University of Larbi Ben M'Hidi Oum El Bouaghi
Faculty of Letters and Foreign Language
Department of English Language

Second Year Students
Module: American Civ

# New Republic era in U.S. History (1789–1816)

## I/ George Washington's Presidency

George Washington's presidency (1789-1797) set critical precedents for the new United States under the Constitution. As the first president, Washington faced the challenge of defining the role and powers of the executive branch while ensuring the stability of the young republic. His administration focused on establishing a strong financial system, maintaining neutrality in foreign affairs, and responding to internal challenges such as the Whiskey Rebellion. Washington also formed the first presidential cabinet, including key figures like Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, whose opposing views shaped early political divisions. His farewell address warned against political parties and entangling foreign alliances, offering guidance for future leaders. Washington's presidency laid the foundation for the office and solidified the strength of the federal government.

### 1. **Organizing the Federal Government**

Washington took the oath of office as the first U.S. president on April 30, 1789. From then on, what the Constitution and its system of checks and balances actually meant in practice would be determined from day to day by the decisions of Congress as the legislative branch, the president as the head of the executive branch, and the Supreme Court as the top federal court in the judicial branch.

#### 1.1. Executive Departments

As chief executive, Washington's first task was to organize new departments of the executive (law-enforcing) branch. The Constitution authorizes the president to appoint chiefs of departments, although they must be confirmed, or approved, by the Senate. Washington appointed four heads of departments: Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state, Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury, Henry Knox as secretary of war, and Edmund Randolph as attorney general. These four men formed a cabinet of advisers with whom President Washington met regularly to discuss major policy issues. Today, presidents still meet with their cabinets to obtain advice and information.

#### 1.2. The Federal Court System

The only federal court mentioned in the Constitution is **the Supreme Court**. Congress, however, was given the power to create other federal courts with lesser powers and to determine the number of justices making up the Supreme Court. One of Congress' first laws was **the Judiciary Act of 1789**, which established a Supreme Court with one chief justice and five associate justices. This highest court was empowered to rule on the constitutionality of decisions made by state courts. The act also provided for a system of 13 district courts and three circuit courts of appeals.

1.3. **Alexander Hamilton’s Financial Program**

Alexander Hamilton, who was the Secretary of the Treasury, had a plan to fix the money problems of the United States government. His plan had three main parts. First, he wanted to pay off all the money the country owed to other people and also take on the debts that the states had from the Revolutionary War. Second, he wanted to help American businesses grow by putting high taxes on things brought in from other countries. This would make American-made goods cheaper and help businesses here. Third, he wanted to make a big bank for the country. This bank would keep the government's money safe and make paper money that was good all over the country.

People in the North, especially rich merchants, liked Hamilton's plan because it helped them directly. They supported his idea for high taxes and a bank. But not everyone liked Hamilton's ideas. Some people called Anti-Federalists were worried that giving more power to the central government would take power away from the states. Thomas Jefferson, who was one of the Anti-Federalists, didn't like Hamilton's plan because he thought it only helped rich people and not poor farmers who owed money. After a lot of arguing, Congress finally agreed to Hamilton's plan, but they changed some things. They didn't make the taxes as high as Hamilton wanted, and they moved the capital of the country to a place in the South as a compromise with Jefferson.

- **National Bank**

Jefferson argued that the Constitution did not give Congress the power to create a bank. But Hamilton took a broader view of the Constitution, arguing that the document's “necessary and proper” clause authorized Congress to do whatever was necessary to carry out its enumerated powers. Washington supported Hamilton on the issue, and the proposed bank was voted into law. Although chartered by the federal government, the Bank of the United States was privately owned. As a major shareholder of the bank, the federal government could print paper currency and use federal deposits to stimulate business.

**2. George Washington and the Foreign Affairs**

Washington's first term as president (1789-1793) coincided with the outbreak of revolution in France, a cataclysmic event that was to touch off a series of wars between the new French Republic and the monarchies of Europe. Washington's entire eight years as president, as well as the four years of his successor, John Adams, were taken up with the question of whether to give U.S. support to France, France's enemies, or neither side.

The French Revolution Americans generally supported the French people's aspiration to establish a republic, but many were also horrified by reports of mob hysteria and mass executions. To complicate matters, the U.S. - French alliance remained in effect, although it was an alliance with the French monarchy, not with the revolutionary republic. Jefferson and his supporters

sympathized with the revolutionary cause. They also argued that, because Britain was seizing American merchant ships bound for French ports, the United States should join France in its defensive war against Britain.

**2.1. Proclamation of Neutrality (1793)**

Washington, however, believed that the young nation was not strong enough to engage in a European war. Resisting popular clamour, in 1793 he issued a proclamation of U.S. neutrality in the conflict. Jefferson resigned from the cabinet in disagreement with Washington's policy.

**2.2.The Jay Treaty (1794)**

The Jay Treaty, negotiated in 1794 by Chief Justice John Jay and British diplomats, sought to resolve lingering issues between the United States and Great Britain following the American Revolutionary War. The treaty aimed to address disputes such as British occupation of western forts, trade imbalances, and British interference with American shipping.

**2.3. The Pinckney Treaty (1795)**

Totally unexpected was the effect that the Jay Treaty had on Spain's policy toward its territories in the Americas. Seeing the treaty as a sign that the United States might be drawing closer to Spain's longtime foe Britain, Spain decided to consolidate its holdings in North America. The Spanish influence in the Far West had been strengthened by a series of Catholic missions along the California coast but they were concerned about their colonies in the Southeast. Thomas Pinckney, the U.S. minister to Spain, negotiated a treaty in which Spain agreed to open the lower Mississippi River and New Orleans to American trade. The right of deposit was granted to Americans so that they could transfer cargoes in New Orleans without paying duties to the Spanish government. Spain further agreed to accept the U.S. claim that Florida's northern boundary should be at the 31st parallel (not north of that line, as Spain had formerly insisted).

**3. Washington’s Domestic Concerns**

In addition to coping with foreign challenges, stabilizing the nation's credit, and organizing the new government, Washington faced a number of domestic problems and crises.

**3.1. American Indians**

Through the final decades of the 18th century, settlers crossed the Alleghenies and moved the frontier steadily westward into the Ohio Valley and beyond. In an effort to resist the settlers' encroachment on their lands, a number of the tribes formed the Northwest (or Western) Confederacy. Initially the tribes, including the Shawnee, Delaware, Iroquois, and others under the Miami war chief Little Turtle, won a series of bloody victories over the local militia. Americans on the frontier were incensed by evidence that the British were supplying the American Indians with arms and encouraging them to attack the intruding Americans. In 1794 the U.S. army led by General Anthony Wayne defeated the Confederacy tribes at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in north-

western Ohio. The next year, the chiefs of the defeated peoples agreed to the Treaty of Greenville, in which they surrendered claims to the Ohio Territory and promised to open it up to settlement.

### 3.2. The Whiskey Rebellion (1794)

The Whiskey Rebellion of 1794 was a significant uprising in the newly formed United States, primarily centred in western Pennsylvania, triggered by the federal government's imposition of an excise tax on whiskey production and sales to alleviate the national debt from the Revolutionary War. Farmers in the region, heavily reliant on whiskey production for income, protested the tax, citing its disproportionate impact on small-scale producers and infringement upon principles of representation. The rebellion escalated to violence against federal tax collectors, prompting President George Washington to mobilize a militia force to suppress the uprising. The federal militia swiftly quelled the rebellion without major casualties, leading to the arrest and subsequent pardoning of many involved. This event underscored the federal government's authority to enforce laws and maintain order, establishing a precedent for centralized power in the young nation.

### 3.3. Western Lands

In the 1790s, the Jay Treaty and the victory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers gave the federal government control of vast tracts of land. Congress encouraged the rapid settlement of these lands by passing the Public Land Act in 1796, which established orderly procedures for dividing and selling federal lands at reasonable prices. The process for adding new states to the Union, as set forth in the Constitution, went smoothly. In 1791 Vermont became the first new state, followed by Kentucky in 1792 and Tennessee in 1796.

## 4. Washington and the Political Parties

Washington's election by unanimous vote of the Electoral College in 1789 underscored the popular belief that political parties were not needed. The Constitution itself did not mention political parties, and the Framers assumed none would arise. They were soon proven wrong. The debates between Federalists and Anti-Federalists in 1787 and 1788 were the first indication that a two-party system would emerge as a core feature of American politics.

- **Origins of the Political Parties**

In colonial times, groups of legislators commonly formed temporary factions and voted together either for or against a specific policy. When an issue was settled, the factions would dissolve. The dispute between Federalists and Anti-Federalists over the ratification of the Constitution closely resembled the factional disputes of an earlier period. What was unusual about this conflict was that it was organized-at least by the Federalists-across state lines and in that sense prefigured the national parties that emerged soon afterward.

In the 1790s, sometimes called the Federalist era because it was dominated largely by Federalist policies, political parties began to form around two leading figures, Hamilton and

Jefferson. The Federalist Party supported Hamilton and his financial program. An opposition party known as the Democratic - Republican Party supported Jefferson and tried to elect candidates in different states who opposed Hamilton's program. The French Revolution further solidified the formation of national political parties. Americans divided sharply over whether to support France. A large number of them followed Jefferson's lead in openly challenging President Washington's neutrality policy.

- **Differences between the Parties**

The Federalists were strongest in the north-eastern states and advocated the growth of federal power. The Democratic-Republicans were strongest in the southern states and on the western frontier and argued for states' rights. By 1796, the two major political parties were already taking shape and becoming better organized. In that year, President Washington announced that he intended to retire to private life at the end of his second term.

**5. The Importance of Washington's Farewell Address Assisted by Alexander Hamilton, the** retiring president wrote a farewell address for publication in the newspapers in late 1796. In this message, which had enormous influence because of Washington's prestige, the president spoke about policies and practices that he considered unwise. He warned Americans:

**• not to get involved in European affairs**

**• not to make "permanent alliances" in foreign affairs**

**• not to form political parties**

**• not to fall into sectionalism**

For the next century, future presidents would heed as gospel Washington's warning against "permanent alliances." **However, in the case of political parties**, Washington was already behind the times, since political parties were well on their way to becoming a vital part of the American political system. One long-range consequence of Washington's decision to leave office after two terms was that later presidents followed his example. Presidents elected to two terms (including Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson) would voluntarily retire even though the Constitution placed no limit on a president's tenure in office. The two-term tradition continued unbroken until 1940 when Franklin Roosevelt won election to a third term. Then, the 22nd Amendment, ratified in 1951, made the two-term limit a part of the Constitution.

## II/ John Adams' Presidency

Even as Washington was writing his Farewell Address, political parties were working to gain majorities in the two houses of Congress and to line up enough electors from the various states to elect the next president. The vice president, John Adams, was the Federalists' candidate, while former secretary of state Thomas Jefferson was the choice of the Democratic-Republicans. Adams

won by three electoral votes. Jefferson became vice-president, since the original Constitution gave that office to the candidate receiving the second highest number of electoral votes.

- **The XYZ Affair**

Troubles abroad related to the French Revolution presented Adams with the first major challenge of his presidency. Americans were angered by reports that U.S. merchant ships were being seized by French warships and privateers. Seeking a peaceful settlement, Adams sent a delegation to Paris to negotiate with the French government. Certain French ministers known only as X, Y, and Z because their names were never revealed, requested bribes as the basis for entering into negotiations. The American delegates indignantly refused. Newspaper reports of the demands made by X, Y, and Z infuriated many Americans, who now clamoured for war against France. "Millions for defence, but not one cent for tribute" became the slogan of the hour.

One faction of the Federalist Party, led by Alexander Hamilton, hoped that by going to war the United States could gain French and Spanish lands in North America. President Adams, on the other hand, resisted the popular sentiment for war. Recognizing that the U.S. Army and Navy were not yet strong enough to fight a major power, the president avoided war and sent new ministers to Paris.

- **The Alien and Sedition Acts**

Anger against France strengthened the Federalists in the congressional elections of 1798 enough to win a majority in both houses. The Federalists took advantage of their victory by enacting laws to restrict their political opponents, the Democratic-Republicans. For example, since most immigrants voted Democratic-Republican, the Federalists passed the Naturalization Act, which increased from 5 to 14 the years required for immigrants to qualify for U.S. citizenship. They also passed the Alien Acts, which authorized the president to deport aliens considered dangerous and to detain enemy aliens in time of war. Most seriously, they passed the Sedition Act, which made it illegal for newspaper editors to criticize either the president or Congress and imposed fines or imprisonment for editors who violated the law.

- **The Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions**

Democratic-Republicans argued that the Alien and Sedition Acts violated rights guaranteed by the 1st Amendment of the Constitution. In 1799, however, the Supreme Court had not yet established the principle of judicial review. Democratic-Republican leaders challenged the legislation of the Federalist Congress by enacting nullifying laws of their own in the state legislatures. The Kentucky legislature adopted a resolution that had been written by Thomas Jefferson, and the Virginia legislature adopted a resolution introduced by James Madison. Both resolutions declared that the states had entered into a "compact" in forming the national government, and, therefore, if any act of the federal government broke the compact, a state could nullify the federal law. Although only Kentucky and Virginia adopted nullifying resolutions in 1799, they set forth an argument and rationale that would be widely used in the nullification controversy of the 1830s.

- The immediate crisis over the Alien and Sedition Acts faded when the Federalists lost their majority in Congress after the election of 1800, and the new Democratic-Republican majority allowed the acts to expire or repealed them. In addition, the Supreme Court under John Marshall asserted its power in deciding whether a certain federal law was constitutional.

**The Election of 1800**

During Adams' presidency, the Federalists rapidly lost popularity. People disliked the Alien and Sedition Acts and complained about the new taxes imposed by the Federalists to pay the costs of preparing for a war against France. Though Adams avoided war, he had persuaded Congress that building up the U.S. Navy was necessary for the nation's defense.

**Election Results**

The election of 1800 swept the Federalists from power in both the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government. A majority of the presidential electors cast their ballots for two Democratic-Republicans: Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. Because both these candidates received the same number of electoral ballots, it was to hold a special election in the House of Representatives to break the tie. In December 1800 the Federalists still controlled the House. They debated and voted for days before they finally gave a majority to Jefferson. (Alexander Hamilton had urged his followers to vote for Jefferson, whom he considered less dangerous and of higher character than Burr.) Democratic-Republican lawmakers elected in 1800 took control of both the House and the Senate when a new Congress met in March 1801.

- **A Peaceful Revolution**

The passing of power in 1801 from one political party to another was accomplished without violence. This was a rare event for the times and a major indication that the U.S. constitutional system would endure the various strains that were placed upon it. The Federalists quietly accepted their defeat in the election of 1800 and peacefully relinquished control of the federal government to Jefferson's party, the Democratic-Republicans. The change from Federalist to Democratic-Republican control is known as the Revolution of 1800.

**III/ THE AGE OF JEFFERSON, 1800–1816**

*Let us then, fellow-citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are but dreary things. . . . But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.* Thomas Jefferson, First Inaugural Address, 1801

**I**n the election of 1800, there had been much animosity and bitter partisan feeling between the two national political parties. Following this Revolution of 1800, Thomas Jefferson, the new president, recognized the need for a smooth and peaceful transition of

power from the Federalists to the Republicans. That is why, in his inaugural address of 1801, Jefferson stressed the popular acceptance of the basic principles of constitutional government when he stated: "We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists."

By the end of the period covered in this chapter, it may be argued that the people were "all Republicans," for the Federalists were no longer a political power. We shall see how, under the leadership of Jefferson and his close friend James Madison, the nation experienced peaceful political change, expanded territorially, survived another war, and strengthened its democratic and nationalistic spirit. This new nation had its problems—including slavery, the treatment of Native Americans, and loyalty to local interests—but it was also a new nation that was surviving and growing.

**1.Jefferson's Presidency**

During his first term, the Democratic-Republican president attempted to win the allegiance and trust of Federalist opponents by maintaining the national bank and debt-repayment plan of Hamilton. In foreign policy, he carried on the neutrality policies of Washington and Adams. At the same time, Jefferson retained the loyalty of Republican supporters by adhering to his party's guiding principle of limited central government. He reduced the size of the military, eliminated a number of federal jobs, repealed the excise taxes—including those on whiskey, and lowered the national debt. Only Republicans were named to his cabinet, as he sought to avoid the internal divisions that had distracted Washington. Compared to Adams' troubled administration, Jefferson's first four years in office were relatively free of discord. The single most important achievement of these years was the acquisition by purchase of vast western lands known as the Louisiana Territory.

**1.1.The Louisiana Purchase**

The Louisiana Territory encompassed a vast, largely unexplored tract of western land through which the Mississippi and Missouri rivers flowed. At the mouth of the Mississippi lay the territory's most valuable property in terms of commerce—the port of New Orleans. For many years, Louisiana and New Orleans had been claimed by Spain. But in 1800, the French military and political leader Napoleon Bonaparte secretly forced Spain to give the Louisiana Territory back to its former owner, France. Napoleon hoped to restore the French empire in the Americas. By 1803, however, Napoleon had lost interest in this plan for two reasons: (1) he needed to concentrate French resources on fighting England and (2) a rebellion led by Toussaint l'Ouverture against French rule on the island of Santo Domingo had resulted in heavy French losses.

**1.2. U.S. interest in the Mississippi River:** During Jefferson's presidency, the western frontier extended beyond Ohio and Kentucky into the Indiana Territory. Settlers in this region depended for their economic existence on transporting goods on rivers that flowed westward into the Mississippi and southward as far as New Orleans. They were greatly alarmed therefore when in 1802 Spanish officials, who were still in charge of New Orleans, closed the port to Americans. They revoked the *right of deposit* granted in the Pinckney Treaty of 1795, which had allowed American farmers tax-free use of the port. People on the frontier clamored for government action. In addition to being concerned about the economic impact of the closing of New Orleans, President Jefferson was troubled by its consequences on foreign policy. He feared that, so long as a foreign power controlled the river at New Orleans, the United States risked entanglement in European affairs.

**Negotiations:** Jefferson sent ministers to France with instructions to offer up to $10 million for both New Orleans and a strip of land extending from that port eastward to Florida. If the American ministers failed in their negotiations with the French, they were instructed to begin discussions with Britain for a U.S.-British alliance. Napoleon's ministers, seeking funds for a war against Britain, offered to sell not only New Orleans but also the entire Louisiana Territory for $15 million. The surprised American ministers quickly went beyond their instructions and accepted.

**Constitutional predicament:** Jefferson and most Americans strongly approved of the Louisiana Purchase. Nevertheless, a constitutional problem troubled the president. Jefferson was committed to a strict interpretation of the Constitution and rejected Hamilton's argument that certain powers were implied. No clause in the Constitution explicitly stated that a president could purchase foreign land. In this case, Jefferson determined to set aside his idealism for the country's good. He submitted the purchase agreement to the Senate, arguing that lands could be added to the United States as an application of the president's power to make treaties. Casting aside the criticisms of Federalist senators, the Republican majority in the Senate quickly ratified the purchase.

**Consequences:** The Louisiana Purchase more than doubled the size of the United States, removed a foreign presence from the nation's borders, and guaranteed the extension of the western frontier to lands beyond the Mississippi. Furthermore, the acquisition of millions of acres of land strengthened Jefferson's hopes that his country's future would be based on an agrarian society of independent farmers rather than Hamilton's vision of an urban and industrial society. In political terms, the Louisiana Purchase increased Jefferson's popularity

and showed the Federalists to be a weak, sectionalist (New England-based) party that could do little more than complain about Republican policies.

**1.3. Lewis and Clark Expedition:** Even before Louisiana was purchased, Jefferson had persuaded Congress to fund a scientific exploration of the trans-Mississippi West to be led by Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark. The Louisiana Purchase greatly increased the importance of the expedition. Lewis and Clark set out from St. Louis in 1804, crossed the Rockies, reached the Oregon coast on the Pacific Ocean, then turned back and completed the return journey in 1806. The benefits of the expedition were many: increased geographic and scientific knowledge of previously unexplored country, strengthened U.S. claims to the Oregon Territory, improved relations with Native American tribes, and developed maps and land routes for fur trappers and future settlers.

**1.4. John Marshall and the Supreme Court**

After the sweeping Republican victory of 1800, the only power remaining to the Federalists was their control of the federal courts. The Federalist appointments to the courts, previously made by Washington and Adams, were not subject to recall or removal except by impeachment. Federalist judges therefore continued in office, much to the annoyance of the Republican president, Jefferson.

**John Marshall:** Ironically, the Federalist judge who caused Jefferson the most grief was one of his own cousins from Virginia, John Marshall. Marshall had been appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court during the final months of John Adams' presidency. He would serve in this position for 34 years, in which time he exerted as strong an influence on the Supreme Court as Washington had exerted on the presidency. Marshall's decisions in many landmark cases had the effect of strengthening the central government, often at the expense of states' rights.

**Case of *Marbury v. Madison* (1803):** The first major case to be decided by Marshall put him in direct conflict with his cousin, President Jefferson. Upon taking office, Jefferson wanted to block the Federalist appointments made at the last minute by his predecessor, John Adams. He ordered Secretary of State James Madison *not* to deliver the commissions to those Federalists judges whom Adams had appointed in his last days as president. One of Adams' "midnight appointments," William Marbury, sued for his commission. The case of *Marbury v. Madison* went to the Supreme Court for review in 1803. Chief Justice Marshall ruled that Marbury had a right to his commission according to the Judiciary Act passed by Congress in 1789. However, Marshall said, the Judiciary Act of 1789 was itself unconstitutional. The law

passed by Congress had given to the Court greater power and jurisdiction than the Constitution allowed. Therefore, the law was unconstitutional, and Marbury could not be given his commission.

In effect, Marshall sacrificed what would have been a small Federalist gain (the appointment of Marbury) for a much larger, long-term judicial victory. By ruling a law of Congress to be unconstitutional, Marshall established the doctrine of *judicial review.* From this point on, the Supreme Court would exercise the power to decide whether an act of Congress or of the president was or was not allowed by the Constitution. In effect, the Supreme Court could now overrule actions of the other two branches of the federal government.

**Judicial impeachments:** Jefferson tried other methods for overturning past Federalist measures and appointments. Soon after entering office, he suspended the Alien and Sedition Acts and released those jailed under them. Hoping to remove partisan Federalist judges, Jefferson supported a campaign of impeachment. The judge of one federal district was found to be mentally unbalanced. The House voted his impeachment and the Senate then voted to remove him. The House also impeached a Supreme Court justice, Samuel Chase, but the Senate acquitted him after finding no evidence of "high crimes." Except for these two cases, the impeachment campaign was largely a failure, as almost all the Federalist judges remained in office. Even so, the threat of impeachment caused the judges to be more cautious and less partisan in their decisions.

**2. Jefferson's Reelection**

In 1804 Jefferson was reelected president by an overwhelming margin, receiving all but 14 of the 176 electoral votes. His second term was marked by growing difficulties. There were plots by his former vice president, Aaron Burr; opposition by a faction of his own party (the "Quids"), who accused him of abandoning Republican principles; and foreign troubles from the Napoleonic wars in Europe.

***Aaron Burr:*** A Republican caucus (closed meeting) in 1804 decided not to nominate Aaron Burr for a second term as vice president. Burr then embarked on a series of ventures, one of which threatened to break up the Union and another of which resulted in the death of Alexander Hamilton.

**Federalist conspiracy:** Secretly forming a political pact with some radical New England Federalists, Burr planned to win the governorship of New York in 1804, unite that state with the New England states, and then lead this group of states to secede from the nation. Most

Federalists followed Alexander Hamilton in opposing Burr, who was defeated in the New York election. The conspiracy then disintegrated.

**Duel with Hamilton:** Angered by an insulting remark attributed to Hamilton, Burr challenged the Federalist leader to a duel and fatally shot him. Hamilton's death in 1804 deprived the Federalists of their last great leader and earned Burr the enmity of many.

**Trial for treason:** By 1806, Burr's intrigues had turned westward with a plan to take Mexico from Spain and possibly unite it with Louisiana under his rule. Learning of the conspiracy, Jefferson ordered Burr's arrest and trial for treason. Presiding at the trial was Chief Justice John Marshall, an adversary of Jefferson. A jury acquitted Burr, basing its decision on Marshall's narrow definition of treason and the lack of witnesses to any "overt act" by Burr.

***Difficulties Abroad***

As a matter of policy and principle, Jefferson tried to avoid war with a foreign power. Rejecting the idea of permanent alliances, he sought to maintain U.S. neutrality in the face of increasing provocation from both France and Britain during the Napoleonic wars.

**Barbary pirates:** The first major challenge to Jefferson's foreign policy came, not from a major European power, but from the piracy practiced by the Barbary states on the North African coast. To protect U.S. merchant ships from being seized by Barbary pirates, Presidents Washington and Adams had reluctantly agreed to pay tribute to the Barbary governments. The ruler of one state, the Pasha of Tripoli, demanded a higher sum in tribute when Jefferson took office. Rather than pay this sum, Jefferson decided to send a small fleet of U.S. naval vessels to the Mediterranean. Sporadic fighting with Tripoli lasted for four years (1801–1805). The American navy did not achieve a decisive victory but gained some respect and also offered a measure of protection to U.S. vessels trading in Mediterranean waters.

**Challenges to U.S. neutrality:** Meanwhile, the Napoleonic wars continued to dominate the politics of Europe—and to a lesser extent the commercial economy of the United States. The two principal belligerents, France and Britain, attempted naval blockades of enemy ports. They regularly seized the ships of neutral nations and confiscated their cargoes. The chief offender from the U.S. point of view was Britain, since its navy dominated the Atlantic. Most infuriating was the British practice of capturing U.S. sailors and impressing (forcing) them to serve in the British navy.

***Chesapeake-Leopard* affair.** One incident at sea especially aroused American anger and almost led to war. In 1807, only a few miles off the coast of Virginia, the British warship *Leopard* fired on the U.S. warship *Chesapeake.* Three Americans were killed and four others were taken captive and impressed into the British navy. Anti-British feeling ran high, and

many Americans demanded war. Jefferson, however, resorted to diplomacy and economic pressure as his response to the crisis.

**Embargo Act (1807):** As an alternative to war, Jefferson persuaded the Republican majority in Congress to pass the Embargo Act in 1807. This measure prohibited American merchant ships from sailing to any foreign port. Since the United States was Britain's largest trading partner, Jefferson hoped that the British would stop violating the rights of neutral nations rather than lose U.S. trade. The embargo, however, backfired and brought much greater economic hardship to the United States than to Britain. The British were determined to control the seas at all costs, and they had little difficulty substituting supplies from South America for U.S. goods. The embargo's effect on the U.S. economy, however, was devastating, especially for the merchant marine and shipbuilders of New England. So bad was the depression that a movement developed in the New England states to secede from the Union. Recognizing that the Embargo Act had failed, Jefferson called for its repeal in 1809 during the final days of his presidency. Even after repeal, however, U.S. ships could trade legally with all nations *except* Britain and France.

## IV. Madison's Presidency

Jefferson believed strongly in the tradition established by Washington of voluntarily retiring from the presidency after a second term. For his party's nomination for president, he supported his close friend, Secretary of State James Madison.

### *1.The Election of 1808*

Ever since leading the effort to write and ratify the Constitution, Madison was widely viewed as a brilliant thinker and statesman. He had worked tirelessly with Jefferson in developing the Democratic-Republican party. On the other hand, he was a weak public speaker, possessed a stubborn temperament, and lacked Jefferson's political skills. With Jefferson's backing, Madison was nominated for president by a caucus of congressional Republicans. Other factions of the Republican party nominated two other candidates. Even so, Madison was able to win a majority of electoral votes and to defeat both his Republican opponents and the Federalist candidate, Charles Pinckney. The Federalists nevertheless managed to gain seats in Congress due to widespread unhappiness with the effects of the embargo.

### *1.1.Commercial Warfare*

Madison's presidency was dominated by the same European problems that had plagued Jefferson's second term. Like Jefferson, he attempted a combination of diplomacy

and economic pressure to deal with the Napoleonic wars. Unlike Jefferson, he finally consented to take the United States to war.

**Nonintercourse Act of 1809:** After the repeal of Jefferson's disastrous embargo act, Madison hoped to end economic hardship while maintaining his country's rights as a neutral nation. The Nonintercourse Act of 1809 provided that Americans could now trade with all nations except Britain and France.

**Macon's Bill No. 2 (1810):** Economic hardships continued into 1810. Nathaniel Macon, a member of Congress, introduced a bill that restored U.S. trade with Britain and France. Macon's Bill No. 2 provided, however, that if either Britain or France formally agreed to respect U.S. neutral rights at sea, then the United States would prohibit trade with that nation's foe.

**Napoleon's deception:** Upon hearing of Congress' action, Napoleon announced his intention of revoking the decrees that had violated U.S. neutral rights. Taking Napoleon at his word, Madison carried out the terms of Macon's Bill No. 2 by embargoing U.S. trade with Britain in 1811. It soon became apparent, however, that Napoleon had no intention of fulfilling his promise. The French continued to seize American merchant ships despite their emperor's deceitful pledge to the United States.

### 1.2.The War of 1812

Neither Britain nor the United States wanted their dispute to end in war. And yet war between them did break out in 1812.

#### *Causes of the War*

From the U.S. point of view, the pressures leading to war came from two directions: the continued violation of U.S. neutral rights at sea and troubles with the British on the western frontier.

**Free seas and trade:** As a trading nation, the United States depended upon the free flow of shipping across the Atlantic. Yet the chief belligerents in Europe, Britain and France, had no interest in respecting neutral rights so long as they were locked in a life-and-death struggle with each other. Since the French Revolution in the 1790s, the majority of Americans had tended to sympathize with France against Britain. They well remembered that Britain had seemed a cruel enemy during the American Revolution. And Jeffersonian Republicans applauded the French for having overthrown their monarchy in their Revolution. Moreover, even though both the French and the British violated U.S. neutral rights, the British violations appeared to be more blatant because of the British navy's practice of impressing American seamen.

**Frontier pressures:** Added to long-standing grievances over British actions at sea were the ambitions of western Americans for more open land. Americans on the frontier longed for the lands of British Canada and Spanish Florida. Standing in the way of their ambitions were the British and their Indian and Spanish allies. Conflict with the Native Americans was a perennial problem for the restless westerners. For decades, settlers had been gradually pushing the Native Americans farther and farther westward. In an effort to defend their lands from further encroachment, Shawnee twin brothers—Tecumseh, a warrior, and Prophet, a religious leader—attempted to unite all of the tribes east of the Mississippi River. White settlers became suspicious of Tecumseh and persuaded the governor of the Indiana Territory, General William Henry Harrison, to take aggressive action. In the Battle of Tippecanoe, in 1811, Harrison destroyed the Shawnee headquarters and put an end to Tecumseh's efforts to form an Indian confederacy. The British had provided only limited aid to Tecumseh. Nevertheless, Americans on the frontier blamed the British for instigating the rebellion.

**War hawks:** A congressional election in 1810 had brought a group of new, young Republicans to Congress, many of them from frontier states (Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio). Known as war hawks because of their eagerness for war with Britain, they quickly gained significant influence in the House of Representatives. Led by Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, the war-hawk Congressmen argued that war with Britain would be the only way to defend American honor, gain Canada, and destroy Native American resistance on the frontier.

**Declaration of war:** British delays in meeting U.S. demands over neutral rights combined with political pressures from the war-hawk Congress finally persuaded Madison to seek a declaration of war against Britain. Ironically, the British government had by this time (June 1812) agreed to suspend its naval blockade. News of its decision reached the White House after Congress had declared war.

***A Divided Nation***

Neither Congress nor the American people were united in support of the war. In Congress, Pennsylvania and Vermont joined the southern and western states to provide a slight majority for the war declaration. Voting against the war were most of the northern states: New York, New Jersey, and the rest of the states in New England.

- **Election of 1812:** A similar division of opinion was seen in the presidential election of 1812, in which Republican strength in the South and West overcame Federalist and antiwar Republican opposition to war in the North. Madison won reelection, defeating

De Witt Clinton of New York, the candidate of the Federalists and antiwar Republicans.

**Opposition to the war:** Those Americans who opposed the war viewed it as "Mr. Madison's War" and the work of the war hawks in Congress. Most outspoken in their criticism of the war were three groups: New England merchants, Federalist politicians, and "Quids," or "Old" Republicans. New England merchants were opposed because, after the repeal of the Embargo Act, they were making sizable profits from the European war and viewed impressment as merely a minor inconvenience. Both commercial interests and religious ties to Protestantism made them more sympathetic to the Protestant British than to the Catholic French. Opposed as a matter of principle to anything Madison did, Federalist politicians viewed the war as a Republican scheme to conquer Canada and Florida, with the ultimate aim of increasing Republican voting strength. For their part, the "Quids" or "Old" Republicans criticized the war because it violated the classic Republican commitment to limited federal power and to the maintenance of peace.

***.Military Defeats and Naval Victories***

Facing Britain's overwhelming naval power, Madison's military strategists based their hope for victory on (1) Napoleon's continued success in Europe and (2) a U.S. land campaign against Canada.

**Invasion of Canada:** A poorly equipped American army initiated military action in 1812 by launching a three-part invasion of Canada, one force starting out from Detroit, another from Niagara, and a third from Lake Champlain. These and later forays into Canada were easily repulsed by the British defenders. An American raid and burning of government buildings in York (Toronto) in 1813 only served to encourage retaliation by the British.

**Naval battles:** The U.S. navy achieved some notable victories, due largely to superior shipbuilding and the valorous deeds of American seamen, including many free African Americans. In late 1812, the U.S. warship *Constitution* (nicknamed "Old Ironsides") raised American morale by defeating and sinking a British ship off the coast of Nova Scotia. Also effective were the attacks of American privateers who, motivated by both patriotism and profit, captured numerous British merchant ships. Offsetting these gains was the success of the British navy in establishing a blockade of the U.S. coast, which crippled trading and fishing. Probably the most important naval battle of the war was fought in 1813 on Lake Erie. At the end of an unrelenting and murderous three-hour engagement, a 28-year-old American, Captain Oliver Hazard Perry, declared proudly, "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

Perry's naval victory prepared the way for General William Henry Harrison's military victory at the Battle of Thames River (near Detroit), in which Tecumseh was killed. The next year, 1814, another young naval captain, Thomas Macdonough, defeated a British fleet on Lake Champlain. As a result, the British were forced to retreat and to abandon their plan to invade New York and New England.

**Chesapeake campaign:** By the spring of 1814, the defeat of Napoleon in Europe enabled the British to increase their forces in North America. In the summer of that year, a British army marched through the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., and set fire to the White House, the Capitol, and other government buildings. The British also attempted to take Baltimore, but Fort McHenry held out after a night's bombardment—an event immortalized by Francis Scott Key in the words of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

**Southern campaign:** Meanwhile, U.S. troops in the South were ably commanded by General Andrew Jackson. In March 1814, at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in present-day Alabama, Jackson ended the power of an important British ally, the Creek nation. The victory not only eliminated the Native American ally but also opened new lands to white settlers. A major British effort to control the Mississippi River was halted at New Orleans by Jackson leading a force of frontiersmen, free blacks, and Creoles. The victory was impressive—but also meaningless. The Battle of New Orleans was fought on January 8, 1815, two weeks *after* a treaty ending the war had been signed in Ghent, Belgium.

***The Treaty of Ghent***

By 1814, the British were weary of war. Having fought Napoleon for more than a decade, they now faced the prospect of maintaining the peace in Europe. At the same time, Madison's government recognized that the Americans would be unable to win a decisive victory. American peace commissioners traveled to Ghent, Belgium, to discuss terms of peace with British diplomats. On Christmas Eve, 1814, an agreement was reached. The terms were:

_ a halt to the fighting

_ the return of all conquered territory to the prewar claimant

_ recognition of the prewar boundary between Canada and the United States.

The Treaty of Ghent, promptly ratified by the Senate in 1815, said nothing at all about the grievances that led to war. Britain made no concessions concerning impressment, blockades, or other maritime differences. Thus, the war ended in stalemate with no gain for either side**.**

***The Hartford Convention***

Before the war ended, the New England states came close to seceding from the Union. Bitterly opposed to both the war and the Republican government in Washington, radical

Federalists in New England urged that the Constitution be amended and that, as a last resort, secession be voted upon. To consider these matters, a special convention was held at Hartford, Connecticut, in December 1814. Delegates from the New England states rejected the radical calls for secession. But to limit the growing power of the Republicans in the South and West, they adopted a number of proposals. One of them called for a two-thirds vote of both houses for any future declaration of war. Shortly after the convention dissolved, news came of both Jackson's victory at New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent. These events ended criticism of the war and further weakened the Federalists by stamping them as unpatriotic.

***The War's Legacy***

From Madison's point of view, the war achieved none of its original aims. Nevertheless, it had a number of important consequences for the future development of the American republic. They may be listed as follows:

1. Having now survived two wars with Britain, a great power, the United States gained the respect of other nations.
2. The United States came to accept Canada as a neighbor and a part of the British Empire.
3. Widely denounced for its talk of secession and disunion in New England, the Federalist party came to an end as a national force and declined even in New England.
4. Talk of nullification and secession in New England set a precedent that would later be used by the South.
5. Abandoned by their British allies, Native Americans in the West were forced to surrender large areas of land to white settlement.
6. As European goods became unavailable due to the British naval blockade, more U.S. factories were built, and Americans took a big step toward industrial self-sufficiency.
7. War heroes such as Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison would soon be in the forefront of a new generation of political leaders.
8. As a result of the war, there was a strong feeling of American nationalism and also a growing belief that the future for the United States lay in the West and away from Europe.