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Republican Theory and Practice

AMERICANS of the early nineteenth century were enormously proud of their country and especially of their government. Unlike the European powers, the United States lacked such signs of national greatness as glittering cities, fabled ruins, or a polished literary culture. It boasted instead of popular self-government. Though the reality of self-government was ordinarily more limited than the rhetorical claims that were made for it, American politics was indeed unusually democratic for the age. At a time when representative institutions were struggling in Latin America, limited in Britain, and severely restricted on the Continent, the citizens of the United States enjoyed political and civil rights for the most part unavailable elsewhere.

Highly conscious of their achievements and their good fortune, Americans loudly proclaimed the superiority of their system and brashly invited the rest of the world to copy it. In his inaugural address in 1817, President James Monroe reflected a common, though immodest, sentiment when he urged his countrymen to remember "how near our Government has approached to perfection; that in respect to it we have no essential improvement to make; [and] that the great object is to preserve it in the essential principles and features which characterize it." Foreigners found this attitude maddeningly smug, but they could hardly escape the universal celebration of what Monroe grandly described as "the

principles of our republican Government." A good deal of insecurity lay behind this ceaseless bragging, but it accurately reflected the importance that Americans attributed to politics.

Americans called their system of government "republican" to contrast it to the aristocratic or monarchical governments that dominated Europe. At the simplest level, a republic was a country without a king, a nobility, or a system of hereditary legal privileges. In a republic, citizens were equal before the law and governed themselves through representative institutions. With a few exceptions, white men of the early nineteenth century assumed that women, children, and men of color could not qualify as full-fledged republican citizens, but the principle of equality between white men made political rights more widespread in the United States than in any major country in Europe.

Republicanism had deep intellectual roots, with important sources in English opposition politics of the eighteenth century, radical movements of the seventeenth century, Renaissance political theory, and the classical traditions of Greece and Rome. Most recently, Americans traced republicanism to the outcome of their own Revolution and glorified its success as the turning point of world history. As one typical Fourth of July orator put it in 1832, "the independence of the United States of America is not only a marked epoch in the course of time, but it is the end from which the new order of things is to be reckoned. It is the dividing point in the history of mankind; it is the moment of the political regeneration of the world."

In describing the benefits of republican government, Americans usually began with "liberty." In a typical tribute made in 1828, Edward Everett, a future U.S. senator from Massachusetts, hailed "the History of Liberty" as "the real history of man." As a concept, liberty was so important and self-evident that Americans rarely stopped to define it. At the very least, liberty implied that no white man would be subject to the arbitrary rule of another and that the community of white men might rule themselves by means of majority rule. The champions of liberty, spelling out their views in thousands of patriotic addresses, sermons, essays, and stump speeches, also used the term broadly to embrace other benefits of a free society: freedom of the individual to improve himself, both morally and materially; freedom from an established religion; freedom from a legally privileged aristocracy; freedom of expression

as defined by the federal and state constitutions. Most American spokesmen also added that liberty was not the same as "license," or the absence of all personal or social restraints. A cautious member of the Massachusetts constitutional convention of 1820–21 contrasted "a spirit of universal or unlimited liberty" with "the spirit of limited liberty; of reciprocal control," and other republican advocates would have agreed with him, at least in principle. Under a system of "constitutional" or "balanced" liberty, the rights of minorities would be as safe as those of the majority. Lawyers and politicians often differed, however, on how balances or limits ought to be applied to popular liberty. They often warned that liberty was fragile and easily endangered; if carried too far, efforts to protect liberty by limiting it could snuff it out instead.

In particular, good republicans feared "power," liberty's tyrannical opposite. If liberty was the promise of self-control in self-governing communities, power was the threat of control by others. Power was a terrible attribute of governments and private authorities that constantly sought to restrict what it did not control. The eighteenth-century English radicals John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon had expressed the relationship between liberty and power very eloquently in their well-read pamphlet series *Cato's Letters*, and Americans continued to heed their warnings in the early nineteenth century. "Liberty chastises and shortens power," "Cato" had warned, "therefore power would extinguish liberty, and consequently liberty has too much cause to be exceeding jealous and always upon her defense." Continuing to elaborate on the same classic themes, many American spokesmen put the eternal warfare between liberty and power at the center of their national history. "The love of liberty . . . grew with the growth, and strengthened with the strength, of the Colonies," a Virginia reformer declared to his state's constitutional convention in 1829. "It declared war, at last, not only against the *power* of the *King*, but against the *privilege* of the Noble, and laid the deep foundations of our Republic on *the sovereignty of the people* and *the equality of men*." Inspired by such sentiments, some Americans of the early nineteenth century sought to expand the sphere of liberty still further. At the very least, all agreed, the encroachment of power upon liberty must be resisted, lest power's pernicious appetites grow stronger.

The continual warfare between liberty and power made some

republicans seem unduly suspicious, even paranoid. The exceptionally cautious could sense a threat to liberty in the most innocent or practical developments: a reform in voting requirements, for example, or a plan for public education. Nevertheless, when liberty was protected by the proper balances, Americans described its effects as downright utopian. A South Carolina clergyman summed up a widespread optimism in 1825, when he pointed proudly to "the present flourishing state of our country, where liberty is happily blended with Government and Laws, where Agriculture, Commerce, and the Arts are making daily advances in improvement, where science is cultivated with care and success, and where religion . . . diffuses [its] benign influences through our widely extended country, among men of every rank and character."

To preserve the precarious balance between liberty and power, republicans laid heavy emphasis on what they called "virtue." A key republican concept, the idea of public virtue meant more than simple honesty; it implied a civic-minded willingness to set aside private interests for the sake of the common good. If citizens used their liberty to advance themselves ruthlessly at everyone else's expense, no one's liberty would be secure. President Andrew Jackson explained why in his Farewell Address of 1837. "No free government can stand without virtue in the people and a lofty spirit of patriotism," he declared. "If the sordid feelings of mere selfishness shall usurp the place which ought to be filled by public spirit, the legislation of Congress will soon be converted into a scramble for personal and sectional advantages," and the resulting discord could tear apart the Union. Republican theorists therefore hoped that virtuous citizens would remember that everyone's private interests would benefit in the long run if the common good came first. History seemed to teach that the Greek and Roman republics had fallen when their citizens lost their sense of virtue, and thoughtful Americans feared the same outcome for their own fragile venture in self-government. They accordingly looked upon virtue as the moral cement of republican society and sought to preserve it at all costs.

Like liberty itself, republican virtue was a very delicate quality that could survive only under special historical circumstances. It flourished in a middling state of civilization, when men were cultured enough to understand morality and reason, but not so sophisticated that luxury, commerce, and exploitation had enabled

the few to corrupt or dominate the many. Americans identified themselves with just such a middling state, just as they associated the Indians with savagery and their British contemporaries with excessive refinement. They used the word "corruption" to refer to the changes that could drag a nation from a pure and virtuous stage of cultivation to the state of decay when republicanism became impossible. As such, corruption could refer to specific misdeeds such as bribery, but its widest meaning applied to the social, economic, and moral changes that could undermine the basis of republican society.

Republicans thus identified corruption with social change, particularly those changes which might diminish the liberty of the individual freeholder. As heirs of the European Enlightenment, republicans saw links between men's moral states and their material circumstances and took it for granted that liberty and virtue required a favorable social and economic environment. Every theory of republicanism also implied a theory of political economy, though republicans differed over what this should be. According to Thomas Jefferson, for example, liberty could flourish only in an agricultural society where small proprietors tilled their own fields and formed the bulk of the body politic. "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people," Jefferson declared, "whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." By the same token, he insisted, the proportion of nonagricultural workers in a nation "is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption," for wage earners were controlled by their employers and lacked the independence that true virtue required. "Dependance begets subservience and venality," he wrote, "suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition." Spelling out beliefs that would continue to resonate powerfully in the minds of Andrew Jackson's followers, the Virginia philosopher thus explained that republicanism depended on agriculture. "While we have land to labor then," he concluded, "let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. . . . The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body."

Not all republicans shared Jefferson's views of the ideal society, but they did tend to agree that republicanism must rest on an

appropriate material foundation. "By hammer and hand, all arts do stand," proclaimed the banners of America's urban artisans, and the port cities of the young republic sustained large populations of skilled craft workers who insisted that their work was just as essential to republican society as farming. Other republican thinkers made room for an even larger cast of ideal citizens. Alexander Hamilton designed his economic program for the early federal government to appeal to the interests of merchants, creditors, and investors, arguing candidly that the Republic could never thrive without the friendship of commercial interests. Hamilton's vision would have particular relevance for the future opponents of Andrew Jackson. The seeds for future bitter quarrels were thus hidden in these various contrasting formulas for the political economy of an ideal republic.

Concerns over the corrupting effects of social change persisted long after the Revolutionary era and suffused political thinking in the years after the War of 1812. In the New York constitutional convention of 1821, Chancellor James Kent mournfully predicted that social change would almost certainly corrupt the nation's primitive simplicity. "We are no longer to remain plain and simple republics of farmers," he warned. "We are fast becoming a great nation, with great commerce, manufactures, population, wealth, luxuries, and with the vices and miseries that they engender." With no hope of halting this process of decay, the judge advocated a state senate based on landed property as a permanent check on the dangerous power of propertyless urban masses. Less conservative republicans saw greater dangers to liberty and virtue in different quarters, but they still worried constantly that social corruption could undermine the material basis for free government.

Republicanism in the young United States was therefore more than an abstract preference for popular government and a dislike of kings and nobles. It also included a disposition to see politics as a struggle between good and evil, expressed as the eternal warfare between liberty and power, virtue and corruption. It did not imply a tolerance for many and varied interests, each contending with the other for a place in the sun. Instead, when republicans of that era quarreled with one another, they tended to regard their opponents as enemies of liberty itself, not as rival interests having equal claims to public favor.

Distrust of contending interests fed republican suspicion of po-

litical organization and partisanship. In a pure republic, they believed, honest purposes would be honestly and independently pursued; only corrupt intentions would require an individual to scheme with others and to subordinate his personal judgment to the dictation of a political organization. Early American republicans used the terms "party" and "faction" almost interchangeably. If they no longer believed that organized political opposition was semitreasonous by definition, they uniformly regretted the appearance of political parties as a sign of republican degeneration. A profound antiparty spirit pervaded American politics at the outset and remained powerful through the Presidency of James Monroe.

Americans would eventually come to see their government as an arena for routine competition and compromise of contending interests, a political model that scholars call the "liberal" state. In this view, political parties would be accepted as normal. Though James Madison and others in the early national period had already begun to move toward a liberal theory of politics, such ideas were not fully elaborated or widely understood in the early nineteenth century. While republican politicians claimed to put a high value on conciliation and the common good, prevailing political attitudes tended to make compromise very difficult, if not impossible. Since each participant in a quarrel tended to view the interests of his constituents or himself as essential to the common good and those of his opponents as subversive of liberty itself, polemical controversies were frequent and vociferous.

The appeal of republican ideas spread far beyond the circle of an educated elite. Ordinary free Americans were conscious that republicanism offered them dignity denied elsewhere, and responded to public appeals that drew on this widespread conviction. No public figure spoke to the patriotism of ordinary citizens more eloquently than Major General Andrew Jackson, commander of the Tennessee state militia and eager proponent of war against Great Britain and her Indian allies. Calling for volunteers in 1812, Jackson summoned republican passions to address the central question of American national identity. "Who are we?" he asked his troops in an address that richly evoked the popular basis for American nationalism. "Are we the titled slaves of George the third? the military conscripts of Napolon the great? or the frozen peasants of the Rusian Czar? No," he thundered. "We are the

free born sons of america; the citizens of the only republick now existing in the world; and the only people on earth who possess rights, liberties, and property which the[y] dare call their own." Having distinguished Americans from all other peoples in the world, Jackson went on to propound the purposes of the war. "We are going to fight for the reestablishment of our national character," he explained, "misunderstood and vilified at home and abroad." The General mentioned impressment, free trade, and the conquest of Canada, but the emotional thrust of his message bore on the rights of free Americans, whom Jackson described as "*a free people compelled to reclaim by the power of their arms the right which god has bestowed upon them, and which an infatuated King has said they shall not enjoy*." The substance of the dispute mattered less to Jackson than the act of trespass and the impossibility of submission for a truly free people. In his eyes, the scruffiest frontiersman in Tennessee was better than all the "titled Slaves of George the third," and that belief gave the American Republic a central place in world history. Americans would long remember and celebrate Jackson's personal achievements in the ensuing conflict, but he won his widest following by combining his military talents with an appeal to a popular republican culture.

Republicanism could grasp the popular imagination so vividly because it was not an abstraction for the typical American freeholder. At the practical level, such a man could identify liberty as the independence he enjoyed as the owner of a farm or shop. Power, by contrast, was the total authority that a master could exercise over his dependents, whether they were slaves, servants, women, or children. Starting with a few simple principles, political theorists could develop some very sophisticated implications of republicanism, but political thinkers kept in touch with their followers because liberty had a concrete personal meaning.

As Americans' personal experiences changed, so too did their concept of liberty. In the time of the American Revolution, for example, citizens had accepted fundamental laws severely limiting the power of the popular will. State constitutions frequently established elaborate gradations of political rights and privileges, with a relatively open franchise for some offices, a stricter set of requirements to vote for others, and still higher requirements for holding office. Many officials were chosen by legislatures rather than voters, and legislative seats were frequently monopolized by

older and wealthier sections of each state. Governors exercised few powers and judges were carefully protected from political pressure. Tolerable at first, unequal restrictions on majority rule seemed less and less republican in the early nineteenth century. By the 1820s, "equality" was joining liberty as a central aspect of republicanism in the minds of many citizens.

A series of state constitutional amendments reflected these changing popular notions. Maryland took the lead in 1802 by extending the right to vote to all white men who met a residency requirement. South Carolina followed ten years later, and suffrage extension became commonplace in the 1810s and 1820s. Because the federal constitution ties voting eligibility in congressional elections to the requirements for voting for members of the most numerous house of a state's legislature, moreover, changes in the right to vote spilled over from state to federal politics.

Advocates of a wider franchise attacked some fundamental notions of eighteenth-century republicanism, including the belief that landed proprietors held a greater stake in society than others and should thus enjoy greater rights to protect what they owned. Did not the Declaration of Independence proclaim the equality of all men? "It is consequently a tyranny to endow one class of men with privileges which are denied to another," a Virginia essayist maintained. "It is erecting a landed aristocracy, ugly and deformed, in the sacred temple dedicated to freedom and the rights of man." In a rapidly changing economic environment, it was hard for conservatives to convince others that one form of property was more influential than another in persuading an owner to defend free government. Even impoverished laborers would support the state if it respected their fundamental equality. In the words of an 1829 petition from the landless citizens of Richmond, Virginia, "virtue [and] intelligence are not among the products of the soil. Attachment to property, often a sordid sentiment, is not to be confounded with the sacred flame of patriotism."

By the same logic, voters should have more control over branches of government that had once been shielded from the pressure of public opinion. State leaders who expanded the right to vote in the 1810s and 1820s also moved to increase the number of elective offices in state government, to streamline executive branches of government, to bring courts more closely under democratic control, and to equalize representation in the legislatures.

If one white man was as good as another, then simple majority rule would be a safer source of virtue and a more reliable guide to the common good than the paternal benevolence of a few well-trained and high-minded gentlemen. Reform did not supplant republicanism in American political thinking, but significantly shifted its emphasis toward majoritarian democracy.

Changes in political rights brought gradual but permanent shifts in the tone of republican politics. Colonial leaders had counted on a deft combination of coercion with "deference," or the voluntary submission of the middling and lower classes, to guarantee the position of a social, economic, and political elite. As the suffrage broadened and electioneering tactics grew more popular, successful individuals won their struggles for higher local status, but automatic respect for social and political superiors declined as well. Officeholders were still likely to be wealthier and better educated than ordinary voters, but they could no longer count on automatic deference after trading public insults with their peers or rubbing elbows with their inferiors. Eager for political success, ambitious members of the gentry descended on taverns and militia musters to flatter and wheedle for the vote of the common man. "How contemptible and degrading it is to see gentlemen assembling at such places," complained a North Carolina editor in 1820, "treating, fawning and courting, nay *soliciting* the suffrage of men to *honor* them with a seat in the Legislative Councils of the State." For statesmen of the old school, such subservience to the popular will seemed to corrupt the tenets of republicanism itself. "Gracious God!" the editor exclaimed. "If this is independence, save us, we beseech thee, from participating in the blessings it imparts." Despite such complaints, the democratization of American politics would continue to accelerate in the coming decades.

Significantly, as free white men moved to claim equal rights of citizenship, the prospect of equality seemed to slip even further from free blacks and women. Though blacks had never been fully equal in Revolutionary America, the concept of a gradation of rights and privileges could give some citizenship rights to the black man who satisfied the same property requirements as whites. States as different as New York and North Carolina had thus offered a limited franchise to "all men" who met certain broad qualifications, and free black inhabitants of both states used these provisions to claim the right to vote. Some women were likewise enfranchised

by a New Jersey constitution that gave the ballot to property-owning "persons" rather than to "men," and other state constitutions were similarly vague. The question of black and woman suffrage in post-Revolutionary America needs further study, but it is clear that the same reformers who extended suffrage and other rights to all white men began to close the opportunities for blacks and women left open by previous generations of lawmakers.

When wealth and status no longer distinguished between those who were full members of the republican community and those who were not, republicans looked for other means to mark these differences. Enfranchised citizens defined who they *were* by emphasizing who they were *not*. An endless catalogue of hostile or dismissive stereotypes thus ascribed traits to blacks and women diametrically opposite to those that qualified white men for the rights of citizenship. If white male citizens wished to think of themselves as intelligent, hardworking, thrifty, self-controlled, and civic-minded, they described blacks as stupid, lazy, sensual, improvident, drunken, licentious, and otherwise unqualified for the privileges of democratic self-government. Women were likewise described as weak, submissive, trusting, and preoccupied by domestic concerns. Though they might be morally superior to men in some respects, they did not have the aggressive qualities necessary for a proper defense of liberty from power, or the broad civic awareness needed for genuine public virtue. A delegate to the New York constitutional convention of 1821 expressed a common view of blacks, but he might just as well have been speaking of women. "They are a peculiar people," the gentleman reflected, "incapable, in my judgment, of exercising [the right to vote] with any sort of discretion, prudence or independence. They have no just conceptions of civil liberty. They know not how to appreciate it, and are consequently indifferent to its preservation." Accepting this reasoning, the convention abolished the property-holding requirement that had previously limited voting among whites, but retained a stiff requirement for voting by free blacks. The delegates did not consider the possibility of women's suffrage at all, but lumped women together with children, convicts, and the mentally disabled to prove that the principle of political equality had "obvious" natural limits.

Throughout the Union, states that had once maintained a complex gradation of political rights based on economic class moved

in the 1820s and 1830s to impose a radical legal dichotomy based on race and sex. Those who "passed the test" were increasingly regarded as politically equal in every respect, while those who "failed" were stripped of every legal basis for political participation. Free blacks lost the right to vote in Maryland in 1810, in New York in 1821, in Tennessee in 1834, and in North Carolina in 1835, while New Jersey women were disenfranchised in 1807. In the "Age of Egalitarianism," all white men would be equal, at least in theory, but no one else would be the equal of a white man.

The new emphasis on racial distinctions had implications for slaves as well as for free blacks. Blacks were utterly different from whites, slaveholding theorists argued, and totally incapable of freedom. God had undoubtedly created them for servitude, to allow all whites to escape menial duties and assume the equality they naturally deserved. "Break down slavery," warned Congressman Henry A. Wise of Virginia, "and you would with the same blow destroy the great Democratic principle of equality among men." In the eyes of many white Southerners, slaveholding states were the only genuine republics.

The logic of racial exclusion could extend beyond political rights to the basic right of habitation. In the cases of both Indians and blacks, the very idea of free, nonwhite people living side by side with white Americans seemed to inspire white fantasies of race war or annihilation. Most of the Southern states passed laws expelling newly emancipated slaves from their borders, while most frontier states banned the entry of free blacks. White observers often assumed that the end of slavery would bring on a bloodbath, and called for the colonization of freed blacks in Africa as the only safe policy of emancipation. Alternatively, whites argued that freedom itself was fatal to blacks, and sought to prove that mortality, insanity, and mental retardation increased among free blacks in direct proportion to the victims' distance from slavery.

Despite plain evidence to the contrary, it was also frequently asserted that the Indians were dying out. As U.S. Secretary of State Henry Clay confided to a fellow Cabinet officer in 1825, "it was impossible to civilize Indians. . . . It was not in their nature. . . . They were destined to extinction, and, although he would never use or countenance inhumanity towards them, he did not think them, as a race, worth preserving." Other white observers declared that removal of the remaining Eastern Indians to the area

beyond the Mississippi was the only way to save these people from extinction, ignoring the fact that the Cherokees, Creeks, and other neighboring tribes were numerous and flourishing. Later, in the 1840s, the advocates of American expansion into Mexico and other Latin American countries likewise predicted that Hispanic peoples would miraculously disappear as Anglo-Americans moved to the west and south. As one such advocate wrote after visiting California in 1842, Mexicans were "an imbecile, pusillanimous race of men, and unfit to control the destinies of that beautiful country. [They] must fade away [before] the mingling of different branches of the Caucasian family of the States." In each case, the prediction that nonwhites would or ought to disappear was clearly based on white longing rather than reality. Not content to establish a free and equal community of citizens by excluding nonwhites from the circle of political equality, many whites hoped to expel them from the landscape itself.

Joined by historian George M. Fredrickson, sociologist Pierre L. van den Berghe has applied the term "*Herrenvolk* ('master race') democracy" to societies such as the Old South, where the oppression of one group is used to establish and defend a system of egalitarianism among those who oppress them. In a diminished but significant form, the term also applies to the antebellum North, where the unequal condition of blacks and Indians was routinely cited to justify the superior position of white Americans. In both sections, white men used the lines of race and sex to create a fraternity of equals, though they did not succeed in suppressing all sources of difference or debate within their ranks.

Certain strains in Protestant religion were the most important sources of dissent from popular republican assumptions that defined human worth on the basis of race and sex. Since the days of the earliest Puritan settlements, devout Americans, especially in New England and the areas affected by New England migration, had thought themselves burdened with a special mission, a unique "errand," to proclaim God's truth in the wilderness. For pious Protestants, the American Revolution had been a consummation and a spur to this mission, reaffirming the rights and the obligations of self-government for God's people. For these citizens, the Republic would flourish only to the degree that it was dedicated to sacred purposes. President John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts reiterated this old Puritan tradition when he reminded Congress

in 1825 "that the tenure of power by man is, in the moral purposes of his Creator, upon condition that it shall be exercised to the ends of beneficence, to improve the condition of himself and his fellowmen." Carrying this line of thinking a step further, many concluded that the good citizen was not only a white man, but a committed Christian as well. Carrying their ideals to the public sphere, these Christians came to hope that the new Republic would grow in moral perfection, just as others hoped to improve in secular liberty. The numbers of such reformers would expand dramatically in the years after 1815, fed by an extraordinary growth in religious commitment known as the Second Great Awakening. The results of this religious movement would have profound implications for the future of Jacksonian politics.

Though Protestant ministers and their flocks had embraced the American Revolution, they worried in the post-Revolutionary generation about the apparent spread of religious skepticism, French revolutionary extremism, decaying moral standards, and apathy among the faithful who remained in the pews. After a decade or more of proselytizing on the frontier and elsewhere, their work bore its first conspicuous fruits in 1801, with a huge camp meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, which inspired dozens of imitations across the South and West. Throngs of listeners fell under the spell of evangelists who preached in teams around the clock, driving "convicted" sinners to tears, shouts, and fits of unconsciousness before their confidence gradually grew in the possibility of personal forgiveness and salvation. Subsequent revivals were somewhat more sedate, but the spirit of religious renewal flourished in them all. Known as the Second Great Awakening to distinguish it from a similar episode in the mid-eighteenth century, the revival movement brought dramatic increases in church membership, particularly in the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and allied denominations.

After cresting in the South, the revival movement spread to the towns along the Erie Canal in the 1820s and then east and south into New York City and the interior of New England. Some Protestants were largely immune to the evangelical spirit, particularly in denominations like the Lutherans or the Episcopalians who cherished a traditional liturgy and a strong identification with the European past. The small but rapidly growing number of Roman Catholics in America were likewise untouched by revivalism and

were often the targets of evangelical hostility. Considerable numbers of nominal Protestants in America never felt the grip of evangelical conviction. Nevertheless, evangelical Protestantism suffused most areas of the United States in the ensuing years. In the North, it found its warmest support among middle-class New Englanders and in the areas outside New England where they had settled. The canal district of western New York was ignited so often by religious enthusiasm that it became known as the Burnt-Over District.

An essential aspect of the Second Great Awakening in the North was an enhanced popular belief in the perfectibility of human beings, with the remembered ideals of the orderly New England village being taken as the model of perfection. Converts began by reforming their own lives and frequently renounced strong drink, idle amusements, Sunday games, and careless work habits. They urged others to take the same steps in order to rededicate families, communities, states, and the nation itself to spiritual as well as worldly progress. Many employers clearly hoped that evangelical virtues would produce a sober, industrious, and contented work force, but the moral sincerity of their crusade was also very obvious. Ministers warned that America stood at a historic crossroads: one path led to national and worldwide salvation; the other, to a world maddened by greed, infidelity, and debauchery. It was in the power of living Americans to choose which path would be taken. Businessmen and other middle-class Americans felt that the choice was theirs to make.

Evangelical Protestants therefore bent their considerable energies to a variety of programs to spread the gospel message. The American Bible Society sought to put the Scriptures in every home. The American Sunday School Union tried to educate the laboring children of the poor. Missionaries left for Asia, for the western states, for the slums of New York and Philadelphia. Support for them came from wealthy philanthropists as well as from sewing circles and mite societies in every community. "Disinterested benevolence" soon reached from the victims of sin to unfortunates of all kinds, and efforts were made to alleviate the condition of the blind, the deaf, the insane, and the destitute. Penitentiaries, asylums, and poorhouses were all founded with the common purpose of reclaiming social, physical, or moral defectives by housing them in salutary environments and encouraging the divinely inspired processes of self-improvement. Exhorters were dispatched to uplift sailors, prostitutes, drunkards, Indians, immigrants, anyone who seemed to deviate from the ideals of evangelical piety, industry, and sobriety.

Eventually, the evangelical movement confronted secular politics, when active ministers and laymen began to demand that the government stop the transportation of the mail on Sunday, in recognition of the Christian Sabbath. Further political involvement would follow when Andrew Jackson's government sought to deal harshly with Indians (many of whom were evangelical converts) or to challenge the interests of Christian businessmen whose profits supported a variety of benevolent enterprises. Though the evangelical movement was frequently intolerant of nonevangelical preferences, it also expressed the highest humanitarian ideals of the age.

The evangelical vision quickly collided with the institution of slavery. Brutality to slaves was an outrage to the Northern evangelical conscience, just as forced labor was an affront to the ethos of an emerging wage labor economy. Reformers expanded on a preexisting eighteenth-century antislavery tradition and urged slaveholders to abandon the sin of bondage just as they urged alcoholics to abandon the sin of drink.

Southern slaveholders were instantly hostile to the new abolitionist movement and did everything in their power to suppress it. They found support from Southern evangelical ministers, who had wrestled with the question of slavery in earlier years, but could not overcome the proslavery convictions of white church members or their own misgivings about the social consequences of abolition. Unlike their Northern counterparts, Southern white clergymen had come to view slavery as a providential institution for the conversion of the African race and the creation of a superior Christian civilization led by the master class. They increasingly rejected the notion that personal salvation obliged Christians to work for earthly reform of any kind, with the exception of the temperance cause. The evangelical impulse in the North and the South thus pointed in opposite directions and fueled a tendency to sectional confrontation as the antebellum period continued.

Despite the potential for moral conflict, sectional disputes seemed unlikely in 1815, for America's secular concerns seemed far more pressing. The gathering movement for political equality

and democracy brought more and more Americans into the circle of political power, but it did not lead to increased harmony within the civic community. Though Americans hoped for a season of fruitful domestic tranquillity, the years after 1815 saw a steady rise in political friction and turbulence that the republican tradition alone could not pacify.

Before the War of 1812, federal politics had revolved around a conflict between the Federalist and the Democratic-Republican (or simply "Republican") "parties." Though not as entrenched or well organized as later parties, the Republicans and Federalists of the first American party system had recruited rival blocs of voters and leaders around an ongoing set of policy disputes. The Republican followers of Virginia's Thomas Jefferson believed that a simple farming economy would be most beneficial to the Republic. Inspired by Alexander Hamilton of New York, Jefferson's Federalist rivals maintained that a weak agrarian Republic could never survive in a world of rival empires, so the federal government must do everything possible to encourage commerce and manufacturing. Federalists also took a dim view of popular political participation, with a tendency to oppose what the youthful Daniel Webster mocked as "the dirt and mire of uncontrolled democracy." Federalists likewise favored a "broad construction" of the Constitution, since the document's literal wording offered meager authorization for their legislative program. Republicans, by contrast, were usually more sympathetic to popular democracy and resisted the Federalist program by insisting on "strict construction" of the Constitution. They denounced proposals for federal subsidies to banking, commerce, or manufacturing as unconstitutional, arguing that such Federalist policies were not only unwise, but also illegal, since the Constitution gave no explicit authorization for them. In the nonpartisan sense, both Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians were actually "republican," since both partook of the earlier political tradition of the Revolution, but the Jeffersonians fought a largely successful battle to associate the older doctrines of "republicanism" with the platform of their own "Republican" organization.

The Federalist Party was the biggest loser of the War of 1812. Federalists had voted against the declaration of war and had continued to harass the war effort in the states they controlled. After the war's triumphant conclusion, Federalists were remembered as unfaithful to the Republic in its hour of need, and their party's

support fell rapidly. A Federalist candidate won some votes in the Presidential election of 1816 and the party hung on in Massachusetts, Delaware, and certain other localities for about another decade, but Federalism was clearly finished as a force in national politics.

As Federalism declined, a large but unstable alliance of Republicans took over public life. Their titular leader was President James Monroe of Virginia, a trusted but colorless associate of Madison and Jefferson who won the Presidency in 1816 as a final representative of the Revolutionary leadership. He was reelected in 1820 with only one dissenting vote in the Electoral College. Opposed to party divisions but suspicious of a Federalist resurgence, Monroe adopted a policy of "amalgamation" to bring all Americans into the Republican fold. He distributed patronage cautiously, eventually allowing some Federalists to return to appointive office, and he almost always spoke in the blandest platitudes possible, hoping to create a broad-based national consensus. Hoping in turn that the decline of active partisanship would eventually lead to the rehabilitation of Federalist men and measures, a New England editor hailed Monroe's Presidency as an "Era of Good Feelings," and the name has stuck ever since, despite the record of personal discord and factional rivalry that increased as the Administration grew older.

The desire for national consensus opened the way for a paradoxical change in Republican public policy. Federalists had long defended such Hamiltonian measures as a national bank, a protective tariff, and a national transportation program, but Republicans had opposed these proposals as unconstitutional and tending to a dangerous consolidation of power over liberty. Not only would they damage the immediate interests of farmers and planters, they could undermine the agrarian, egalitarian economy that supposedly sustained republicanism itself. At the same time, James Madison and other moderate Republicans had long believed that some commerce, especially the export of farm surpluses, was needed to reward the toil of America's rural population. In part, the War of 1812 had been fought to protect this commerce. For similar reasons, handicraft manufacturing was considered necessary for American survival, so long as urban development did not hinder prosperity of the farm. Wartime experience had strengthened these convictions among Republicans and persuaded many doubters that

certain measures of political centralization and economic development were essential for American national security. With the larger, "aristocratic" designs of Federalists discredited, Republican politicians felt more latitude in adopting specific Federalist programs that would further these moderate Republican goals. Beginning in the congressional session of 1816, therefore, support for nationalist policies flourished, particularly among "War Hawk" Republicans such as Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, younger leaders who had strongly supported a militant policy against Great Britain.

In particular, these Republicans found that the lack of manufacturing facilities had been a serious disadvantage to America's military effort. Industries had sprung up under wartime pressures, however, and the return of British trade was threatening to wipe out these new and struggling enterprises. To preserve this infant national resource, Republicans from the South, West, and Middle Atlantic states joined together in 1816 to pass the nation's first protective tariff.

They founded a national bank for similar reasons. The first Bank of the United States had gone out of existence in 1811, but wartime experience persuaded a majority of Republicans to suspend their constitutional scruples and establish a second Bank of the United States in 1816. Fixing his eyes on the $1.5 million "bonus" that the Bank's stockholders paid to the government in return for its charter, young South Carolina Congressman John C. Calhoun introduced a "Bonus Bill" that allocated the money for a national system of internal improvements. "Let us conquer space!" he challenged his colleagues, only to be rebuffed when President Madison's constitutional scruples impelled him to veto the measure at the close of his term in office. Republican friends of internal improvements continued to seek a formula for successful federal subsidies, but they also pursued their projects avidly in the various state legislatures.

The privilege of incorporation was one of the most valuable forms of assistance they could obtain from the states. Corporate status for a company gave businessmen the opportunity to invest in risky enterprises without endangering their uninvested personal assets. Unlike partners in a business, the stockholders of a corporation were not liable for the corporation's debts, beyond the

limits of their own investments. Corporations were legal "persons" with the right to do business, hold property, and conduct lawsuits. In the early years, many corporations also received monopoly rights over a certain line of business or exemption from taxation or other special privileges, a further advantage to the stockholders.

Often, some of the capital for these early corporations came from the state itself, with governments buying shares along with private individuals. Legislators justified the mixture of public and private enterprise on the ground that the corporation was prepared to meet a pressing public need that could not be met in any other way, but that private capital was insufficient for the purpose. Legislators also hoped that profits from lucrative enterprises would reduce the burdens on ordinary taxpayers. Railroads, banks, and canal companies were frequent recipients of corporate privileges in the Jacksonian era, and critics often charged that political favoritism and inside connections were the key determinants of who received their benefits.

Though most public subsidies of internal improvements took place at the state level, the federal government was also involved in the process. Lighthouses and other harbor improvements had long been objects of federal spending, and public land sales had been used to finance road construction in Ohio and neighboring territories since 1802. By 1818 this policy had led to the opening of the National Road from Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, now in West Virginia, on the Ohio River. In 1825 President Monroe approved a federal purchase of stock in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, and similar "subscriptions" multiplied rapidly in the subsequent Adams Administration.

Not all Republicans were satisfied by their party's embrace of internal improvements and other Hamiltonian measures. Conservative Republican thinkers, especially those from the declining plantation areas of the Upper South, had long been suspicious of any deviation from strict constructionism. Led by such men as John Randolph and John Taylor of Virginia and Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, these men called themselves "Old Republicans" and urged their countrymen to remember that wealth and growth could be fatal signs of corruption rather than of national improvement. They argued in Congress and in the columns of newspapers such as the Richmond *Enquirer* that the tariff, bank, and internal

improvements measures would stimulate commercial interests unduly, undermine agriculture, centralize power in the federal government, and violate the Constitution.

Fears for the future of slavery lay at the heart of the Old Republicans' concern. "If Congress can make canals," warned Nathaniel Macon, "they can with more propriety emancipate." Broad construction of the Constitution would create the constitutional authority for an attack on slavery, while legal privileges for commercial and manufacturing interests would create a society in the North with the material incentive and moral inclination to undertake such a mission. The future would vindicate Macon's foresight, but the Old Republicans' warnings were widely ignored in the booming years of the early postwar period.

Old Republicans won certain converts to their views. Moved by strict constructionist arguments, President Madison had vetoed a proposal for a federal system of internal improvements in 1816, and President Monroe seemed sympathetic to their principles. Faced with opposition, some advocates of federal aid favored a constitutional amendment to clarify the situation. Others warned that the effort to obtain an amendment would be difficult and vulnerable to defeat. They also refused to surrender to the argument that federal action must always be hamstrung by the narrowest possible reading of the Constitution.

Beneath the legalistic dispute, an undercurrent of fear and suspicion flowed against the superficial consensus in favor of rapid economic development. Since before the days of Jefferson, political theorists had argued that a republican government could exist only in a society marked by a widespread and roughly equal diffusion of private property, where no citizens could be forced to submit to the arbitrary domination of others. For some Americans, government aid to internal improvements and the other features of the Market Revolution threatened to alter the delicate social and economic balance that had so far staved off corruption, by creating huge private fortunes, large cities filled with penniless laborers, and mammoth corporations lacking all human sympathy and conscience. Opponents also grumbled that internal improvements would cost too much, that citizens should not be taxed for enterprises which could not benefit everyone equally, and even that the whole idea of "improving" God's creation was impious.

Some of the best-known dissents from the gospel of economic development came from the authors and poets who fashioned the classic works of nineteenth-century American literature. In their varying ways, such writers as James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville all raised searching questions about the social and moral costs of the departure from America's traditional way of life. One of the sharpest of such critiques came from Jacksonian Democrat Nathaniel Hawthorne, who in 1843 published "The Celestial Railroad," a satiric parody of the classic Christian allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*. In John Bunyan's original story, a solitary pilgrim named Christian toiled on foot from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, patiently seeking salvation by God's help despite endless temptations and obstacles. In Hawthorne's version, a modern traveler was delighted to find that Christian's archaic footpath had been superseded by a railroad, though its engine looked "more like a sort of mechanical demon that would hurry us to the infernal regions than a laudable contrivance for smoothing our way to the Celestial City." By the end of the journey, these suspicions were confirmed. Though promoted as a mechanical savior, the diabolical invention proved no substitute for Christian's old-fashioned piety and treacherously delivered its idle and heedless passengers to the gates of hell.

Hawthorne's worries about the moral course of a materialistic society beguiled by seemingly miraculous technology were repeated in various ways by other contemporary authors and occasionally in popular political discourse. An electioneering ballad from North Carolina, for example, denounced internal improvements, scientific agriculture, and political corruption in verses that appealed to a variety of conservative sentiments. Speaking of pro-improvement candidates in the state elections of 1826, "Voice of the Illiterate" warned citizens to keep them out of the legislature.

> *So therefore let it be our care,*
> *To keep these men away from there,*
> *Who build their castles in the air,*
> *Who dream they can vast things perform*
> *And in a breath God's works reform.*
> *[But to] us send such men as will*

Cut no canals through vale nor hill,
Till the ground the good old way,
And let the funds in the Treasury stay.

Compatible sentiments cropped up in private communications. Alfred Balch, one of President Jackson's numerous correspondents from Tennessee, urged the President to reject the policy of federal aid to internal improvements on the ground that it would lead to the destruction of the states and the corruption of the republic. "When the day arrives that shall see our citizens paying tolls at turnpike gates and on canals for the benefit of the national Treasury," Balch predicted, "when the time arrives that Members of Congress shall be scuffling for a division of the spoil to be gathered from the Treasury of the General Govt. in order to sustain their own popularity and that of some corrupt administration, the *sovereignty* of the States will be but a shadow—a mere name." New York editor and Democratic ideologue John L. O'Sullivan likewise reminded his readers that the "sallow complexions, emaciated forms, and stooping shoulders" of New England mill workers proved that it was "almost a crime against society to divert human industry from the fields and the forests to iron forges and cotton factories." Compared to the optimistic promises of the supporters of internal improvements, such sentiments did not dominate the written record, yet they were clearly present in the public mind and gave a distinct ambivalence to the surface tone of public boosterism in the age of the Market Revolution.

Though concerns over rapid development were rarely voiced in the Era of Good Feelings, politicians found tranquillity in the states just as elusive as they did in the national arena. As quarrels over suffrage and representation demonstrated, social and economic controversies repeatedly fractured the republican consensus, while personal rivalries and jealous factionalism rent the fabric of political harmony. In most states, a handful of surviving Federalists struggled to maintain an alliance with one or more factions of Republicans. In Pennsylvania, for example, the "New School" Republicans sought state support for banks, tariffs, and internal improvements, while their "Old School" opponents resisted them, sometimes in association with Federalists and sometimes not. Local resentments undercut any attempt to create consistent divisions over these issues, as country voters opposed the influence of town

politicians, Eastern leaders condescended to the West, and Pittsburgh quarreled with Philadelphia. In New York, Governor DeWitt Clinton put together a personal following based on patronage and family connections and sought to beat down all opposition as he dreamed of running for the Presidency. Opposing Clinton, a motley collection of factions—sporting exotic names such as Bucktails and Martling men, Burrites and Federalists—jostled with one another as they sought to topple the man New Yorkers called the "Magnus Apollo." In Virginia, by contrast, politics continued as a gentleman's game, with stiff property requirements for voting and low voter turnout at elections. Old Dominion insiders put together the "Richmond Junto" of politicians, led by Thomas Ritchie, editor of the Richmond *Enquirer*. Mainly depending on the arts of conciliation and persuasion to keep a coalition of conservative planters at peace with one another, Ritchie and his Old Republican colleagues controlled the party caucus in the state legislature and usually arranged the choice of governor and other leading state officials.

Farther south, politics was more divisive, but still infused with personal rivalries between competing leaders of the gentry as much as with consistent differences of principle or social base. In Georgia, the planters of the rice coast and the interior cotton country had created a state faction to protest a massive land grab by outside speculators in the first decade of the century. Maintaining their cohesion, this coalition of planter-lawyers fought with a more backwoods-oriented group. Class rivalries were very evident in the tone of Georgia politics, but rarely led to concrete differences in public policy. Likewise in Tennessee, a faction of planters, merchants, and land speculators dominated state politics, but they fought for power with a more roughhewn set of frontiersmen. Alabama was similarly divided between an intermarried group of transplanted Georgia gentry who dominated the fertile Black Belt and an opposing cluster of settlers in the small-farm country of the Tennessee Valley to the north. Rivalry between plantation districts and backcountry districts gave Deep South politics a more overt basis in social conflict than elsewhere, but rival groups in most states sought the symbols of popular approval more than they used state power to advance one set of class interests over another.

The factional bickering and personal aggrandizement typical of state politics in the Era of Good Feelings were precisely the evils

that classical theorists had warned were fatal flaws in a republic. Factionalism seemed to reveal that politicians had become more interested in their own welfare than in the public good, a condition synonymous with corruption. Many thoughtful state leaders were disturbed by the seemingly aimless system of backbiting and intrigue that was taking the place of what they remembered as a more principled struggle between Republicans and Federalists. Following conventional wisdom, most such leaders searched for some means to unite Americans behind a widely accepted vision of the public good. Unfortunately, the irrepressible ambitions of individuals and the increasing social and economic diversity of the country combined to make this search fruitless.

For some New York politicians, however, the search for unanimity became so hopeless that they came to question the assumptions that inspired it. Instead of searching for selfless consensus, these Republican activists devised a means to combine personal advancement with pure republican principles by promoting political conflict. They called themselves the "Bucktail" faction of the New York Republican Party, and their leader was a dapper country lawyer named Martin Van Buren.

Van Buren's origins were in many ways typical of the men who came to dominate the politics of his era. Unlike the heroes of the Revolution, he did not start out with the trappings of gentry status—his father was a barely solvent tavern keeper in Kinderhook, New York, and his formal education ended after several terms in the village academy. Friendly relatives, amiable manners, and the increasing fluidity of American society enabled Van Buren to find a place in an attorney's office, where he read law and copied documents. Admitted to the bar in 1803, he began to practice in the county courts of his birthplace.

Though heavily pressured to join the local Federalist establishment, Van Buren clung to his father's Jeffersonian principles and became active in Republican politics. Offended by his stubbornness, the wealthy men of the neighborhood took their legal business elsewhere, and Van Buren's clients became the small farmers of the area whose land titles were under assault from the manorial landlords who dominated the Hudson Valley. "For my business," Van Buren later recalled, "I was to a marked extent indebted to the publick at large, having received but little from the mercantile interest or from Corporations, and none from the great landed

aristocracies of the country." As he started his law practice, Van Buren also embarked on a political career that would make him President in 1837 and architect of a second American party system, as well as a classic prototype for the self-made American as professional politician.

New York politics in Van Buren's youth was dominated by bitter rivalry between Federalists and several factions of Republicans. The Federalist Party in the state had been led by Alexander Hamilton, and Van Buren always believed that "the object of its original establishment" was "to combat the democratic spirit of the country . . . , an object which it has pursued with unflagging diligence, by whatever name it may have been designated." Throwing himself into the Republican opposition, Van Buren quickly learned that party unity was the only weapon that could defeat the antidemocratic purposes of the Federalists. Other Republicans were not so perceptive and fought with each other incessantly. Hunger for office was so intense that individual Republicans were not above collaboration with the Federalist enemy in order to gain a personal advantage. Adhering to what he firmly believed was a principled position, Van Buren set his face staunchly against such behavior and made strict party loyalty the basis of his political creed, as he rose from volunteer party activist to "surrogate," or probate officer, of Columbia County, to state senator in 1812.

Short in stature and elegant in dress, Van Buren never overcame a feeling of inferiority about his origins. He compensated by rigid self-control, unfailing courtesy to friend and foe alike, a surefooted gift for intrigue, and skillful evasiveness on controversial issues. Enemies belittled him with such nicknames as the "Little Magician" and the "Red Fox of Kinderhook," but they could not diminish his increasing stature in the world of New York politics.

The opposing political style was represented by DeWitt Clinton, mayor of New York City and a man who stood for everything Van Buren could never be. Tall and imposing where the Magician was slight, Clinton belonged to a patrician family. He entered politics as the nephew and protégé of George Clinton, Revolutionary governor of New York who from 1805 to 1812 served as Vice President of the United States under Presidents Jefferson and Madison. Cultivating the scientific and literary pursuits of a gentleman amateur, DeWitt Clinton turned his greatest energies to the creation of a family-based political machine. "Why is Pierre C. Van Wyck Re-

corder of the City of New York," demanded Clinton's enemies in 1811, "[as well as] Commissioner in Bankruptcy, and why is his brother Notary Public?" Back came the angry answer, "Because his mother is the sister of Pierre Van Cortlandt, who married the daughter of George Clinton, who is the brother of James Clinton who is father of DeWitt Clinton." Fully in the spirit of eighteenth-century politics in England and the colonies, Clinton's blatant nepotism seeming increasingly improper in the more egalitarian atmosphere of the nineteenth century.

Respected more than he was liked, Clinton won his greatest public admiration as the father of the Erie Canal. As one of his followers brusquely told him, "the charge of a cold repulsive manner is not the most trifling charge, that your political enemies have brought against you—you have not the jovial, social, Democratical-Republican-how-do-you-do Suavity" of a truly popular politician.

In Van Buren's eyes, however, Clinton's greatest sin was perverting the Republican Party of New York to private and selfish purposes. Not only had the "Magnus Apollo" once made a secret deal with Federalists to split the national Republican Party and advance his own Presidential ambitions, he had lied to Van Buren to conceal these tactics. Disgusted, Van Buren cut all his ties to Clinton. Joining with like-minded friends in 1813, he helped to establish a newspaper, the Albany *Argus*, dedicated to strictness in Republican Party regularity. As Van Buren and his associates guided New York through the War of 1812, they came to realize that their own political futures and the well-being of the state depended on the complete overthrow of DeWitt Clinton and his principles.

Acquiring the name "Bucktails" from the emblem they wore to party meetings in their hat brims, Van Buren and his friends began by discarding the antiparty rhetoric that was so typical of most Republicans of the postwar period. Parties were inevitable, the *Argus* declared, and mankind has always been divided between the parties of the few and of the many. Looking back on the political scene as it had existed in the Era of Good Feelings, Van Buren later spoke of the period in the direst terms. "In place of two great parties arrayed against each other in a fair and open contest for the establishment of the principles in the administration of Government which they respectively believed most conducive

to the public interest, the country was overrun with personal factions. These having few higher motives for the selection of their candidates or stronger incentives to action than individual preferences or antipathies, moved the bitter waters of political agitation to their lowest depths."

The Bucktails insisted that a correct political party should be a democratic body organized at the grass roots. Ward committees should send delegates to county conventions, which would in turn send delegates to a state convention. Candidates for office should be selected by these conventions, and every participant in the process was morally bound to support the nominees selected by the party. Any deviation on the basis of personal likes or dislikes would be ruthlessly punished by stripping dissidents of official patronage and expelling them from the councils of the party. Once in office, party representatives were strictly bound by the decisions of the party caucus, even if that meant violating personal convictions or the desires of the voters.

The one thing missing from the Bucktails' program was a consistent and principled set of state policies. Emphasizing patronage and party discipline, they concentrated on the dead issue of Federalist elitism and evaded the substantive questions of their own times. As good Republicans, for example, the Bucktails were ostensibly opposed to the overwhelming power of banking institutions, but bankers who endorsed the Bucktail faction had no trouble getting what they needed from the legislature. The Bucktails' opponents later made considerable political capital by pointing to the cozy relationships that had developed between favored businessmen and the political leadership of Republican New York. Under Van Buren's leadership, the strength of the Republican Party became synonymous with republicanism itself, and party loyalty alone became the test of the common good.

Bucktails justified their rigid demand for party loyalty by explaining that the only alternative to party discipline was party disunity and the ultimate return of Federalism. As Bucktail lieutenant Silas Wright proclaimed, members were "safe if they face the enemy, but the first man we see *step to the rear*, we *cut down*." Fellow loyalist William L. Marcy later horrified the U.S. Senate when he candidly avowed the Bucktail dogma that government jobs were like the spoils of war, and that they saw "nothing wrong in the rule that to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy."

Marcy's phrase endured, and high-minded reformers ever since have deplored the influence of the "spoils system" in American politics. Ignoring such protests, however, the Bucktails propounded these principles endlessly from party platforms, from the pages of the Albany *Argus*, and from a large network of subordinate papers around the state. By following their precepts rigorously, Van Buren and his followers put the Clintonians to rout and in 1820 made themselves the masters of New York. To crown their success, they elected Van Buren to the U.S. Senate and he left for Washington, destined to repeat there what he had earlier accomplished in Albany. In his absence, he left behind a tightly knit alliance of Bucktail party leaders who soon became known as the Albany Regency.

Arriving in Washington, Van Buren found the capital in disarray. Though President Monroe had longed for national unity, the federal government was riven by the same forces of economic conflict and personal ambition that disrupted the politics of the states. The question of who would succeed Monroe was already splitting the government into feuding camps. The Panic of 1819 had overthrown postwar prosperity and restrictive measures by the new Bank of the United States seemed to make matters worse, casting grave doubts on the Republican decision to discard ideology and embrace this controversial Federalist nostrum. More seriously, the decline of interparty conflict had created a situation in which Republicans felt free to quarrel among themselves about the country's most deeply divisive social issue—the institution of slavery. Suddenly, with little prior warning, the controversy burst on Congress with the clangor of what the aging Thomas Jefferson called "a firebell in the night."

When the territory of Missouri applied for statehood in 1819, Representative James Tallmadge of New York, a Clintonian, asked Congress to prohibit the further importation of slaves into the territory and to require the eventual elimination of slavery there as a condition for admission to the Union. His proposal threw the House into an uproar. Republicans who had thought themselves united by a common love of liberty and a broad desire for national improvement suddenly found themselves divided by the institution of human bondage. In the angry speeches that followed, Northern congressmen pointed to the Declaration of Independence as the embodiment of republican principles. As a congressman

from Massachusetts put it, slavery violated the right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, so "the attempt to extend slavery to the new States, is in direct violation of the clause [in the U.S. Constitution] which guarantees a republican form of government to all the States." Infuriated slaveholders shot back that the immortal principles of the Declaration did not apply to black people, only to whites. Some of them went further and dismissed the phrase "all men are created equal" as meaningless—"a fanfaronade of metaphysical abstractions," as Old Republican John Randolph later put it. An attempt by Congress to interfere with the freedom of Missouri to continue slavery was a violation of white rights and states' rights. If Congress could restrict slavery in Missouri, what could stop it from attacking slavery anywhere? One Georgia congressman roared that Tallmadge "had kindled a fire which all the waters of the ocean cannot put out, which seas of blood can only extinguish."

The New Yorker's amendment passed the House on a strictly sectional vote, only to die in the Senate, where the balance of free states and slave states gave a veto to the South. The significance of this sectional balance of power would grow in the years to come, but in the meantime, numerous congressmen felt that the immediate controversy should be compromised. In March of 1820, at the urging of Henry Clay, the Senate agreed to admit Missouri without restriction and to preserve the sectional balance by adding the free state of Maine. For the future, slavery in the Louisiana Purchase could exist only in the region south of the southern boundary of Missouri. Old Republicans protested that states' rights barred Congress from interfering with slavery in any future state, but the House agreed to the compromise in a portentously sectional vote. Southerners and a few Northern allies agreed to the admission of Missouri, while a Northern coalition divided the Louisiana Territory in two, permitting slavery in one portion but banning it from the other. The question of slavery was so deeply divisive that very few congressmen would vote for both sides of this so-called Missouri Compromise.

As the Missouri crisis demonstrated, the apparent unanimity of the Era of Good Feelings masked some serious divisions about the nature and direction of American society. Following the congressional controversy from his library at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson saw its dangers with stark clarity. "I considered it at once as the knell of the Union," he wrote to a Northern sympathizer.

"A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper." Jefferson acknowledged that slavery was the root of the looming threat to the Union and, as always, he regretted the existence of slavery. Like the Southerners in Congress, however, he feared a bloodbath if emancipation were not combined with deportation of the freedmen from America; the practical objections to this course seemed insurmountable. "As it is," Jefferson concluded painfully, "we have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other."

White Southerners who were less idealistic than Thomas Jefferson thought they saw the same dilemma. In the years ahead, they would opt for self-preservation without any of the misgivings that troubled the Sage of Monticello. They insisted on the sectional political balance that the Compromise protected and they would increasingly make the safety of slavery an important factor in guiding their course in national politics. At the same time, Northerners who desired to protect the Union sought to reassure the South without alienating their own section. These leaders would be very receptive to new alignments in politics that did not depend on Mr. Jefferson's "geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle." In part, the political parties of the Jacksonian era would be designed to meet such specifications.

Without entirely realizing it, Martin Van Buren's Bucktails had stumbled on a device that could bring coherence to social, economic, and political conflict in all the states and equilibrium to the national government. When rival political parties linked local and national issues, the sectional controversy that frightened Jefferson and many others could be evaded for a while, and the more manageable controversies aroused by the Market Revolution could be addressed in an orderly way. The revised party system would likewise leave ample room for personal rivalries and individual ambition, without allowing these potentially disruptive energies to gain destructive momentum. The second American party system would not be built in a day, however, and it could not even be attempted without a stronger national sense that amalgamation could not work. That sense began to build, however, in the waning years of James Monroe's Administration.

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For Adam and Hannah—
my two sturdy republicans