



Jonathan Jackson, c. 1760s
Portrait by John Singleton Copley

Jonathan Jackson's *Thoughts*: A High Federalist Critique of the Philadelphia Constitution

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Abstract: *Jonathan Jackson of Newburyport, Massachusetts, is best known as a member of the “Essex Junto,” a group of Federalist New England lawyers, merchants, and politicians—many of them from Essex County—who opposed Democratic-Republican policies. However, Jackson also authored a controversial and lengthy political pamphlet criticizing the Philadelphia Constitution as excessively democratic. This article examines Jackson’s political thought as expressed in his 1788 pamphlet Thoughts on the Political Situation of the United States, a politically conservative commentary on the Founding Era, richly detailed in its grievances and propositions, and informed by the major writers of the Enlightenment. This work, however, proved so unpopular that it ruined his hopes of election to Congress. Instead, he occupied appointed government positions under Federalist administrations and promoted regional industrial growth, which was more fully realized by his son Patrick Tracy Jackson. Jackson’s life and published work offers a window on High Federalism, a conservative strain in American political thought during an important transitional period in American political history. Michael J. Connolly is an associate professor of history at Purdue University North Central and author of Capitalism, Politics, and Railroads in Jacksonian New England (University of Missouri Press, 2003).*

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When used in politics and religion, the adjective “high” connotes austerity, severity, gravitas, rigor, and an overall seriousness in behavior and appearance. Think, for example, of a “High Mass” or “High Church.” Fearful of the rebelliousness of the 1780s represented by Shays’ Rebellion and followers of Alexander Hamilton in national politics, High Federalists urged a more centralized government, fewer democratic institutions, and a less frivolous society. Among the best-known New England High Federalists was Fisher Ames of Dedham, Massachusetts, whose brilliant, vitriolic prose pierced Jeffersonians for two decades after ratification.

Lesser known but no less noteworthy was Jonathan Jackson of Newburyport, Massachusetts, whose long 1788 pamphlet *Thoughts on the Political Situation of the United States* (his only published work) cautiously approved the new Philadelphia Constitution but worried it did not go far enough in curbing American democratic tendencies and frequent elections. A fine example of High Federalism and a conservative strain in American political thought, Jackson’s work offers an interesting window into those transitional years between the discontented 1780s and the early national party battles between Hamiltonian Federalism and Jeffersonian Republicanism. It also links to nineteenth-century Whiggery and the Industrial Revolution. This article will outline Jackson’s life and career as a merchant and public servant and then examine the various elements of his political philosophy as expressed in *Thoughts*.

JACKSON’S EARLY LIFE AND CAREER 1743-1787

Jonathan Jackson was born on June 4, 1743, in Boston, the only son of merchant Edward Jackson. After graduating from Harvard College in 1761 (like his father, who was a 1726 Harvard graduate), Jackson immediately entered into business with Newburyport merchant Patrick Tracy. In 1766, Jackson entered into partnership with merchant John Bromfield and their modest-sized Newburyport firm imported English, Scottish, and Caribbean goods as well as Pennsylvania flour and iron, and carried back Massachusetts flaxseed and rum. As his fortunes improved, Jackson married Sarah Barnard, the daughter of a Salem minister, in January 1767. The young merchant, active in city social life and the Congregational Church, seemed on the cusp of prosperity.¹

As the American colonies came into increasing conflict with Great Britain, Jackson’s life became unsettled. In the late 1760s, his firm participated in a boycott of British goods that had resulted from widespread discontent with the Townsend Revenue Acts, an unpopular series of acts designed to

raise revenue and enforce trade regulations that included duties on certain goods imported from England. In 1770, his wife died after a struggle with tuberculosis. His own health also began to suffer from the strain, and he was forced to leave his office for an extended vacation. Nevertheless, he remarried in 1772 to Patrick Tracy's only daughter Hannah, who would bear nine children over the next ten years, and built a large home in Newburyport. As a result of this union, Jackson joined his Tracy in-laws in a much larger mercantile firm in the spring of 1774, an inauspicious time for new business ventures as Parliament that year retaliated against Boston's intransigence with a series of Coercive Acts, a series of punitive measures that included closure of the Boston Harbor until the British East India Company was repaid for the tea destroyed during the Boston Tea Party. Jackson & Tracy & Tracy dealt largely in the New England-Pennsylvania trade and benefited from the closure of Boston Harbor when New Englanders imported into alternative ports. However, business was also risky; they sometimes traded in gunpowder and weapons, and one of the firm's ships was actually seized by the British Navy off the coast of Portugal.²

Jackson wholeheartedly backed the revolutionary cause, and less than one month before the Declaration of Independence freed his black slave, Pomp, who took the name Pomp Jackson and later served as a fifer in the American Army. The manumission document stated that Jackson felt "impropriety" in holding a slave, "more especially at a time when my country is so warmly contending for the liberty which every man ought to enjoy." He joined a group of prominent Essex County lawyers and businessmen in calling for a new Massachusetts Constitution and along with jurist Theophilus Parsons and three others penned the influential statement of emerging American political ideas called the "Essex Result." Due to these efforts, he attended the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention in 1779-1780 as one of three Essex County representatives and was appointed by Governor John Hancock to an open seat in the Continental Congress in 1782.³

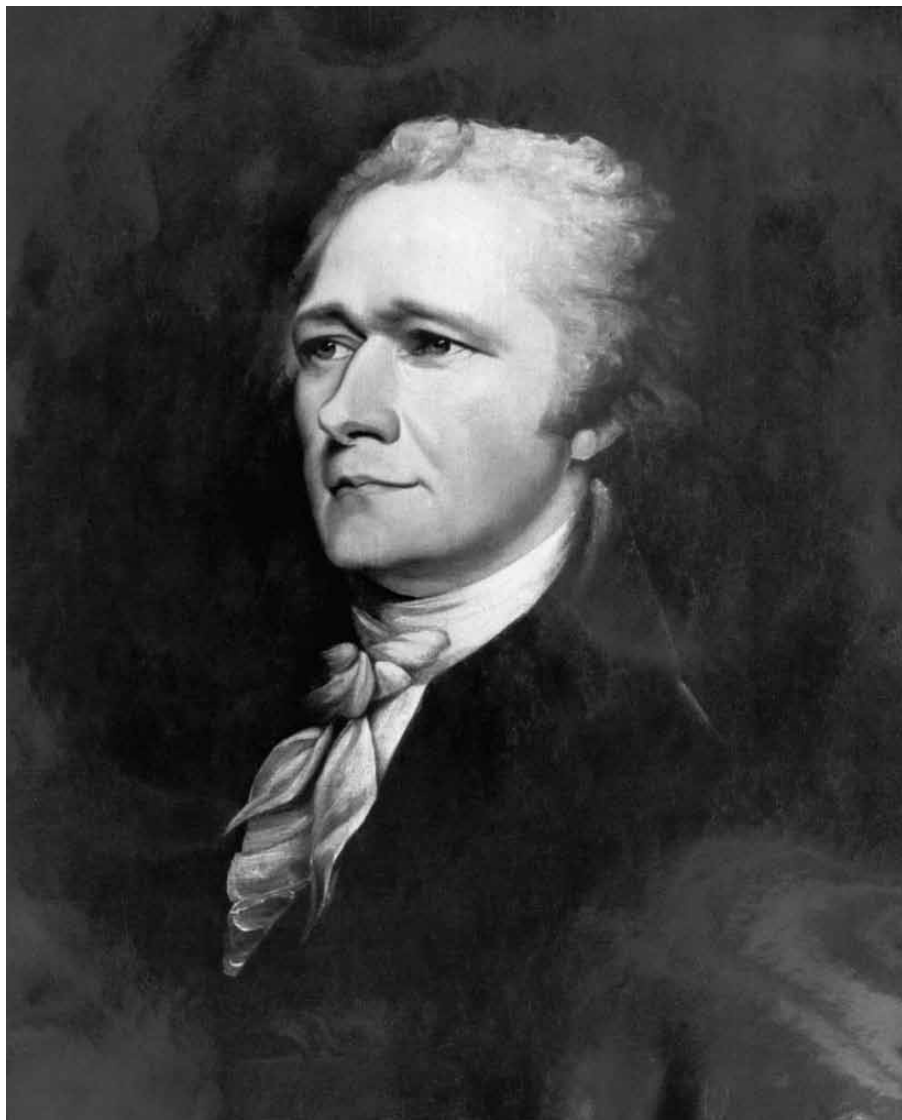
While his political career flourished, however, his business ventures floundered. The firm dissolved in 1777, and Jackson became a privateer, as his father had done successfully during King George's War (1744-1748). Between 1779 and 1783, the younger Jackson owned interest in at least thirty privateer ships. However, Jackson's privateering was not as successful as his father's, and by the war's end he had lost his entire fortune. Jackson attempted to recoup his wartime losses by investing in land and creating a new mercantile firm in 1783 with his Boston friend (and successor in Congress) Stephen Higginson. The following year he sailed for Europe to contact old business friends, traveled through Ireland and England meeting

with government officials, and attempted to open markets in France, Sweden, and Russia. An increasingly desperate Jackson even considered entering the slave trade to cure his economic ills. When he returned to Massachusetts in May 1785, he moved his family to Boston to be closer to his business concerns, but his connection with Higginson was a failure. Despite a far-flung trade network connecting Boston with England, Portugal, Spain, the West Indies, and Virginia, he lost a considerable amount of money, including money swindled by a French West Indian merchant. He traveled with one of his sons to Haiti in August 1787 in an unsuccessful attempt to recover this money and that same year his partnership with Higginson dissolved. Failing in business a second time, he moved his family back to Newburyport and turned permanently toward politics and government employment.⁴

JACKSON'S POLITICAL CAREER 1787-1810

By 1787 Jackson was thoroughly disillusioned by the record of American republicanism. His brief experience in Congress had left him unimpressed with the aptitude and principles of its members, and he complained to his friend John Adams that congressional terms of office were too short and that Congress was too big.

His 1784-1785 sojourns in Europe had exposed him to the criticism of Europeans who ridiculed a weak American government and constitution. Despite his money troubles, Jackson was mortified with the 1786 debtors' revolt, Shays' Rebellion. Along with Samuel Adams and Stephen Higginson, he wrote a public condemnation of the uprising and organized a rally in Boston. He also served as a cavalry officer in an Essex County regiment drawn up to suppress the protestors and as an aide to General Benjamin Lincoln in efforts to quell the rebellion. These experiences, combined with a miserable economic climate from which Jackson suffered firsthand, drove him to publish a wide-ranging pamphlet in August 1788, titled *Thoughts on the Political Situation of the United States*. In it, he urged national leaders to lengthen terms of office for both president and Congress, shrink the size of Congress, embrace a Venetian-style mandatory participatory democracy, and adopt a social austerity of simple dress and manners. He approved of the new Philadelphia Constitution and of the Convention's president, George Washington, whom Jackson worshipped, but wondered if the Constitution went far enough in checking popular passions and insulating political leaders from public pressures. Insufficient checks and insulations invited demagoguery, a disturbing trend he saw in the 1780s.⁵



Alexander Hamilton

Jackson's *Thoughts on the Political Situation of the United States* expressed beliefs to the political right of Federalists like Alexander Hamilton.

Despite his disappointment with the Constitution, he allowed his name to be submitted for election to the First Federal Congress, though he eventually lost to the Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue. In 1789, he personally visited President Washington in New York City to request appointment to the post of Collector of the Port of Boston. When he discovered that General Lincoln was also there asking for the same post, he recommended that the president appoint Lincoln, never revealing his own ambitions. Instead, Washington appointed Jackson United States Marshal for Massachusetts. As marshal, he supervised federal prisons and the first federal census efforts in Massachusetts. Although the job had important political functions in the early national period (historian Leonard White called them “the handy men of the federal administration”), it lacked prestige and only paid on a fee basis. Still, it allowed him to remain a Federalist leader in Essex County. When President Washington visited the Commonwealth in late October 1789, Jackson entertained him at his Newburyport home.⁶

In 1791, Jackson became Inspector of Internal Revenue in the “second district” of Massachusetts (Essex, Worcester, Hampshire, and Berkshire Counties), which meant he was a federal tax officer in areas that had been afflicted by Shays’ Rebellion just a few years before. He succeeded Nathaniel Gorham as Supervisor of Internal Revenue for Massachusetts in 1796. With this better-paying federal job, he once again moved his family to Boston, this time leaving Newburyport for good. The move came with tremendous sadness, however, as his wife Hannah died soon after arriving in the city. Jackson’s son James became his father’s clerk and briefly lived with his father to keep him company. According to his son, at this point:

He was contented with the prospects before him, and that his ability to perform his official duties was not abating, but increasing. He had sustained a high and honorable character in periods of prosperity. He was retained in the office of Supervisor, more lucrative than that of Inspector, though he differed openly in his politics from Mr. Jefferson, while many of his friends were displaced. My father did not permit any apprehension of the loss of his office on account of politics.⁷

As a federal office holder and High Federalist from Essex County, Jackson faced accusations that he was a central figure in the secretive, powerful political group known as the “Essex Junto.” Jeffersonians claimed that prominent county Federalists like Jackson, Theophilus Parsons, John Lowell, Stephen Higginson, George Cabot, Timothy Pickering, and Benjamin

Goodhue manipulated state and national politics to their “ultra-conservative” purposes, steered American foreign policy in a strongly pro-British direction, and advocated New England secession if their policies were rejected in the Capitol. The charges were largely a product of the Jeffersonian imagination—the Essexmen were hardly a cohesive organization—but Jackson did remain active in national politics throughout the 1790s. He heartily approved of Alexander Hamilton’s 1790 blueprint for American political economy, the *Report on Manufactures*, and, as one critic charged, proudly “wore the badge of Anglo-Federalism” in foreign policy. President Washington thought highly enough of Jackson that he offered him the position of comptroller of the currency in February 1795, but Jackson refused the offer, preferring to live in Massachusetts. In August 1797, he and a small committee of New England Federalists supped with President John Adams at Quincy and urged him to crack down on pro-French activity in the United States, an idea later codified by the Alien and Sedition Acts.⁸

By the early 1800s, Jackson was so dismayed at partisan politics that he remained an aloof and pessimistic observer rather than an active participant. He lost his job in July 1802 when President Jefferson abolished all internal federal taxes. Instead, he was elected Treasurer of Massachusetts that same year, a post he kept until 1806, when a Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican ousted him. In the meantime, he assumed the presidency of the Boston Bank and also reconnected with his alma mater in early 1807, when he was appointed Treasurer of Harvard College (during the presidency of Reverend Samuel Webber, a fellow Essex County man). Jackson became an early booster for New England industrial development as president of the “Proprietors of Locks and Canals on the Merrimack River,” an effort his son, Patrick Tracy Jackson, would complete by leading the effort for industrial water power in New England and helping found the city of Lowell in the 1820s.⁹

Jonathan Jackson died in March 1810, three months short of his sixty-seventh birthday. He left behind a modest estate worth more than \$26,000 (about \$357,000 in 2010 dollars) “quite creditable to the thrift and investment skill of a man who had 22 years before failed in business and since then had been forced to support a large family by various salaried positions.” His Harvard classmate and close friend John Lowell memorialized him as

a man of whom, though the world knew much, they knew little . . . If the world admired the uprightness and the zeal, the assiduity and intelligence with which he discharged the most arduous duties of many distinguished public offices, his friends have



Soldiers Fire on Protesters during Shays' Rebellion

Led by Daniel Shays, a group of poor farmers and Revolutionary War veterans attempted to shut down Massachusetts court houses in protest against debt collections against veterans and the heavy tax burden borne by farmers. In Massachusetts, the state legislature had refused to issue paper money, as had been done in some other states, like Rhode Island, to make it easier for debt-ridden farmers to pay off their creditors. After forcibly closing courts in a few places to stall farm foreclosures, Shays and his supporters tried to seize a government arsenal in Springfield on January 25, 1787. The state militia dispersed the group with gunfire, killing three. Shays was captured and sentenced to death for treason, but was pardoned. Jackson, deeply disturbed by the rebellion, co-authored a public condemnation and organized a rally in Boston. He also served as a cavalry officer in an Essex County regiment to suppress the rebellion. Image Source: Library of Congress

more to regret in the loss of that sweetness of manners, and that sincerity of affection which formed the charm of his society.

Future Harvard President John Thornton Kirkland also recalled Jackson fondly: "A great loss. So true, so upright, so amiable a spirit cannot take its flight without leaving a melancholy chasm."¹⁰ Jackson also left behind writings that embody the very essence of High Federalist thought.

JACKSON'S HIGH FEDERALISM AND THE *THOUGHTS*

Jackson's 1788 *Thoughts on the Political Situation of the United States* reflects the anxieties of a veteran American patriot, a failed New England merchant, and an emerging Federalist leader, as well as the intellectual and reading interests of a thoughtful observer of world affairs who was connected by correspondence and friendship to some of the leading politicians of the early American Republic. It also stands as a uniquely critical commentary on the 1780s and on the Constitution from the direction of High Federalism. *Thoughts* criticizes the early Republic from the political *right* of Hamilton, rather than the usual criticisms emanating from Anti-Federalism. As explained via Jackson's biography, the miseries of the American 1780s motivated him to write *Thoughts*: economic failure, unhappy experiences in Congress, and a firsthand look at Shays' Rebellion. In understanding these problems, he found their roots back in the 1760s and 1770s.

Jackson believed the American Revolution began badly, resulting in the sour experiences leading up to the 1787 Philadelphia Convention. In the years leading up to 1775-1776, most Americans were not aiming for independence, and lacked understanding of the basic political and social principles necessary for a stable republic. Unprepared for and taken by surprise by fast-flowing events, they improvised as best they could but fell into a series of errors leading to miserable consequences in the years to come.

The errors were many, and Jackson touches upon dozen of concerns. However, each of these concerns generally falls into one of five larger concerns: that states of unequal size became possessive of their authority and began arguing for "states rights"; that national and state legislative assemblies grew far too large for honest and efficient governance; that the short terms of political office and constant electioneering politicized American life; that the dangerous illusion of *vox populi vox dei*, or "the voice of the people is the voice of god," took root with many Americans; and that far too many citizens were addicted to British fashions and exhibited a type of social frivolity. All were serious, but none were without resolution.

When the war began and colonies made the transition to states, they were of vastly unequal size and wealth, and hence of ability to fight. According to Jackson, some states exerted themselves mightily during the Revolution and paid with men and treasure, while others did distinctly less. With the peace, these unequal efforts continued with the larger states aggressively pushing their claims on lands west of the Appalachians. In addition to these problems, too many states allowed reckless internal subdivision, with more and more new counties and towns being created each year, so that instead of “one large family,” the United States in 1788 was a series of “puny governments.”

The sum total of these early errors was a rising tide of arguments for states rights (rather than “efficient” national authority), the danger of future civil wars like Daniel Shays’ Massachusetts uprising in 1786-87, and “sly, artful” demagogic state politicians interested only in their localities who “reckon upon a partial scale” rather than the general good. Jackson took a strong view:

We have passed the Rubicon, and in my mind, the question now is, whether we shall break up into separate disproportioned clans and hordes, each under petty captains and rulers, who will be as tyrannical as they dare to be, and will keep the whole continent in a constant state of turbulence, till some few greater usurpers engulf the whole into one of a few despotisms—or, whether we will all unite, or the greater majority of us, in establishing a general and efficient government, which shall include the whole territory ceded to the *United States* by the treaty of *Paris*, in 1783.

Jackson proposed that had some type of equalization of the states occurred (he actually suggests redrawing states’ borders) in the 1770s, many of these problems could have been avoided from the beginning, and Americans would see themselves as equal partners in a national effort rather than sectional competitors. Indeed, Jackson appears to envision the sectional strife of the nineteenth century from his perch in the 1780s, with “Brothers and friends not only thinking differently, but acting with all the rage, to which blind zeal shall prompt them, and artful men will excite.”¹¹

Jackson served in both state and national assemblies during the 1770s and 1780s, and came away convinced they were far too large. Large legislatures suffered under the rule of loud-talking demagogues, corruption, lack of wise decision-making, and lax attendance (Jackson viewed the missing of votes and empty seats in American assemblies as a sign that legislators were more

concerned with private than public interests), and were far more dangerous to public liberty than angry street mobs. He claimed:

Numerous public assemblies approach nearly to the nature of a mob; and are oftentimes more dangerous to general liberty, than any real mobs which may collect in the streets; – these, usually, do but a partial violence, and for a limited time, while those may, and frequently do commit injurious acts, and of long duration.

In Jackson's mind, an odd correlation existed between the size of an assembly and the venality of its legislation. On the other hand, small governing assemblies, of no more than fifty men, were far easier to observe and check for honesty and public virtue. Sounding remarkably like Edmund Burke's observation on kings being limited by the "soft collar of social esteem," Jackson commented that "considering human nature as it is, a consciousness of the publick eye being always open upon men intrusted with the publick weal, is a great security to the political honesty of the publick servants."¹²

With large assemblies came frequent elections, campaigning, and the politicization of American life, a scourge Jackson hoped to eliminate. Constant politics kept nations in turmoil and argument, but lengthened terms of office with mandatory rotation mitigated the problem. Legislators serving longer terms could learn their job and understand the issues, thereby better preserving the public safety and giving society the services of wise men for many years. Jackson believed that fewer elections equaled less turmoil in daily life. He wrote, "the turbulence and confusion of parties would be less frequent in each state, and having less politicks—or what is called such, to trouble our minds about, we should have more leisure to attend to our private affairs." Good salaries also obsessed Jackson, perhaps a reflection on his own penury at the time of his writing and pursuit of a well-paying federal job. He argued strongly that governments could not attract good public servants away from lucrative vocations unless they were compensated well. He bitterly labeled low government salaries a "wretched parsimony."¹³

Aristocracy did not endanger American liberty and order in 1788, Jackson argued. He claimed that no nation was less likely to fall for the attractions of a permanent titled aristocracy, primogeniture, entail, and all the trappings of an English-style manorial society. A natural elite, however, did exist or at least could exist if the United States discarded its fascination with big legislatures and a constant election cycle. Since wisdom and honesty sprouted in all kinds of people, this elite was a political meritocracy. Like Burke only three years later in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*,

Jackson reminded readers that governing ability could be found in farmers and fishermen (“let them be taken from the plough, from the mechanick’s bench, or from behind the counter”), but farmers and fishermen were not able *because* of their vocation and station.¹⁴

According to Jackson, this was democratic fantasy, the idea that all the “people” (whoever they may be) are good judges of leadership. “I had rather have wise men to govern me, even though at times they should be severe, than fools,” Jackson advised, using domestic imagery to illustrate his point. “Mankind are abundantly happier, when obliged to conform strictly to rules, if they are wise ones; as the children of the same family are, to those of a well regulated house.” It was democracy, a “mere puppet show,” that endangered America, and even the revered New England town meeting faced Jackson’s scorn as demagogue-ridden. Classical and medieval history showed no examples of a successful republic, only “scenes of inquietude, turbulence, and barbarity.” Jackson went so far as to exhibit his anti-slavery opinions while decrying republicanism’s historic failures. For example, one of the several consistencies between classical and American republicanism was the treatment of certain people as “cattle”:

I was going to thank Heaven, that we had no such people in the *United States*, as are described in the dark ages to have been in *Europe*; but when my recollection returned, and in this enlightened age, pointed out such in some parts of our union, though their colour be different, my cheek glowed with shame for my forgetfulness, and with indignation, that any such should remain within the professed limits of freedom.

Jackson freed his own slave in 1776 and like many Federalists forcefully opposed slavery.¹⁵

Thus far, Jackson’s criticisms aimed at fatal errors in American politics during the Confederation era, but society too shouldered blame for the nation’s problems. Americans drank excessively (though not as much as the French, he noted thankfully), spent too much on luxurious imported British fashions, and incurred vast amounts of debt. Americans in 1788 lived beyond their means:

I believe it may be safely affirmed, that the people of fashion in this country, live at an expense, or at least assume a style equal to those in *Europe*, who possess three or four times as much property, and have at least double the income.

High living among young Americans caused demographic problems, as many were now postponing marriage till a later age and having far smaller families. The wealthy, those who Jackson called “genteel livers,” needed to set a better example for all classes and adopt a simpler life. Women should lead the “retrenchment” campaign and perhaps consider calling a national female congress to standardize American dress and “establish an uniformity,” argued Jackson. “All we need are two sets of clothing, a summer and winter outfit.” We should live as Quakers, the Congregationalist Jackson advised.

Americans needed to wean themselves from dependency on British export goods and attain economic self-sufficiency and “commercial independence.” Military service in a national militia should be mandatory for all men between eighteen and twenty-five, where they would learn American ideals, soldiering skills, and self-discipline. Further, republican education should teach young people their responsibilities as well as their rights (or what Jackson called “proper subordination”). “[F]or they, who never learned to obey, must govern



Philadelphia Convention

The signing of the constitution on September 17, 1787 as depicted by Howard Chandler Christy. In his 1788 pamphlet, Jackson cautiously approved the new Philadelphia Constitution but worried it did not go far enough in curbing American democratic tendencies and frequent elections.

very badly,” he cautioned. As for excessive drinking, federal excise taxes helped slightly, but social scorn, “disreputation and infamy will alone cure the evil.”¹⁶

This purported American misery of 1788 had solutions, however, and Jackson spent many pages in *Thoughts* offering cures for solving the nation’s various ills. He admired the Philadelphia Constitution and thought it a vast improvement over the Articles of Confederation, but it did not go far enough. The national government needed to be profoundly more powerful. He suggested at one point that Congress have veto power over state legislation and the president over the state governors (“in legislative matters giving the national legislative a revision, and when necessary, a negative upon all doings of the inferiour legislatives; and in all executive departments, to submit to supervisors, rising up to the supreme executive”). The House of Representatives should be radically shrunk in size to forty members, the Senate be apportioned via population rather than an equal number of senators for each state and have only twenty members (he liked the indirect election of senators, however, saying they would act “in the true spirit of a diplomattick corps”), and the presidency should have absolute veto and appointment powers. He also wanted much longer terms of office, especially for the presidency: if the president was under the age of forty, he should serve a twenty-year term with a one-term limit. Presidential elections were gravely important, he presciently warned. “Frequent elections will greatly hazard the tranquility, if not the continuance, *of the Union*—and an injudicious choice may be attended with the most tremendous consequences.”¹⁷

His most radical structural reform dealt with elections. Jackson, like John Harrington, David Hume, and John Adams, admired the Venetian intricate ballot as an ideal type of indirect democracy, or what Adams classed as a type of “Aristocratical Republic,” and argued for it to be adapted to the United States. Jackson’s adaptation resembled a giant political pyramid of ascending (or “refining”) elections, which would result in the selection of small ideal governing assemblies, governors, or presidents.¹⁸

First, at the town level, “wards” of ten people (preferably ten contiguous neighbors) would be required to meet and chose one capable man among them to ascend to the next highest election. Attendance was mandatory and if by some dire emergency a voter could not attend, he was required to send an absentee ballot. At the next highest election, again of about ten men from ten wards, another choice would be made, sent to the next election, and so on. This series of filtering elections would result in the best possible legislators and governors, in theory freer from demagoguery than the previous system because the small size of the elections would allow for easier public scrutiny.

“[T]he most common men, when reduced to such small circles, will certainly act with judgment,” Jackson believed. Later, in an appendix, he suggests adopting the Venetian intricate ballot—complete with the drawing of white and gilt balls from a ballot box, just like the system used to elect a Doge in the thirteenth century. In this scheme, which sounded suspiciously like a French Revolutionary destroying the traditional political regions of monarchical France, state lines would be redrawn into ten new states nearly equal in population, themselves internally subdivided into equal districts, counties, “hundreds,” and wards. All “electioneering” and use of influence would be banned and subject to harsh penalties like the elimination of voting rights. Jackson was sensitive to the charge that his proposal, a vast indirect democracy with mandatory participation based on the Venetian model, was unworkable and “utopian” (a self-observation historians have been quick to agree with), but he denied it. Quite the opposite, he advised young readers to begin their musings on human nature and politics with humility rather than fantasy:

I wish the rising generation may learn earlier and better than many of their fathers have done, how to set a just estimate upon human life; and study with accuracy the limit beyond which both societies and individuals cannot pass without losing more than they can gain.

If titans like Hume and Adams esteemed the Venetian model, Jackson’s version looks far less outlandish in retrospect and well within the mainstream of eighteenth-century political thought.¹⁹

In composing this work, Jackson showed himself to be well-read in eighteenth-century political philosophy. He liberally quoted from John Adams’ *Defense of the Constitutions of the Government of the United States of America*, a work written and published almost simultaneously with Jackson’s own. He clearly admired the Tory David Hume (which would have mortified Anti-Federalists and soon-to-be Jeffersonians) and used his 1752 essay “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth” as support for his Venetian ballot plans, among other things. Quotations from Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *Essay on Man* (1732-34) pepper the text, as well as Latin quotations used in Pope’s works, and there is some evidence he may have read Rousseau:

[T]he history of all ages, and of all countries at different periods, teaches us, that [suffering] has been man’s lot; and that by far the greatest proportion of the race, have been born, have lived,

and have died slaves. Which has led some of the best hearted philosophers, after a survey of man's history, to doubt, whether he would not act more wisely – to detach himself from his fellow men, and live a savage all his days, then to enter into society, and risk injuries the more powerful, and the more cunning might impose upon him.

Jackson was also smitten with two Continental writers, the French economist Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (“he appears to me to have considered our situation, with a more extensive view, and to have treated it in a more masterly manner, than any other writer whom I have read”) and the Swiss political theorist Jean-Louis DeLolme, both quoted to bolster his concerns over a lack of strong central authority, small assemblies, and excessive democracy.²⁰

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JACKSON'S *THOUGHTS*

Jackson's *Thoughts* had its detractors and admirers. Since his work was published too late to impact the writing or ratification of the Constitution, its most immediate effect was on Jackson's ambition for election to the First Federal Congress in late 1788. He ran as Newburyport's favorite son in the race, against the Salem merchant Benjamin Goodhue, the Beverly merchant Nathan Dane, and the Anti-Federalist Dr. Samuel Holton of Danvers. The first vote ended in a stalemate, with Jackson and Goodhue drawing the bulk of the votes. A runoff was scheduled for January 1789 in hopes of breaking the tie, but three controversies dogged Jackson and sank his chances. First, rumors spread that he owned no property and was inadequate to represent Essex County's trade and commercial interests in New York. Appalled at the charge, he lashed out at his critics. “I am not without friends,” he wrote his brother-in-law Judge Oliver Wendell, “nor without property—if real estate may pass as such—having enough to qualify for the first magistracy here. But some folks whom you see almost every day have tried to propagate in some parts of this county that I am without property. I believe that I can still compare with any of my brother candidates. This electioneering has grown such a vile business.”²¹

Second, one of the two Massachusetts senators was Newburyport's Tristram Dalton, and in a congressional election between Newburyport's Jackson and Salem's Goodhue, many wondered if the latter city deserved equal representation in the national capitol. “We see . . . that the interests of our trade, our fisheries, and our lands may be safely trusted to Mr. Goodhue,”

wrote a Salem elector to the *Salem Mercury*, “who has so faithfully supported them in our General Court, many years, and, certainly, candor and fair dealing will allow this part of the district to furnish a Representative as another part affords a Senator.” Balance and the goal of harmonizing the differing interests of the county dictated the election of Benjamin Goodhue.²²

Third, electors disliked Jackson's pamphlet and accused him of thwarting American democracy and the spirit of the Revolution. One letter writer to the *Essex Journal* called Jackson “the author of an infamous Pamphlet lately published, wherein the ax is laid at the root of the tree, to deprive the people of all their liberties . . . [M]ay the man and his book be treated with the contempt they deserve.” An Anti-Federalist prodded him in the columns of the *Salem Mercury*: “If these are thy Federal Politicks, oh America, woeful is thy condition!” His supporters replied in kind. “An Elector from Essex” listed a long retinue of Jackson's virtues in the *Journal* – his war service and experience in business – and defended him against charges of being author of “an obnoxious pamphlet.” “[T]he best judges will pronounce him a man of sense . . . [*Thoughts*] is a work of which no genius among us need blush to be reported the author.”²³

The attacks took their toll. Goodhue defeated Jackson in the runoff by a two-to-one margin, running very well along the North Shore and the inland Merrimack Valley towns. Only Jackson's native Newburyport and the intransigent Marblehead, a determined rival port of Salem and the home of Anti-Federalist leader Elbridge Gerry, backed Jackson. Rejected by voters in his home county, Jackson abandoned elective office and turned toward government employment later that year.²⁴

Historians have generally been critical of Jackson and the *Thoughts*. Samuel Eliot Morison in his *Maritime History of Massachusetts* labeled Jackson “the elder statesman and pamphleteer” of the Essex Junto. Benjamin Larabee in his book *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815* took Jackson's career in Newburyport seriously but dismissed his book as “an extraordinary plan for continental union.” In his influential 1964 work “The Myth of the Essex Junto,” David Hackett Fischer lumped Jackson and the other Essex County Federalists into “the right wing of the Revolutionary movement.” He wrote:

The Essex men were dreamers, hopeless idealists, and in their own time they came to know it . . . [T]he men generally assumed to be the leaders of the Essex Junto were not selfish, pliant timeservers who were consistent only in a steady attachment to immediate interests, but reactionary idealists whose careers were shaped by

an inflexible attachment to ancient principles in a world of swift and sudden change.

Gordon Wood, a leading historian of the American Revolution, portrayed Jackson as a broke merchant suffering from status-anxiety, who wrote *Thoughts* “expressing his bitter reaction to this displacement.” More recently, Van Beck Hall in his book on early national Massachusetts politics correctly describes the *Thoughts* as an “extremely conservative pamphlet on political theory,” but stopped short of deeper analysis. T.A. Milford’s *The Gardiners of Massachusetts* considers Jackson’s philosophy and makes note of his intellectual debt to Hume and Adams. Oftentimes Jackson’s work is overlooked altogether. For example, Elkins and McKittrick’s magisterial *Age of Federalism* mentions Jackson not at all.²⁵

Despite these slights and criticisms, there is much value in Jackson’s *Thoughts*. He certainly represented the “right wing of the Revolutionary movement,” that lightly settled High Federalist territory to the right of Hamilton and Washington. His criticisms were noteworthy in the broader debate between Federalists and Anti-Federalists over ratification, and represent that variety of American conservatism more inclined toward centralized authority and order than states’ rights and liberty. Federalists often voiced these ideas and worked within this tradition, one relayed to nineteenth-century American Whigs several decades later. What is most fascinating about Jackson’s *Thoughts* is its place in the American trajectory between ardent eighteenth-century revolutionary patriotism and nineteenth-century Whig entrepreneurialism, between the Battle of Bunker Hill and the Lowell cotton mills. No Tory or Loyalist, Jackson fervently advocated the American cause, lost everything as a result, and by 1787-88 wrote passionately about the failed promise of the Revolution. Much had been accomplished since 1776, some of it clumsily and badly; yet despite the disillusionment, so much needed to be done. There was hope, maybe not in his own life but in the next generation, and *Thoughts* constantly calls young people to a life of national service and reform in order to correct the mistakes and incomplete efforts of the patriots. The High Federalism of *Thoughts* signals Jackson’s transition from eighteenth-century patriotism to another political and economic faith (also seen by his early advocacy of New England industrial water development), a faith more fully developed by his son Patrick Tracy Jackson in the 1820s and 1830s as an industrialist, railroad promoter, and Whig.

Thus Jackson’s pamphlet represents an important link between the Revolutionary and Industrial eras in America, between Federalists and

antebellum Whigs. Political independence, however botched, was achieved by patriots like Jonathan Jackson, but commercial independence was completed by Whig entrepreneurs like Jackson's son. In so many ways, the construction of Lowell and the development of industry and railroads was the last battle of the Revolution.



Notes

¹ Kenneth W. Porter, *The Jacksons and the Lees*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 6-14, 155-174; Chaim M. Rosenberg, *The Life and Times of Francis Cabot Lowell, 1775-1817* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 17, 20; Kenneth Morgan, *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 111.

² Porter, *Jacksons and the Lees*, 15-21, 217-342.

³ James Jackson Putnam, *A Memoir of Dr. James Jackson, With Sketches of His Father Hon. Jonathan Jackson, and His Brothers Robert, Henry, Charles, and Patrick Tracy Jackson; and Some Account of Their Ancestry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905), 30-32, 50; Rosenberg, *Francis Cabot Lowell*, 22; Benjamin W. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 43-44. Jackson took his seat in Congress on July 3, 1782, and served from July to November 1782. The "Essex Result" argued for a bicameral Massachusetts state legislature that would accommodate men of property in a senate, rather than a unicameral legislature that would potentially be influenced by populist demagogues. It also advocated a stricter separation of powers and checks on the powers of the legislature.

⁴ Porter, *Jacksons and Lees*, 21, 24-25, 118, 324, 347-372; Rosenberg, *Francis Cabot Lowell*, 47; Carol Bundy, *The Nature of Sacrifice: A Biography of Charles Russell Lowell, Jr., 1835-1864* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005), 20; Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 59-60, 62.

⁵ Jack N. Rakove, "The Structure of Politics at the Ascension of George Washington," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, eds. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter III. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 261-262; Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 69; Leonard Richards, *Shays' Rebellion: The American Revolution's Final Battle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 11; James Jackson, *Reminiscences of Hon. Jonathan Jackson* (Boston, 1866), 12; David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst MA, University

of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 86; *Worcester Magazine*, August 14, 1788; Jonathan Jackson, *Thoughts on the Political Situation of the United States of America* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1788.)

⁶ Van Beck Hall, *Politics Without Parties: Massachusetts, 1780-1791* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 310; Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 80; Leonard White, *The Federalists: A Study in Administrative History* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 411, 413; *Essex Journal*, November 4, 1789; *New Hampshire Spy*, November 6, 1789; Rosenberg, *Francis Cabot Lowell*, 48. Jackson's son later remembered that he "took boyish pleasure, which he never forgot, in seeing the famous general by his father's fireside, though he was filled with surprise at hearing the conversation turn on crops instead of battles." See Putnam, *Memoir*, 51.

⁷ *Philadelphia Gazette*, February 26, 1795; *Connecticut Gazette*, July 21, 1796; White, *Federalists*, 415; *Massachusetts Spy*, May 4, 1797; Porter, *Jacksons and Lees*, 374-375; Putnam, *Memoir*, 50-53; Jackson, *Reminiscences*, 17-22, 26-27.

⁸ Porter, *Jacksons and Lees*, 32-38, 121; *Newburyport Herald*, July 4, 1800; David Hackett Fischer, "The Myth of the Essex Junto," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, 21 (April, 1964), 190-235; Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 92; *Philadelphia Gazette*, February 26, 1795; *Constitutional Telegraph*, October 24, 1801; *Philadelphia Gazette*, August 12, 1797; *Massachusetts Spy*, August 23, 1797.

⁹ Jackson, *Reminiscences*, 29-30; *Newburyport Herald*, April 17, 1801; *Mercury and New England Palladium*, May 28, 1802; *Boston Commercial Advertiser*, June 3, 1802; *Gazetteer*, April 16, 1803; *Daily Advertiser*, June 19, 1806; *Boston Commercial Advertiser*, January 29, 1807. On Patrick Tracy Jackson's efforts to control New England's rivers for industrial purposes, see Theodore Steinberg, *Nature Incorporated: Industrialization and the Waters of New England* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991)

¹⁰ Porter, *Jacksons and Lees*, 381; Putnam, *Memoir*, 60-63. The currency conversion was completed at www.westegg.com/inflation.

¹¹ Jackson, *Thoughts*, 44-45, 47, 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 59, 66; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), 67.

¹³ Jackson, *Thoughts*, 82-83, 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58, 164, 102-103.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-123, 126, 121, 94-95, 27, 127.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87, 185, 204.

¹⁸ John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, Against the Attack of M. Turgot in his Letter to Dr. Price, Dated the Twenty-Second Day of March 1778*, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram, 1797), 35.

¹⁹ Jackson, *Thoughts*, 106-107, 196, 192-193, 199, 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 52-53, 40-41.

²¹ Merrill Jensen and Robert A. Becker, eds., *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788-1791*, Vol. 1 (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 586, 628; Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 81.

²² *Documentary History*, 631.

²³ *Essex Journal*, January 20, 1789; *Documentary History*, 597; *Essex Journal*, January 28, 1789.

²⁴ *Documentary History*, 634-635.

²⁵ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), 167; Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans*, 72-73; Fischer, "Essex Junto," 200, 213, 234-235; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 508-510; Hall, *Politics without Parties*, 310; T. A. Milford, *The Gardiners of Massachusetts: Provincial Ambition and the British-American Career*. (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), 110-111; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). The two-volume Liberty Fund collection of pamphlets, sermons, and speeches between 1760 and 1805 does not include Jackson's *Thoughts*. See Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing during the Founding Era, 1760-1805* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1983).