

Newspapers and American Nationhood,
1776–1826

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HISTORIANS look back for origins; journalists look ahead for outcomes. The conventional style of history is the chronology; the conventional style of journalism is the inverted pyramid. Thus, historians tend to begin their stories at the beginning; journalists begin theirs at the end. So, where does that leave me, a journalism historian? In an effort to comply simultaneously with the conventions of *both* of my professions—history and journalism—I will begin my story precisely in the middle. The period of American history that I am talking about this evening is the first half century of independence, 1776 to 1826. As the application of quantitative methodology quickly tells us, the middle is 1801. So, let's begin in 1801.

1801 has sometimes been celebrated as the end of the American Revolution. In that year, Thomas Jefferson assumed the presidency, following an election that Jefferson liked to call the 'Revolution of 1800.' Though bitterly contested, the election was lawful, and the transfer of power peaceful. The Federalists' acceptance of defeat and of Jefferson's inauguration as president signaled the end of the constitutional crisis that had loomed since 1789. For the first time in history, a political party relinquished power because

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a constitution told them to do so. The Constitution worked. The Republic was secure. And the bright and manifest destiny of an American continent and an American century lay ahead.

But this account of 1801 is a myth—a national myth of our day distilled from a Jeffersonian myth of that day. At the time, the losers, the Federalists, saw the scene in quite a different light. They had no intention of fading into a Jeffersonian edition of American history. They believed the country had been betrayed and debauched. Though their party was now splintered and demoralized, the Federalists in 1801 planned their revival and their revenge. They plotted to build a great weapon to carry on the battle to save the country. And what was that weapon? A newspaper—the *New York Evening Post*. The *Post* was launched in November of 1801 by Alexander Hamilton's faction of the Federalist party and placed under the editorship of William Coleman. The purpose of the *Post* was to boost the Federalist cause and to destroy Jefferson. If that purpose required the editor to vilify his party's opponents as liars and traitors, to attack the president as a moral degenerate with a slave harem, or to shoot a Republican dead in the street in a duel, so be it.¹ That was what newspaper work was all about in 1801.

And not just in 1801. Throughout the fifty years after 1776, newspapers were usually outrageously partisan, and factional in other ways as well. Newspapers represented and exacerbated *all* the lines of cleavage in the early republic. In every case of alleged sedition or treason, the newspapers were there: the treason of loyalism, the treason of Republican Jacobinism, the treason of Federalist monarchism, of the Jay Treaty, of the Sedition Law of 1798, of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, of the New England secessionist conspiracies of 1804 and 1814, and of the Missouri crisis of 1819. And on and on. To hear the newspapers tell it, traitors and seditionists lurked everywhere. Even beyond the government, newspapers cultivated faction and dissension. In reli-

1. Allan Nevins, *The Evening Post: A Century of Journalism* (New York: Boni and Live-right, 1922), chap. 1, passim, and pp. 36 and 48.

gion, for example, newspapers in the early nineteenth century were often the carriers of radical evangelical doctrines that undermined the standing order of religious orthodoxy. In other words, when Americans in the early republic saw treason, sedition, fragmentation, dissension, disintegration, degeneration, disunion, anarchy, and chaos, they usually saw it first in the newspaper.

At this point, you may be wondering how treason, sedition, fragmentation, dissension, disintegration, degeneration, disunion, anarchy, and chaos figure into a lecture with the very solemn title 'Newspapers and American Nationhood, 1776-1826.' That's a fair question. Indeed, it is the question I would like to pursue this evening. Let me rephrase it slightly: Can an instigator of treason be an agency of nationhood? Can an organ of faction be an instrument of nationality? My title, I suppose, gives me away: My answer is 'yes,' but not a simple 'yes.' There is a paradox involved here that begs explanation. The relationship between faction and nation is a subtle one in the American experience. An exploration of how newspapers could have been builders of both is my subject this evening.

The quest must begin with the key concepts: state, nation, and nationalism. In our day, the concepts 'nation' and 'state' are often fused into a single term: 'nation-state.' But the breakup of the Soviet Union and the perpetual crisis in the Middle East should remind us that a 'state' is not always the political expression of a 'nation.' There are multinational states and stateless nations, and there always have been. So, distinctions are crucial.² By 'state' I mean the formal structures of political sovereignty. By 'nation' I mean a people, a people who share a culture, the institutions of culture, and a history. By 'nationalism' I mean the organized political voice of a nation.

The conventional historical model of the origins of modern nations and nationalism grows from the experience of Central and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth century, where language-based

2. John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982).

national political movements (such as Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Magyar) rose in opposition to the state (the dynastic realm of Hapsburg). The myths of nationalism always locate the origin of the nation in time immemorial, for the legitimacy of the nation derives from its claim on tradition. This is why nationalism is often linked with language and religion, two institutions with appropriately deep historical roots.

The power of nationalism always depends upon its claim to be the spontaneous political expression of a legitimate nation. Yet, despite this universal tenet of nationalism, the opposite is often true. Often, perhaps even most of the time, it is not the nation that makes nationalism; it is the nationalists who make the nation. Nations are *modern* entities—invented, shaped, and directed by political will. They are, in the words of Benedict Anderson, ‘imagined communities.’ A nation can exist only when people can imagine it, can imagine that they are part of ‘a people,’ nearly all of whom they will never know or see. Only in the age of modern political organization (modern state-building) and modern communication has such imagination been possible for the vast majority of mankind.³

The characteristics of the nation have a great deal to do with the nature of the state into which it is born. American nationhood, for example, is more like that of Latin America than Europe. European nations grew in the wreckage of feudal states and dynastic empires. In the nineteenth century, these emergent nations struggled to achieve a new form of statehood: a state contiguous with a nation. In Latin America and the United States, it was otherwise. All the American states, in North and South America, were ‘creole states.’ They were founded by Europeans born in America. These people shared language and culture with the metropole, England or Spain. In South America, every one of the newly independent states of the early nineteenth century had been an administrative unit of a European colonial empire. These states were not created

3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 13–15.

by indigenous peoples, but by creoles, often former colonial functionaries. Only the accident of American birth had set them apart from (and made them subordinate to) the Spanish and Portuguese 'peninsulars.' In other words, these American creoles seized colonial provinces, made them states, and *then* began the tedious task of shaping them into nations.⁴

The story in our part of North America is roughly similar. As in South America, the colonial administrative units became 'states,' and the erstwhile creole functionaries became nationalists. The difference in North America, of course, was that thirteen of these administrative units joined together in a federal union, itself also a state. This was possible partly because the English colonies were so small. (All thirteen composed an area smaller than Venezuela and one-third the size of Argentina.) Proximity permitted the emergence of an intercolonial creole elite with a shared 'American' ethos. But within this ethos, vast differences existed, which carried enormous implications for both state-making and nation-making. The idea of union was strong among the elites of the thirteen English colonies. But what sort of union? Where was the sovereign state in these United States? Disagreement over that question was endemic throughout the early national period, before becoming epidemic in 1861, leaving 600,000 dead.

The American case, then, is not an example of a nation becoming a state *or* of a state becoming a nation. Rather, it is the case of a nation emerging within the controversies and crises of state-building. It was in the ordeal of the state that the nation was forged. And here is where we come back to treason, chaos, and the newspaper. In the first fifty years of independence, in every effort to undermine the government or disrupt the state, the newspaper was implicated. Newspapers were the organizers of faction and sedition. Yet, in their efforts to subvert the state, they helped to build the nation. American nationhood coalesced in the constitutional crises of the state. Though organizers of faction, newspapers

4. *Ibid.*, chap. 4.

helped to standardize a political language of state, which came, in turn, to serve as the mythic language of the nation.

This is not quite what the North American creoles—our founding fathers—had in mind. They were appalled by the ordeal of their state and the role that the newspapers played in it. The federalists and antifederalists of the era of Constitutional ratification and the Federalists and Republicans of the era of the first party system argued about the nature of the union, but they believed in the idea of union.⁵ Even the most strident states-rights antifederalists (such as Luther Martin of Maryland) saw a role for an American union (although not the role of ‘state’ or perhaps even ‘nation’). Most federalists of 1787, including those who later became Jeffersonian Republicans, were genuine American nationalists. Jefferson and Madison, for example, struggled vigorously with their adversaries over affairs of state, but both were ardent believers in and promoters of an American nation.

In short, the founders were nationalists. They disputed the nature of the state, but they agreed on the need for institutions of national communication and culture. Some proposed national ceremonies and rituals. Some wrote poetry, national epic poetry, such as Philip Freneau’s ‘A Poem, or the Rising Glory of America’ or Joel Barlow’s ‘Vision of Columbus.’ Federalist and Republican literati clashed over issues of state and cultural politics, but they shared a vision of an American national literature.⁶ Others promoted education for American citizenship. Men such as Benjamin Rush and Noah Webster disagreed on politics yet spoke a similar language of education. Education would fashion model Americans, model republican citizens.⁷

But perhaps the nationalists’ favorite institution of national culture was the newspaper. From the Revolutionary War onward, American leaders of all political stripes talked incessantly about

5. J. R. Pole, *The Idea of Union* (Alexandria, Va.: Bicentennial Council of the Thirteen Original States Fund, 1977).

6. Robert E. Shalhope, *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760–1800* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), chap. 3.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

the need for a general 'diffusion of information'; and newspapers were always part of the plan.⁸ In 1791, James Madison explained (in a newspaper article) the relationship between public communication and republican government. 'Whatever facilitates a general intercourse of sentiments,' he said, 'as good roads, domestic commerce, a free press, and particularly a circulation of newspapers through the entire body of the people, . . . is equivalent to a contraction of territorial limits, and is favorable to liberty.'⁹ The next year, the Congress passed a postal act that clearly established the newspaper as a favored instrument of national communication policy. This act set postage for newspapers so low that newspaper circulation would be heavily subsidized. In the debates over this 1792 act, no one proposed setting newspaper rates equal to letter rates; everyone took the subsidy of newspaper circulation to be a proper function of federal policymaking.¹⁰ Throughout the period, the arguments changed little. In 1817, John C. Calhoun seemed almost to be quoting Madison's essay of 1791. He urged Congress to 'bind the republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals. Let us conquer space. . . . It is thus that a citizen of the West will read the news of Boston still moist from the press. The mail and the press are the nerves of the body politic.'¹¹

Support for the diffusion of newspapers was nearly universal among the national elites, regardless of party. In the 1780s and 1790s, the Federalists controlled the government, the mails, and most of the newspapers. For them, the newspaper was the bulwark of social order; increased newspaper circulation meant the dissemination of 'correct principles' from the nationalist gentry to the masses.¹² The Republicans were somewhat more egalitarian,

8. Jefferson used the phrase 'diffusion of information' in his first inaugural address.

9. Quoted in Robert A. Gross, 'Printing, Politics, and the People,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 90 (1989): 389.

10. Richard B. Kielbowicz, *News in the Mail: The Press, Post Office, and Public Information, 1700-1860s* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 32-34.

11. Quoted in Richard Kielbowicz, 'The Press, Post Office, and Flow of News in the Early Republic,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (1983): 280.

12. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), pp. 38-41; Gross, 'Printing, Politics, and the People,' pp. 388-89.

but they, too, viewed the newspaper chiefly as an instrument of education and mobilization from the top down. Jefferson's efforts to create a national party newspaper in the early 1790s were quite frankly based on notions of a national center and a provincial periphery. He asked Benjamin Franklin Bache to make his *General Advertiser* 'a paper of general circulation, thro' the states, . . . a purely republican vehicle of news established between the seat of government and all its parts.'¹³ In 1799, Jefferson urged his lieutenants to use the newspapers to propagate the Republican message throughout the land. After the election of 1800, one Jeffersonian editor, sounding much like a good Federalist, attributed the rising tide of Republicanism to 'the diffusion of correct information, among those who are uninformed, by means of Newspapers devoted to the cause of morality and freedom.' Years later, Jefferson himself remembered the Republican press of 1800 for 'its unquestionable effect in the revolution produced on the public mind.'¹⁴

This was a kind of administrative nationalism, a nationalism first 'imagined' by an elite of creole colonial functionaries who then took the idea to the people. Elites usually play a key role in national movements, as Tom Nairn has so nicely put it: 'The new middle-class intelligentsia of nationalism had to invite the masses into history; and the invitation-card had to be written in a language they understood.'¹⁵ The American nationalists used the languages of ceremony, of poetry, of art, of education, and, especially, of the newspaper.

But the masses, once invited into history, have a way of doing there what they will — much to the annoyance and sometimes horror of the elites. And elites themselves have a way of fragmenting into factions. So it was in American society, which by 1800 was bubbling with 'cultural ferment,' in the words of Robert Shal-

13. Quoted in Jeffery A. Smith, *Franklin and Bache: Envisioning the Enlightened Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 107.

14. All quotations are found in Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), pp. 633–34.

15. Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 340.

hope.¹⁶ Jefferson's election did not end the Revolution; it broadened it, deepened it, and reinvigorated it. People everywhere, common people, peripheral people, increasingly sought their own place in the new republican society of America. Urban mechanics and artisans developed a brand of radical class-based politics that Sean Wilentz has labeled 'artisan republicanism.' Western farmers and traders actively resisted the domination of the eastern metropole. And religious people everywhere, especially in rural areas, began to shake off the dust of Calvinism. In 1801, America stood at the threshold of an age, not of national unity, but of unprecedented geographical, economic, political, religious, and cultural pluralism.¹⁷

The newspaper press had gradually come in the 1790s to reflect this pluralism. Of course, the elites struggled to maintain their control of the press from the center, to guide the 'diffusion of information' from the top down. The orderly distribution through the newspapers of the 'Declaration of Independence' in 1776 and the 'Federalist Papers' in 1787-88 was what the founders had in mind. When common people rebelled against the nationalist center, their causes at first fared badly in the press. This was true of the backcountry rebellions in Massachusetts and Virginia in the 1780s. It was still true as late as 1794 for the Whiskey Rebellion in western Pennsylvania. The Federalists were still able to guide much of the interpretation of that event in the newspapers and the early histories. Federalist editors everywhere condemned the whiskey rebels as Jacobins and traitors, and they portrayed the crushing of the rebellion as a brilliant exercise of national authority, and as the apotheosis of General Washington.¹⁸

If there ever had been a centralized newspaper voice in America,

16. Shalhope, *Roots of Democracy*, chap. 6.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 165. See also Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

18. Mary K. Bonsteel Tachau, 'A New Look at the Whiskey Rebellion,' in *The Whiskey Rebellion: Past and Present Perspectives*, ed. Steven R. Boyd (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).

however, this was its last gasp. The press of the Democratic-Republican movement that proliferated in the 1790s was strikingly diverse and decentralized, despite Jefferson's efforts to support a center of national journalism in Philadelphia. Benjamin Franklin Bache's *General Advertiser* (later, *Aurora*) emerged as the leading Republican paper after 1793, but it was only one strong voice in an increasingly discordant choir.¹⁹ In 1793 and after, democratic-republican clubs sprang up all across the country to support revolution abroad and republicanism at home. These clubs brought common people into the political process and into journalism as well. The newspapers in the 1790s swelled with invective against the government, from readers as well as from editors and politicians. When the Federalists denounced these people as rabble, they responded with newspaper essays proudly signed 'one of the swinish multitude' or 'only a mechanic and one of the rabble.' And they mocked the Federalists as men who 'despise mechanics because they have not snored through four years at Princeton.'²⁰

President Washington hated the democratic-republican clubs and denounced them as 'the most diabolical attempts to destroy the best fabric of human government and happiness, that has ever been presented for the acceptance of mankind.' He hated them as much for their independence as for their ideology. They were 'self created,' decentralized, anarchic.²¹ The same charges were levied against the Republican newspapers, by Washington and others. Jefferson defended them. 'It is wonderful indeed,' he said, 'that the President should have permitted himself to be the organ of such an attack on the freedom of discussion, the freedom of writing, printing and publishing.'²²

This was just the beginning. The Republican movement grew steadily more diverse and more hostile to the central government.

19. On Bache and his journalism, see Smith, *Franklin and Bache*, chap. 7.

20. Quoted in Shalhope, *Roots of Democracy*, p. 156.

21. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, pp. 73-74.

22. Quoted in Merrill D. Peterson, *Adams and Jefferson: A Revolutionary Dialogue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 80.

The papers brimmed with charges of bribery, thievery, and treachery of every sort. By 1798, the government had had enough; Congress passed the Sedition Law, an act to punish 'any false, scandalous, and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States.'²³ Under the Sedition Law, twenty-five persons were arrested, ten tried, and ten convicted—mostly Republican printers. Nearly every opposition newspaper suffered under the 'reign of terror,' as Jefferson called it. The Republicans responded with the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which declared the law unconstitutional and which came perilously close to the states' rights doctrine of 'nullification.' The century ended in violent controversy over the nature of the state, and the newspapers were at the center of it.

The election of Jefferson did not end the controversy; it merely turned the tables. Now the Republicans were in, the Federalists out. And the Federalist press—newspapers such as William Coleman's *New York Evening Post*—carried the opposition from the periphery (now New England and New York) to the center (now Washington). The Federalist press during the early years of the nineteenth century was just as diverse and seditious as the Republican press of the 1790s. New England newspapers did all they could to undermine Jefferson's diplomacy, subvert the embargo of 1807, and obstruct the war effort that followed. If Republicans of the South and West had embraced nullification in 1798, the Federalists of the Northeast courted secession in 1804 and 1814.²⁴ And the newspapers again were in the thick of it. Stung by the constant abuse, even Jefferson, a true friend of press freedom, suggested

23. The text of the law is reprinted in James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 441–42.

24. Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789–1815* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), chap. 12. In his chapter on the New England secessionist 'conspiracy' of 1804, Henry Adams remarked, 'The Federalists in Congress wrought themselves into a dangerous state of excitement.' See Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Library of America, 1985), p. 409. Adams's nine-volume history of the Jefferson and Madison administrations was originally published by Scribner's in 1889–91.

that 'a few prosecutions of the most prominent offenders would have a wholesome effect in restoring the integrity of the presses.'²⁵

Though the Federalist party collapsed with the end of the war in 1815, this did not exactly herald an 'Era of Good Feelings,' as this period used to be called. The feelings seemed good only because they were so weak in Washington. Power and controversy retreated to the states after 1815, and the national parties disappeared along with their relevance. The westward movement had long fed sectional differences and animosities (North/South, East/West), and these were now multiplied a hundredfold by the Louisiana Purchase. A better name for this period might be, in the words of Robert Wiebe, 'The Era of State Power.' With the threat of foreign war ended, people turned their attention to private enterprise and to the states, which were positioned to promote and subsidize it. Washington withered. From the Congress, Henry Clay reported that 'the topic of disunion is frequently discussed with as little emotion as an ordinary affair of legislation.' Silas Wright, a New York politician, offered the maxim: 'Love the state and let the nation save itself.'²⁶

When the crisis over the extension of slavery into Missouri erupted in 1819, the aging Jefferson heard it as 'a fire-bell in the night.' The fragmentation of the country into geographical factions, which Washington had warned against in his farewell address, now seemed at hand. But few heard the alarm. The compromise—the papering over of the crisis—was faint comfort to Jefferson, but it seemed to satisfy most Americans, who were anxious to get on with the business of business. The end of a half-century of colonial and international war had changed everything. States now rushed ahead with plans for 'internal improvements'—harbors, roads, and canals. People rushed westward. And the federal government languished. As Robert Wiebe noted, 'Now the

25. Quoted in Buel, *Securing the Revolution*, p. 267. See also Leonard Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963).

26. Quoted in Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, pp. 202-3, 206.

national government mattered so little that irrelevance threatened to dissolve the union.²⁷

Of course, some national men in the tradition of the founders still carried on in the Washington of the 1820s. Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun come to mind, although Calhoun was soon to drift stateward as well. But many nationalists seemed to despair of government. Rather than smashing up in political warfare, the country now seemed more likely simply to fade away, following the sun over the western horizon. Many nationalizers turned to private institutions: colleges, home missionary societies, Bible and tract societies, reform associations. They hoped to use private enterprise to battle the centrifugal forces of privatism.²⁸ Lyman Beecher dealt with the problem directly in 1820 in an address to the Charitable Society for the Education of Indigent Pious Young Men for the Ministry of the Gospel:

The integrity of the Union demands special exertions to produce in the nation a more homogeneous character and bind us together with firmer bonds. . . . The prevalence of pious, intelligent, enterprising ministers through the nation, at the ratio of one of a thousand, would establish schools, and academies, and colleges, and habits, and institutions of homogeneous influence. These would produce a sameness of views, and feelings, and interests, which would lay the foundation of our empire upon a rock. Religion is the central attraction which must supply the deficiency of political affinity and interest.²⁹

Most newspapers reflected the turn outward to the West and inward to the states. The number of newspapers grew remarkably in the fifteen years after 1810—from fewer than four hundred to more than eight hundred. This number made the United States by far the greatest newspaper country in the world. In second place

27. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

28. Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), pp. 4–5; David Paul Nord, 'The Evangelical Origins of Mass Media in America, 1815–1835,' *Journalism Monographs* 88 (1984): 3–4.

29. Quoted in Peter Dobkin Hall, *The Organization of American Culture, 1700–1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982), p. 88.

was Great Britain, with about half that number.³⁰ But most of these newspapers were small weeklies scattered across the land. They carried large amounts of foreign and national news, and they spoke the same language of liberty and republicanism. But their political and cultural orientations were to their states. They represented state parties and state economic interests. More than ever before, newspapers became boosters of private business and the politics of economic development. Once again, newspapers reflected the political disaggregation and decentralization of the country.

From time to time in the 1820s, Americans (and their newspapers) were briefly able to raise themselves high enough to see the country as a whole, to see the *nation*. On July 4, 1826—fifty years to the day after the Declaration of Independence—John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died. This ‘double apotheosis’ of ‘twin sons of liberty,’ this ‘setting of two suns’ on the same historic day, was an astonishingly providential and national event. As the news slowly spread from Quincy and Monticello throughout the land, Americans were awakened by their own past. They seemed to realize, with some surprise, that they ‘had a past, a golden age, a glorious heritage.’³¹ Adams and Jefferson had been bitter foes in the political wars of the 1790s. But in the last fourteen years of their lives, they had renewed their correspondence and their affection. Their reunion, now consummated in patriotic death on the Fourth of July, seemed laden with symbolic meaning for the nation. Everywhere orators and newspapers drew from it lessons of harmony, unity, and nationality.³²

Most of the orators and newspaper writers seemed to equate

30. Edwin Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of Journalism*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 193; Allan R. Pred, *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790–1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 21; J. D. B. DeBow, comp., *Statistical View of the United States, Compendium of the Seventh Census*, (Washington, D.C.: Beverley Tucker, Senate Printer, 1854), pp. 154–58.

31. John Murray Allison, *Adams and Jefferson: The Story of a Friendship* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), pp. 324, 330; Peterson, *Adams and Jefferson*, pp. 128–29.

32. Peterson, *Adams and Jefferson*, p. 129.

reunion and harmony. But, in fact, this was not the case for Adams and Jefferson. They were reunited, but never harmonious. Early in their renewed correspondence, Adams had written to Jefferson: 'You and I ought not to die, before we have explained ourselves to each other.'³³ They tried, but failed. On the most fundamental issues of political philosophy and statecraft, neither quite grasped what the other was saying. Yet despite their enduring and passionate disagreement, their affections grew as their correspondence continued. 'Despite' may be the wrong word here. Perhaps *because* of their passionate disagreement their affections grew. Perhaps their love (Adams's word) lived in that endless controversy. And perhaps the same might be said of the nation. In political matters, Americans have never succeeded in explaining themselves to each other, certainly not in the period 1776-1826. In the early years of the Republic, the state was fragile and its future uncertain. Disputes over the key terms of political philosophy and practice were incessant, passionate, and sometimes violent. Americans used the same words, but the meanings were different. Yet the conversation went on, and in that conversation grew the symbolic language of the nation: republicanism, liberty, independence, representation, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, the people. In the controversy of the *state*, the ordeal of the union, the nation was born. In other words, to be an American was to participate in the 'revolutionary dialogue' that Adams and Jefferson had begun.

In the early Republic, newspapers did not soften or diffuse the hostilities generated by this dialogue. On the contrary, they amplified the hostilities and intensified the crises of the state. But they made the dialogue possible. And that is the link between newspapers and American nationhood, 1776-1826.

33. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 111.

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