Patrick Henry refused to represent Virginia at the convention because he knew something other than amending the Articles was afoot. His reason for refusing was that he "smelt a rat."

⁵² New York State presented the strongest opposition to the new Constitution and a public relations campaign began to win their support for the Constitution. Hamilton, Jay, and Madison shared the pen name Publius as they bombarded New Yorkers with pro-constitution rhetoric. Many argue that the *Federalist Papers* had little positive impact on the ratification process; however, these collected essays gave politicians an authoritative interpretation of the Constitution after it was adopted.

The Anti-Federalists opposed ratification of the Constitution, and responded to the avalanche of pro-Constitutional propaganda. Elbridge Gerry, George Mason, Samuel Bryan, Richard Henry Lee, and Luther Martin wrote the most widely circulated Anti-Federalist literature.⁵³ Anti-Federalists were not an organized or united group who shared consistent political ideals. They came from diverse regional, social, and economic backgrounds. Parts of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas strongly opposed ratification. Basic elements shared by Anti-Federalists were their opposition to the Constitution and the use of republican language to defend their stance. Aristocrats in Virginia and struggling yeoman farmers in Pennsylvania turned to the republican rhetoric of the Revolution to fight against ratification. This discourse could be effectively used by both those who thought the government was too democratic and those who believed it was not democratic enough. James Madison characterized the Anti-Federalists in a letter to Jefferson, by stating, “They had no plan whatever. They looked no farther than to put a negative on the Constitution. . . .”⁵⁴ Madison’s statement was true; Anti-Federalists never called a convention to form an alternative constitution, nor did they band together in any organized fashion.

The Anti-Federalists did not argue that changes in the government under the Articles of Confederation were unnecessary; however, they tended to defend the status quo and resist all sweeping changes. A number of those opposing ratification of the new Constitution did so on the ground that “whatever is old is good.”⁵⁵ Anti-Federalists viewed themselves as defenders of the pure republican principles of the Revolutionary era, and they argued that these ideals were embodied in the Articles of Confederation. In the first Brutus essay, readers were asked, “whether a confederated government be the best for the United States or not?” The treatise contended that the present form of government was more suitable for the young nation.⁵⁶ Those in favor of the new Constitution, according to Anti-Federalists, desired to adopt a new form of government based on concepts that differed from the principles of the Revolution. Patrick Henry, in a speech before the Virginia Ratifying Committee, urged Virginia to consider the gravity of approving a new Constitution. He declared, “Here is a revolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain. It is as radical, if in this transition our rights and privileges are endangered, and the sovereignty be relinquished: And cannot we plainly see, that this is actually the case?”⁵⁷ Many Anti-Federalists represented a type of republicanism that stridently opposed the attempts to create a national government that would in any way negate the authority of state governments. Elbridge Gerry noted the consolidating tendency of the Constitution. He insisted that “The Constitution proposed has few if any *federal* features, but it is rather a system of *national* government.”⁵⁸ Disagreements over who were the true federalists reveal the difficulty of defining the beliefs of Federalists and Anti-Federalists. The rhetoric of both those who supported and those who opposed the Constitution reflected the popularity of republican discourse, with each group using the language of republicanism as it attempted to sway American opinion on the Constitution.

⁵³ Saul Cornell argues that historians must consider how widely publicized essays, letters, and pamphlets were in order to achieve a true picture of Anti-Federalist sentiment. He compiled lists showing the most often published Anti-Federalist works and maintains that these were more representative of the main segment of the population. Print culture, according to Cornell, united the Anti-Federalist’s movement and provided them with “a shared language and common set of criticisms.” Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition, 1788-1828*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 28.

⁵⁴ James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, New York, February 19, 1788. James Morton Smith, ed., *The Republic of Letters: Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776-1826*, vol. 1, New York: W. W. Norton, 1995, 529.

⁵⁵ Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists were For: The Political Thought of the Opponents of the Constitution*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 7.

⁵⁶ The Brutus Essays were a series of sixteen writings that appeared in the *New York Journal* at the same time that the Federalists essays were published. They were probably written by Robert Yates, a New York judge. These essays were widely quoted and reprinted all over the United States, but they were never published in pamphlet form. Ralph Ketcham, ed., *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, New York: Penguin Putnam, 1986, 269.

⁵⁷ Patrick Henry, June 5, 1788, “Speech to Virginia Ratifying Convention,” in Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 5, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981, 215.

⁵⁸ Rather ironically, Anti-Federalists did not oppose government of a federal character. They argued that under the Articles of Confederation representatives of a group of sovereign and independent states met and handled a limited range of common issues. This system depended largely on the cooperation of the states. Under the federal system of government the balance of power shifted to the state. Many opponents of the Constitution resisted the label Anti-Federalists and rarely used it to describe themselves. As the ratification progress progressed the term federal was also used to refer to those in favor of the new government. Strictly speaking, the term nationalist more clearly represents the sentiments of proponents of the Constitution. Cornell: *The Other Founders*, 165.

Anti-Federalists believed that only if state governments had primacy could liberty be preserved. Patrick Henry, in a speech filled with solemn warnings of dire consequences, admonished the delegates of the Virginia ratifying Convention to reject the new Constitution. “We are come hither to preserve the poor Commonwealth of Virginia, if it can be possibly done; something must be done to preserve your liberty and mine.”⁵⁹ Behind the concept that states were more fit to govern and better prepared to protect individual freedom than the national government lay the belief that the republican form of government could only be successful in small territories. Antifederalists were obsessed with the dangerous aspects of power. Just as Americans in 1776 had fought against the corrupting and ever expanding evils of power, which would rob them of their liberty, Anti-Federalists in 1787 contended that the Constitution posed the same threat to their freedom that British policy had prior to the Revolution. The fears of Revolutionary leaders passed to the Anti-Federalists, and later to men like Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph of Roanoke, who so fiercely clung to the republican principles of the 1760s and 1770s. These two men were often referred to as part of a group called the Old Republicans, who, like the revolutionaries and Anti-Federalists, perceived threats lurking behind every political bush and remained vigilant against them.⁶⁰

Fear of too much government power was a major concern of the Anti-Federalists and it closely reflected the fears of Americans prior to the Revolution. Anti-Federalists warned that even a good man could be corrupted by power and an executive could make himself king and take away all of the liberties and freedoms Americans now enjoyed. Anti-Federalists also worried that the judicial branch gave primacy to national courts and would undermine the integrity of state courts. By placing so much power in the hands of individual judges the danger of corruption increased, and the corrupting influence of power, according to republicanism, must always be guarded against. Anti-Federalists contended that the lack of control of the House and Senate, especially the length of Senate terms and lack of term limits, would lead to the development of an American aristocracy. Another problem with the new Constitution, according to Anti-Federalists, was that it gave the national government too great powers in regards to the enactment of taxes. These powers not only oppressed citizens, they also threatened the authority of the state governments. The intense fear of standing armies in time of peace caused Anti-Federalists to complain that the new Constitution did nothing to prohibit the national government from creating and maintaining a national army. This possibility coupled with the fear of a corrupt executive led to dire predictions about the fate of America liberty.⁶¹

Among the names of prominent Anti-Federalists, especially the southern elite opposition to the Constitution, one finds close connections to two primary defenders of Revolutionary-era republicanism: Nathaniel Macon, who while serving in the North Carolina state legislature, disapproved adoption of the Constitution, and John Randolph of Roanoke, whose family participated in the attempt to deny ratification of the Constitution in Virginia. His stepfather, St. George Tucker, and his uncles Dr. Theoderick Bland and Thomas Tudor Tucker, helped to lead the fight in the Commonwealth against the new national government.⁶² Randolph acknowledged his early political influences in a letter to Josiah Quincy, a member of the House from Massachusetts. Randolph stated, “You know I was an Anti-Federalist when hardly breeched.”⁶³ Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph serve as excellent examples of statesmen who remained faithful to and defended the tenets of Revolutionary-era republican beliefs throughout their entire lifetimes.

Both men spent most of their adulthood as members of Congress, Macon representing North Carolina and Randolph representing Virginia. Following their public careers allows a continuous view of the fate of Revolutionary-era republicanism during the politically unsettled Early National Period.

In many ways, Macon and Randolph’s backgrounds were similar for they both had roots in the Old Dominion and were slaveholders from the tobacco-growing South with Anti-Federalist leanings. In other instances, they differed: Macon’s family background though not as illustrious as Randolph’s was quite respectable. Macon, sixteen years older than Randolph, fought in the Revolutionary War, while Randolph was a young man “still in short pants” during the fighting.

⁵⁹ Patrick Henry, June 5, 1788, “Speech to Virginia Ratifying Convention,” in Storing, *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 5, 215.

⁶⁰ Jack Rakove, 149-50.

⁶¹ Saul Cornell, 28-34.

⁶² Dodd, 54-5.

⁶³ John Randolph to Josiah Quincy, 1813, quoted in Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts*, Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1857, 337.

Despite their differences in age and economic circumstances, they held a strong commitment to the republican ideals formulated before the American Revolution. A glimpse into the personal history of these men sheds light on their political lives.

The Macon family had roots in Virginia's tobacco country. Gideon Macon, claimed connections with many of Virginia's prominent families.⁶⁴ He migrated to the frontier of North Carolina and in the 1730s settled on the Roanoke River, lured by the availability of cheap fertile land. Tobacco, the main money crop in the Old Dominion took a heavy toll on the soil, and much of the available farmland in the state had been "worn out." After crossing the Virginia border onto the North Carolina wilderness, Gideon Macon soon married the daughter of another former Virginia planter and eventually managed to amass landholdings amounting to 3,000 acres and around thirty slaves.

Gideon and his wife, Priscilla, also produced a large family consisting of four daughters and an equal number of sons. Nathaniel was the sixth child to be born to the couple. William Dodd, in his 1908 biography, records Nathaniel's date of birth as December 17, 1758.⁶⁵ Gideon Macon died in 1763 leaving his widow to raise their large brood and manage the plantation. Although, as was usually the case in colonial North America in the eighteenth century, Gideon's widow soon remarried, and she also managed young Nathaniel's inheritance quite well. The two tracts of land left to him by his father were in excess of five hundred acres. His father's bequest also included three slaves and Gideon Macon's prized blacksmith tools. Not a princely inheritance by any means, but a respectable base on which Macon through hard work and diligent attention was able to greatly enlarge.

Even though Nathaniel Macon spent his early years in a sparsely settled frontier settlement, his mother saw to it that he received an education.⁶⁶ Following her marriage to James Ransom, Priscilla continued to attend to the welfare of her children vigilantly, and insuring that her sons received an education befitting their position was quite important. Therefore, to that end, she, along with a neighbor, Philemon Hawkins, hired a young man from Pennsylvania, Charles Pettigrew, to open a school. He operated the small school from 1766 until 1773, and young Nathaniel and his brothers attended during this time.⁶⁷ In 1774, the teen-aged boy left the backwoods of North Carolina to attend the College of Princeton in New Jersey. Here, he joined his older brother, John, and two of his former classmates from the Pettigrew School. Macon's college career began during a time of severe unrest in the colonies, and details of the two years spent at Princeton under the tutelage of John Witherspoon remain quite sketchy. No record can be found of the courses he undertook, or any other details of his studies. In 1776, when war broke out between England and its American colonies, Macon joined the New Jersey militia for an undetermined amount of time. Information concerning his participation in New Jersey's militia is unavailable, and he does not mention being involved in any battles in his brief memoir. The Revolutionary War interrupted his studies at Princeton, as the college closed in 1777, resulting in Macon's return to his home in Bute County.

He did not resume his studies at Princeton following the end of the war; however, Macon began to study law immediately upon his return to North Carolina.⁶⁸ Although many blank spaces exist in Nathaniel Macon's early life history, evidence abounds to show that he acquired more than just a rudimentary education. He knew Latin, the English common law, and history. His letters and speeches reflect more than an adequate command of the English knowledge of history.

In 1779, Bute county split, creating two new counties: Franklin and Warren, and in this same year Macon reached his majority and took control of the estate left him by his father. He continued to study law until May 1779, when he enlisted in the North Carolina militia.

⁶⁴ Gideon Macon was distantly related to both Martha Custis Washington and James Madison. His father had been a tobacco planter in eastern Virginia. William E. Dodd, *The Life of Nathaniel Macon*, Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1908, 1-2.

⁶⁵ Dodd, 3. Macon believed himself to be born in 1758 and an entry in the Macon family Bible confirms this; however the year of his birth is listed as 1757 in several other sources. James Helms's dissertation, "The Early Career of Nathaniel Macon and Thomas Hart Benton's *Thirty Year View* both use the 1757 date.

⁶⁶ North Carolina was quite sparsely populated at the time of Macon's birth and throughout his youth. Indeed, in 1764 the largest town in the piedmont region of the state had only about forty inhabitants and there was no town at all in Bute County where Nathaniel's family resided.

⁶⁷ Charles Pettigrew accepted the position of schoolmaster to the Macon and Hawkins children in 1766. He later left to accept the position of principal of the Academy of Edenton. Eventually, Pettigrew was selected as the first Bishop-elect of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina.

⁶⁸ Autobiographical sketch of Nathaniel Macon, undated, Macon Papers, Duke University Library.

The state had been spared direct military involvement in the early years of the American Revolution. Then, following the successful British siege of Charleston, South Carolina, British General Cornwallis and his forces planned an invasion of North Carolina. Because of the British capture of continental forces at Charleston, North Carolina was totally dependent on its militia for protection.⁶⁹ The eminent danger to his beloved state spurred Macon into action and he immediately joined a newly formed Warren County militia unit. His brother, John, who had only recently returned from Valley Forge, was elected as Captain of the Warren Militia.⁷⁰ When Harrison Macon joined the militia, three brothers were serving to protect their state from British invasion. Nathaniel refused an offered commission, and true to his ideals, concerning civic responsibilities never accepted any compensation for his military service.

During Macon's brief stint in the New Jersey militia, no evidence exists that he saw any military action; however, the same is not true of his tour of duty in the Warren County militia. Macon fought the British in South Carolina in 1780 at the Battle of Camden, when the American forces, which consisted of regiments of the Continental army and militia units from North Carolina, and South Carolina, and Virginia. The British troops greatly outnumbered the colonials and they were soundly defeated. Macon's militia unit faced a series of humbling defeats in the winter of 1781. In February Macon, a young man who had not long since reached his majority, learned of his election to the North Carolina state senate. Initially, because of his military responsibility, Macon refused to accept the position. An anecdote contained in a July 4 speech given by Thomas S. Pittman at a ceremony for the unveiling of a monument honoring Macon contends that the commander of his unit sought out Nathaniel and asked why he declined to take his seat in the state senate. Macon reportedly replied, "He had seen the faces of the British many times, but he had never seen their back, and he meant to stay in the army until he did."⁷¹ Whether Macon actually participated in any action that drove back the British is uncertain, but in the spring of 1781, the British under the command of General Cornwallis bloodied by North Carolina troops, decide to move his forces to Yorktown, Virginia.

By the time the second session of the North Carolina Senate met in June 1781, Macon had taken his seat. He attended the General Assembly but returned to his militia unit when the Assembly adjourned. Officially, he remained a member of his militia unit until November 30, 1782. During his four years as a representative of Warren County in the North Carolina State Senate, Macon began to put into effect his strongly held republican ideals. He stressed economic prudence within the government by opposing a raise in the amount of money paid to members of the general assembly.⁷² Macon's service in the North Carolina General Assembly prepared him for a successful congressional career in the federal government, and he would unwaveringly follow the same republican course throughout his thirty-seven years in the United States Congress. The meaning of republicanism shifted and changed from the Revolutionary era through the early national period; however, Macon clung tightly to the republican ideas of the eighteenth century. His personal life and political career emphasize his deep commitment to republican precepts of the Revolutionary era.

At the same time Macon was serving in the North Carolina General Assembly, he met Hannah Plummer and they were married on October 9, 1783. Macon and his bride resided on a small farm, called Buck Springs, he had inherited from his father. Macon quickly settled into life as a tobacco farmer, and in 1785, he left the state Senate and intended to retire fully from the political arena and devote his life to raising his family and becoming a successful planter. Macon's dreams of living an isolated life on his Warren farm were not to be. The outside world continued to intrude and in 1787, the citizens of his district elected Macon to the Continental Congress. He refused to serve and became a strong opponent of ratification of the new Constitution. He and his brothers fiercely opposed the adoption of the Constitution, and only after the promise of the addition of a Bill of Rights did their resistance end.

⁶⁹ John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 98.

⁷⁰ John Macon, Nathaniel's older brother, had joined the Continental Army in 1776 and fought under Washington's command prior to returning to Warren County. His experience and his family standing explain his easy election as captain. Dodd, 21.

⁷¹ Pittman, Thomas S. "Nathaniel Macon: An Address on the Occasion of the Unveiling of a Monument to Mr. Macon at Guilford Battle Ground, July 4, 1902, Greensboro: Guilford Battlefield Company, 1902, 4.

⁷² Alethea Jane Macon, comp. *Gideon Macon of Virginia and His Descendants*, Jarvis Wood, ed., Washington: Wilkes Publishing Co., 1981, 30.

Macon's plans for an idyllic country life surrounded by his wife and children ended in 1790 with two important events; the death of his wife Hannah and his election to the North Carolina House of Commons. He left the solitude of his beloved Buck Springs plantation to become an active participant in the governance of his state and the new country.

In 1791, Macon took his place in the federal House of Representatives, a position he would hold for the next twenty-four years. As the elected delegate for the Halifax district of North Carolina, Macon arrived in Philadelphia on October 24, 1791, to assume his position in the Second Congress. Participation in the national government was unknown to him; however, he carried with him legal training, business management skills acquired in running Buck Spring, and experience in state government. Macon was not a worldly man; he lacked expertise in matters of foreign diplomacy and the workings of the federal government; nonetheless, he brought with him to Philadelphia a well-defined sense of American Revolutionary-era republicanism and a strong devotion to its principles. He lived his life according to these tenets and strove to keep the government of the United States on a course that upheld them. After almost a decade passed, John Randolph of Roanoke joined Macon as a member of the United States House of Representatives and the two worked diligently to preserve the republican ideals of the Revolutionary era.

Any attempt at understanding John Randolph of Roanoke requires an examination into his background. He was born into the Virginia gentry on June 3, 1773, at Cawson's, the large and prosperous plantation of his maternal grandparents. His father, a wealthy planter, died when Randolph was only three, leaving his wife, Frances Bland Randolph, to manage his debt encumbered estate and three young sons. Although, John Randolph left his estate in Matoax (just outside of Petersburg, in Chesterfield County, Virginia) to Frances, for reasons of her own she spent much of her widowhood living under her parents' roof. She remained a widow for only two years. In the autumn of 1778, she married St. George Tucker, a native of Bermuda, who had immigrated to Virginia in 1772, where he attended the College of William and Mary and studied law under the tutelage of George Wythe. Before his marriage to Frances Randolph, St. George Tucker and his brother, Thomas Tudor Tucker of Charleston, South Carolina, became very involved in the struggle between England and her colonies. Tucker, before leaving Williamsburg and returning to Bermuda at his father's insistence, informed both Thomas Jefferson and Peyton Randolph of an unguarded magazine of gunpowder in Bermuda. During the summer of 1776, two ships, one from Virginia and the other from Charleston, South Carolina sailed into the port at St. George, raided the magazine and confiscated 112 barrels of gunpowder and sailed away undetected. The distinguished Tucker family fell under suspicion in Bermuda and this caused a great deal of embarrassment to the elder Tucker, who granted St. George permission to return to Virginia, which he did in December 1776. Upon his arrival, he was welcomed as a hero. Finding the practice of law none too profitable, Tucker, upon his return to Virginia, became involved in trade between Bermuda and Virginia. His business ventures proved successful and his reputation as a supporter of the revolutionary cause grew. In the spring following his marriage to Frances Randolph, he enlisted in a Virginia militia unit in Williamsburg, but after the imminent threat of invasion passed, he returned to Matoax, and lived there with his growing family until early 1781.⁷³

In January, British ships rendezvoused in the Chesapeake Bay carrying troops for an invasion of Virginia. The infamous traitor, Benedict Arnold, now a brigadier general in the British army, led the invading troops. With Arnold's forces moving in the direction of Matoax, Tucker decided to evacuate his growing family to safer quarters. After a three-week stay at Wintopoke, the family began a difficult mid-winter journey to Bizarre, the Randolph estate located in the central Virginia county of Cumberland.

After safely depositing his family at Bizarre, Tucker returned to the war and served as a major in command of a militia detachment, sent to aid General Nathaniel Green's troops in North Carolina. Safety and tranquility evaded Frances Tucker and her children at the Bizarre plantation and news of the British advance on bordering Prince Edward County caused the family to flee to the Roanoke Plantation in Charlotte County.⁷⁴ It was an isolated and lonely place where only slaves lived. There was no white overseer and only a two-room log cabin to shelter Frances and her brood.

⁷³ Matoax was the plantation in Chesterfield County, Virginia that the elder John Randolph had bequeathed his wife, Frances Bland Randolph for life. It was a large property consisting of about 1305 acres and was so heavily encumbered with debt that John Randolph and his older brother, Richard were eventually forced to sell an attempt to save the rest of their inheritance. Hugh A. Garland, *Life of John Randolph of Roanoke*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, 60.

⁷⁴ The Randolph holdings on the Roanoke River had been bequeathed to John Randolph and his brother Theoderick, and this was the first time they had ever visited it.

This rather unusual arrangement of unsupervised slaves had often brought complaints from the other farmers who had settled the area. Roanoke plantation produced enough to support and maintain the large slave population, but otherwise was not profitable. It did offer sanctuary to the family and Huch Garland, an early Randolph biographer contended that it was at this time John developed his bond with the rough and largely untamed Roanoke Plantation.

According to Garland, while at the isolated Charlotte County property, the young John Randolph rode over the farmlands and at one point they stopped and Frances counseled her son concerning his holdings. "Johnny" she said, "all of this belongs to you and your brother Theoderick; it is your father's inheritance. When you get to be a man you must not sell your land; it is the first step to ruin for a boy to part with his father's home: be sure to keep it as long as you live. Keep your land and your land will keep you."⁷⁵ Evidently, Randolph remembered his mother's admonition, and combined it with his republican belief that property ownership was the safeguard against dependence. Throughout his life, he never sold his land, only added acreage to his beloved Roanoke Plantation.

Soon after the hurried flight to the Charlotte County backwoods, the family deemed it safe to return to Bizarre, the more hospitable plantation in Cumberland County. Frances and her brood remained there until the fighting came to an end with Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, at which time they traveled back to Matoax.

The elder John Randolph had stressed the importance of education in his will and directed that his sons be "educated in the best manner without regard to expense as far as their fortunes allow, even to the last shilling."⁷⁶ The boys, because of war-related disruptions, had received little formal education before 1782, although it is known that their mother and stepfather had schooled them. In 1782, their uncle, who had been charged by his brother-in-law's will to see to their education, gave up hopes of finding a suitable tutor and enrolled all three Randolph boys, Richard, Theoderick, and John in Walker Maury's school. Maury, a graduate of William and Mary, with a reputation for a quick temper and heavy hand operated a grammar school, first located in Orange County. The school was soon moved to Williamsburg. With the closing of Maury's school in Orange, John and his brothers enrolled in the new school in Williamsburg. They boarded at the school and were often victims of Maury's ill temper. After attending the school in Williamsburg for about one year, John's health seems to have become a concern and his parents sent him to Bermuda to live with his stepfather's family, in hope that the change in climate would strengthen him. Here he lived for about a year and during part of that time his mother and the entire Matoax family joined him on the island. Frances Tucker's health was failing, probably due to the frequent and numerous pregnancies she experienced, and her husband thought the trip might help her recover her strength and vitality. After their return to Virginia, John with his brother, Theoderick, once again enrolled in the Maury school but soon thereafter, the disturbing reports of the schoolmaster's abusive behavior, and an especially severe beating Theoderick had received at Maury's hand led both Bland and Tucker to agree that the boys should be immediately removed from the school.

Randolph's political education began at home and was steeped in the principles of American Revolutionary-era republicanism. The influential men of his family molded his political beliefs: his stepfather St. George Tucker, a well-respected jurist, Dr. Theodorick Bland, his maternal uncle, who fought under Washington's command during the Revolutionary War and later served in the first U S Congress, and Thomas Tudor Tucker, a staunch anti-Federalist who later represented South Carolina in the First and Second Congress, all contributed to the early political education of John Randolph. Both his stepfather and relative Edmund Randolph had served as delegates to the Annapolis Convention in September 1786. Although Edmund Randolph was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and introduced the Virginia Plan, he refused to sign the document by the time it was adopted, because he felt it was not sufficiently republican.

He changed his mind yet again and supported the Constitution and served as the nation's first Attorney General and assumed the post of Secretary of State following Jefferson's resignation in 1794. The inconsistency of Edmund Randolph's actions also made an impact on John Randolph, for he had little respect for men who, in his opinion, were not true to their convictions. The influential men closest to Randolph opposed the creation of a new federal government under the new constitution. St. George Tucker and Dr. Theodorick Bland both openly and vigorously opposed its ratification.

⁷⁵ John Randolph was known to the people of Charlotte County as Jack. Hugh Garland, *Life of John Randolph*, vol.1, Philadelphia: 1850, 2.

⁷⁶ Will of John Randolph, the Elder, Clerk's Office, Petersburg, Virginia.

The constitutional question held the attention of much of the nation when John and Theodorick Randolph left Virginia and traveled to New Jersey to begin attending a grammar school operated by the small New Jersey Presbyterian College at Princeton.⁷⁷

Randolph's early letters show that he was quite content with his situation at Princeton. Then during the first month of 1788, their stepfather called John and Theodorick home due to their mother's poor health. Frances Bland Tucker died, apparently from complications following childbirth before her sons arrived. Following their mother's death, Richard, Theoderick, and John remained at home until June. For reasons of his own, Tucker decided that his stepsons would not return to Princeton. Instead, he enrolled all of Frances's sons in a tiny New York City college, Columbia. The three young men did not seem to be well pleased with their academic experience at Columbia but being able to observe the political history being made in the city thrilled John. He observed a Federalist parade that urged New Yorkers to accept the Constitution and wrote home about ratification arguments and debates swirling throughout the city. Randolph included detailed accounts of how New York was preparing for the new government and inserted his opinions on the politics of the day. In one letter he wrote, "The words Party, Tory, Anti, and Federalists compose the greater part of the conversation of this place."⁷⁸

John Randolph's connection to the new government was not merely the product of youthful curiosity. Two uncles, Thomas Tudor Tucker and Theodorick Bland were members of the first Congress and a more distant relative, Edmund Randolph, was the nation's Attorney General. Even though William Samuel Johnson, president of Columbia, resided in New York, his former constituents selected him to serve as senator from Connecticut. Randolph eagerly accepted invitations to dinners and gatherings from his family members and Dr. Johnson, and participated in the political discussions that occurred. His eagerness to involve himself in the conversations was not always welcomed and Dr. Johnson complained that John Randolph's exuberant interruptions were often irritating to his elders. In a letter to his stepfather, Randolph admitted that it was difficult for him to sit silently while others talked about such important matters.⁷⁹

Washington's inauguration took place on April 30, 1789, and Randolph was there to witness the event. His early letters concerning the new government were often enthusiastic, describing events such as the inauguration, and Washington's address, an occasion that made a lasting impression on Randolph, who would long remember it. Years later, he spoke of the day in a speech to his constituents. He said, "The Constitution was in its chrysalis state. I saw it—George Mason and Patrick Henry saw it—the poison under its ivy." Randolph wrote to his father and friends about other ceremonies; however, as the year progressed Randolph's correspondence showed him not just concerned with public events but also taking a close interest in the everyday business of Congress. Also evident in his letters was his intense feelings about efforts to strengthen the central government and disagreements with certain interpretations of the Constitution. His attendance at congressional sessions took priority over his college classes, and he wrote his stepfather regularly and kept him informed on the business of the Congress. He complained about the feeling of superiority members of the Senate had. They were, he wrote, "becoming worse every day, wanting higher pay for their services than that paid to the Representatives." Randolph believed that the basis of their demands for higher salaries rested on the fallacy that the "Senate was superior, while everyone should know that the people's representatives in the House were certainly more powerful than the members of the other chamber. Although he was only sixteen years old, Randolph had some very strong opinions about government and those involved in it.

He had sharp criticisms for the Vice-President, as he wrote that Adams was "continually filling the papers with encomiums on Titles and other such Nonsense."⁸⁰ In another letter, Randolph wrote again of Adams's disdain for anyone who could not speak Latin or French. Randolph noted that Adams made no reply when asked what he thought of General Washington since he understood neither language.⁸¹

⁷⁷ The grammar school was much like a modern prep school, which the college operated to prepare students prior to the matriculation.

⁷⁸ John Randolph to St. John Tucker, New York, March 1, 1789, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁷⁹ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, January 17, 1790, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸⁰ Randolph always maintained that the House of Representatives was the most honorable chamber of Congress and that only they truly represented the people. Randolph's dislike for John Adams was formed while he was just a teenager and continued throughout Randolph's entire life. John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, August 11, 1789, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, September 11, 1789. Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

Randolph became very dissatisfied with Columbia and wanted to return to Virginia to read law; however, his stepfather was not agreeable and instead arranged for him to reside in Philadelphia and read law under the tutelage of Attorney General Edmund Randolph. Philadelphia was now serving as the nation's temporary capital, and once again, John Randolph found himself located near the center of the new government.

As he had never been very keen on the idea of becoming a lawyer, the young Virginian spent more of his time attending sessions of Congress than studying law. His intense interest in politics was quite evident in his correspondence with St. George Tucker, and his connection to the Attorney General gave him greater access to the inner workings of the national government. Many of the people Randolph met during his stay in Philadelphia became major participants in the federal government, and in just a few short years, he, himself, would be a member of the House of Representatives.

Randolph continued to live in Philadelphia and maintained at least a pretense of studying law, but in 1792, he quit the city of brotherly love and headed for Virginia. He entered the College of William and Mary and studied law under Judge Tucker, but Randolph's time at the college ended abruptly when his actions led to his expulsion. An argument between Randolph and a fellow student, Robert Barraud Taylor, resulted in a duel, strictly forbidden by the institution. Immediately before the duel, Randolph had withdrawn from the college. When the two young men met on the field of honor, the first round proved unsatisfactory, so the men agreed to another attempt. The second exchange resulted in Taylor being shot in the leg. The two men before leaving the site of the duel reconciled their differences and maintained their friendship for the remainder of their lives.⁸²

Following the duel, Randolph returned to Bizarre, his brother's plantation in Cumberland. This visit could not have been very pleasant because of the recent scandal involving the Randolphs. Richard Randolph, John's older brother had married Judith Randolph (a not so distant cousin) and soon thereafter her younger, and by all accounts livelier and prettier sister, Nancy had come to live with them. While the Randolphs were visiting the Carter Page family at a nearby plantation, Nancy went into labor and gave birth to a child. Whether the child was Richard's or not has never been proven, but it seems highly likely that he was responsible for the pregnancy. Quite a stir was caused in the Page household the night of the child's birth, but Judith and Richard all claimed that Nancy was suffering from a fit of hysteria, which was not uncommon. Later, when rumors of infanticide circulated, the Randolphs denied a child was born; however, the fetus of a white male child had been found by slaves in the wood pile behind the Page home. Eventually, Richard was charged with murder and a sensational trial followed. It is quite evident that Judith, Nancy, and Richard all perjured themselves and denied there was ever a pregnancy or child, and since slaves could not testify against whites, the fact that a baby's body had been found could not be presented. Richard was acquitted but that did not stop the rumor mill from spreading real and imagined details concerning the private lives of those involved. When John arrived at Bizarre he testified in his brother's behalf at the murder trial. Even after Richard's acquittal, Nancy continued to live with her sister and brother-in-law at their Cumberland home. To say that the atmosphere in the household was awkward is a gross understatement. John stayed at his brother's for about one month before returning to Williamsburg. Tucker managed to convince John to journey back to Philadelphia and make one last attempt at studying law. John probably had little choice but to go back to his legal studies; he had not yet reached his majority, he could not enroll in William and Mary because of the duel, and for the proud young man the continuing gossip about his brother must have been terribly humiliating. In mid-July, Randolph arrived in the temporary United States capital. It was an unusually hot and dry July, and the political environment was equally heated as the French Revolution became the main topic of debate.

Many Americans felt pride because France, the greatest and most sophisticated power in continental Europe had decided to follow the shining American example and establish a new republican government. Others worried about how the wars in Europe would affect the United States due to the Treaty of Alliance, which was a defensive agreement between France and the United States, formed in the midst of the American Revolutionary War. It promised military support in case of attack by British forces indefinitely into the future. As the French Revolution became more radical, many of those who had admired it became disillusioned.

⁸² Lemmel Sawyer, *A Biography of John Randolph of Roanoke*, New York: 1844, 9.

Two distinct points of view concerning the revolution in France had been developing in the new American government since its inception. These views soon manifested themselves in the president's cabinet. Thomas Jefferson, Washington's Secretary of State, sided with the French and saw their revolution as an outgrowth of the American struggle for independence from Britain, and he supported abiding by the alliance with France. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, advocated maintaining a close relationship with the British. After they joined into a European coalition against revolutionary France, Hamilton favored breaking the Treaty of Alliance between the United States and France.

Young John Randolph was witness to much of the debate surrounding this issue. Around this time, Randolph's early political ideals began to harden into permanent and unshakeable rules for moral and ethical governance. He had shown in his letters to his stepfather and friends a preference for the Revolutionary era republican ideals since he was about seventeen years old. He had denounced the "monocratic" government he believed Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton was trying to create.

He rekindled his earlier friendship with Joseph Bryan, and together they watched as two competing political factions seemed to divide the nation. Initially, Bryan and Randolph were enthralled with the French Revolution and for a brief period addressed each other as citizen in their correspondence. John Randolph became so carried away with the French war that he even wrote requesting his stepfather's permission to proceed to France and fight with the Army of the Republic. After Congress adjourned for the session, Randolph returned to Virginia, and while there he passionately wrote, "I assure you, my dear father, that my heart is set on this scheme, and I dream of nothing else. I Think of nothing else. . . what life can be so glorious, what death can be so honorable? Then, as always, Randolph seemed confident of his own abilities and assured Tucker that "I should be able, by my own exertions to obtain an ensigney. I would not if I could get it wish for a higher post. . . I submit these things, my dear Sir, to your consideration, hoping that when you judge of them you will suppose yourself a single man of twenty. . . ." ⁸³ Although no reply to the letter exists, Tucker certainly must have denied John's exuberant request and the young man returned to Philadelphia in the middle of a yellow fever epidemic. His inability to join the French in their fight did not dim his enthusiasm for their cause. He complained to Tucker that he could not concentrate on "Old Coke" because his thoughts were "on the plains of Flanders, trembling with anxiety for a French victory."⁸⁴ Randolph's inattention to his studies may have also reflected the absence of Edmund Randolph, under whom John Randolph was supposed to be studying law, from the city. Edmund Randolph, as did many others, fled the city because of the epidemic.⁸⁵ Slowly, in the late fall of 1793, the city returned to normal, and the maneuvering of national politics resumed, while John Randolph continued to follow closely the political activities of the government, paying particular interest to Congress. His letters to Tucker showed his increasing interest and understanding of politics. In fact, his last year spent in Philadelphia had accomplished nothing in the way of advancing Randolph's legal education, but during that time his knowledge of the daily workings of the government had grown and he had perfected his own political philosophy. His political thoughts had matured to the point that he fully understood the federal system of government.

Then in April of 1794, Randolph left Philadelphia, and in June he celebrated his twenty-first birthday and all pretense of studying law ceased. As Randolph bid Philadelphia and his formal education adieu, he assumed full responsibility for his heretofore neglected plantation on the Roanoke River in Charlotte County, Virginia.

He took up residence at his brother's home in neighboring Cumberland County, which remained troubled by the backlash caused by the murder trial. Randolph now had to deal with the debts with which his inheritance had been encumbered. His brother Richard convinced him to allow the sale of Matoax, and with his share of the proceeds he began to pay off the debts against Roanoke Plantation. John Randolph spent about two years living at Bizarre while attending to his own plantation and playing the role of a southern gentleman.

⁸³ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, Matoax, May 25, 1793, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸⁴ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, Philadelphia, August, 25, 1793, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸⁵ The deadly disease that overtook Philadelphia was identified as Yellow Fever. In September approximately 1400 died and during the second week of October it hits its peak with 400 deaths being recorded in a five day period. After the first hard frost the epidemic began to die down and by November Dr. Benjamin Rush reported that the danger had passed. Dr. Rush to Mrs. Rush, Philadelphia, November 8, 1793, Lyman Butterfield, ed., *The Letters of Benjamin Rush*. Vol.II, Princeton: University Press, 1951, 742.

In January 1796, Randolph rode away from his brother's home in Cumberland to call upon old friends in the South. He accepted an invitation from Henry Middleton Rutledge to visit in South Carolina and his closest friend Joseph Bryan urged him to come to Georgia. Bryan promised, "You will find me on the seacoast with the best Spanish segars, and the best of liquors, good horses, and deer hunting in perfection." It seemed a proposition Randolph could not resist, and he saddled up his favorite mount, Jacobin, and set out on an 1800-mile adventure. He wrote exuberant letters to family and friends about his experiences, "the beautiful women, the gallant fellows" and the races Jacobin easily won. He continued southward to accept the hospitality of Joseph Bryan, where the Bryan family heartily entertained the young Virginian.⁸⁶ During his stay in Georgia, events unfolded that would later have a great impact on Randolph's political career.

While in Georgia, Randolph gained firsthand knowledge of Yazoo land deals. A few months before Randolph arrived, the Georgia state legislature had voted to sell over thirty million acres of land, which rested along the Yazoo River to a New England based land company. The price of the land was an unbelievably low one and one-half cent per acre. It soon came to light that all but one of Georgia's legislators had taken bribes from the land-speculating company. When details of the sale surfaced, a groundswell of public outrage emerged and at the next election the citizens of Georgia refused to return the incumbents to their positions. The newly elected state legislature burned the documents concerning the deal and rescinded the sale. Unfortunately, some of the Yazoo land had already been resold. The affair involved third parties. In years to come, after Randolph had been elected to the House of Representatives, Congress had to decide if the "Yazoo Land Deal" sales would be recognized. Randolph took his unwavering stand against any form of compensation to parties involved in the purchase, and throughout the remainder of his life one of the worst insults he could hurl at an unscrupulous person was to call him a Yazoo man.⁸⁷

After Randolph's tour of South Carolina and Georgia, he returned to Bizarre Plantation, and the life of a planter. While visiting family and friends in Petersburg he fell ill, but within a couple of weeks, John was well enough to return to Cumberland. Before he was halfway to Bizarre, he received word of Richard's death. John did not reach the plantation until after his brother's funeral. Richard's demise resulted in John taking over management of Bizarre in addition to the responsibilities of running his Roanoke plantation. This was an even more daunting task because his brother's property was heavily mortgaged and Richard's will freed all of his slaves, save the few who had belonged to Judith. Randolph's fear and hatred of debt can be attributed to republican tenets, but they were also a product of his personal experience. The added responsibility of his brother's obligations and his grief at the loss of a brother, he had always admired, plunged him into a deep depression, which lasted nearly two years.⁸⁸ He finally emerged from the dark period, but remained troubled by bouts of depression (some even say insanity) and an intense hatred of debt throughout the remainder of his life.

Just as Randolph had answered the call of familial responsibilities, he agreed to take up the burden of civic duties as well. When Abraham B. Venable announced his plans to retire from the House of Representatives, Creed Taylor, a prominent Virginia politician and lawyer, approached Randolph and urged him to turn his attention to politics. Taylor, who lived in Cumberland County and was a long-standing family friend of the Randolphs and served as a Virginia state senator, persuaded Randolph to stand for election to the House of Representatives.⁸⁹ Randolph, as was the custom, did nothing overtly in support of his own candidacy, and Taylor shouldered the primary responsibilities for Randolph's campaign. In March, Randolph emerged from the background and began making appearances throughout his district. One such appearance that helped kick start Randolph's campaign occurred on the first Monday in March, court day, in Charlotte County. Here, Randolph shared center stage with the ailing, but still powerful orator, Patrick Henry. Just as the sun set on the life of one Virginia statesman and famed orator, another one came onto the scene. Patrick Henry's speech drew spectators from all over Southside Virginia and he went on to win his election to the Virginia General Assembly, but died before ever taking his seat. Randolph was elected to the U S House of Representatives and began his long congressional career.

⁸⁶ John Randolph to Henry Middleton Rutledge, April 29, 1797, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

⁸⁷ C. Peter Magrath, *Yazoo: The Law and Politics in the New Republic*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966, 4-6.

⁸⁸ Garland, vol.1, 70.

⁸⁹ William Ewart Stokes, "Randolph of Roanoke: A Virginia Portrait, The early Career of John Randolph of Roanoke, 1773-1805", Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1955, 142.