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**“The Most Agreeable Country”:  
New Light on Democratic-Republican Opinion of  
Massachusetts in the 1790s**

**By**

**Arthur Scherr**

Among recent notable trends in eighteenth century American historiography are complementary emphases on “Atlantic history,” resonating with current scholarly interest in hemispheric relations and globalism, and a simultaneous stress on regionalism: the relations between the divergent sections and interests of the parts of the nation-state.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, these studies have relatively ignored the late

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Peter S. Onuf, “Federalism, Republicanism, and the Origins of American Sectionalism,” in Onuf et al., eds., *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11-37; Onuf, *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), chaps. 3-5; Eliga H. Gould, *Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); James E. Lewis, Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity From the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001),

eighteenth century United States during the Federalist Era (1789-1801), when infant national institutions first emerged, and the national government’s cooperation and conflict with previously existing state and local entities, Northern and Eastern [“New England”], Southern and Western. A deeper examination of the effect the new national government’s policies in the 1790s exerted on diverse regions’ responses to each other will further increase our knowledge of regional tensions and affiliations in the Early Republic.<sup>2</sup>

The emergence of national political parties, with the Federalists gaining control of New England; the Middle States of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania being vigorously contested by them; and the South generally dominated by the Republicans (Democratic-Republicans), also occurred during the 1790s. This article seeks to further examine how Republican partisans from different parts of the Union viewed Federalist-oriented Massachusetts during the initial years of the revolutionary two-party system, whose grass-roots constituencies were something unique in modern times.<sup>3</sup>

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although an admirable study, generally overlooks late eighteenth century attitudes, including those of the individuals discussed in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Several studies have emphasized sectional controversies and tensions in the early republic, e.g.: Joseph L. Davis, *Sectionalism in American Politics, 1774-1787* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); J. Wendell Knox, *Conspiracy in American Politics, 1787-1815* (New York: Arno Press, 1972); James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Staughton Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution: Ten Essays* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967); and Robert L. Kelley, “Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon,” *American Historical Review* 82 (1977): 531-562.

<sup>3</sup> Although there have been few syntheses on the origins of the American party system in recent years, some excellent standard works remain useful: Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., *The Jeffersonian Republicans: The Formation of Party Organization, 1789-1801* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), and Cunningham, *The Jeffersonian Republicans in Power: Party Operations, 1801-1809* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963); Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970); Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815*

As was the case in many areas of American political thought and practice, Thomas Jefferson was a forerunner of regional studies, not only with regard to his own state in his brilliant and controversial *Notes on the State of Virginia*, but in appreciating salutary mutual influences that the social and political institutions of different regions of the country might exert on each other.<sup>4</sup> This was especially true of his views on the relationship between the Massachusetts town meeting and Virginia's modes of local government.

In keeping with his historical reputation for self-contradiction, Jefferson, while denouncing New England's opposition to his Republican Party in the nation's earliest partisan contests, praised its people's democratic instincts and practices (this, notwithstanding the fact that in the presidential election of 1804 only Connecticut and Delaware had cast electoral votes for Charles C. Pinckney, his South Carolina Federalist opponent). He especially admired their town meeting elections, by which the people directly decided most local issues through referenda and elected their neighbors to a wide variety of local offices. He regarded this as the ideal form of republicanism. Proposing to divide Virginia's counties into "wards" or "hundreds," as he called them, organized on the basis of local militia musters or "captaincies," he sought

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(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965); William N. Chambers, *Political Parties in a New Nation: The American Experience, 1776-1809* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); and Manning J. Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953). Recently, "cultural" perspectives on the politics of the 1790s have taken center stage. See Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); and Andrew S. Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> For some examples, see Edward Dumbauld, *Thomas Jefferson: American Tourist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1946).

to emulate the New England town's political modes. Jefferson first proposed to apply to his state, aristocratic Virginia, the techniques of the New England town meeting in his Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, presented to the Virginia assembly in 1776 to institute a more widespread public education system. Jefferson, in *Notes* in the 1780s, and even more enthusiastically after he left the presidency in 1809, urged Virginia to adopt the town meeting mode for conducting all aspects of local government.<sup>5</sup>

This article examines the views of four influential non-New England political figures of the 1790s about Massachusetts and Connecticut during this frenzied period of American history. Included will be Jefferson and his friend, Virginia political theorist, U.S. senator and state assemblyman John Taylor of Caroline, from the South; the controversial newspaper editor Benjamin Franklin Bache, Benjamin Franklin's grandson, from Philadelphia; and an Anglo-American citizen of the world, Benjamin Vaughan, of London, Paris, and later of Massachusetts. The observations of these figures, some of which are unfamiliar to historians and have never appeared in print before, will further elucidate aspects of a turbulent, transitional stage of Massachusetts politics in the middle and late-1790s from Federalism to Democratic-Republicanism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge” (1776); *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIV; Jefferson to John Tyler, May 26, 1810, and Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, Feb. 2, 1816, in Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York: Viking Press, 1984), 365-73, 272-74, 1226-27, 1379-81. See also Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 61-67, 72, 84-88; Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist View* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 81-90, and Jean Yarbrough, “Republicanism Reconsidered: Some Thoughts on the Foundation and Preservation of the American Republic,” *Review of Politics* 41 (Jan., 1979): 61-95.

<sup>6</sup> For general studies of political conflict in Massachusetts during the period of the First Party System, see Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Paul Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts: Politics in a Young Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); William A. Robinson, *Jeffersonian Democracy in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916); and James M. Banner, Jr., *To the*

Despite his praise for the direct democracy of New England's town meetings, Jefferson was painfully aware that its voters ordinarily mindlessly voted for their traditional gentry leaders, who were invariably Federalists. Indeed, he thought that the people of Massachusetts and Connecticut were generally more servile and deferential to their upper class elites, exhibiting "a traditionary reverence for certain families, which has rendered the offices of government nearly hereditary in those families," than were the small farmers of Virginia with regard to the large plantation owners.<sup>7</sup>

Had Jefferson gained access to the correspondence between New England leaders, his suspicion of their contempt for average voters, whom they believed required to be instructed by their rulers like children, would not have been allayed. A good example of Federalist condescension toward the people is provided by a letter from Nathaniel Chipman, a Vermont Federalist, federal judge and congressman, to Alexander Hamilton in 1794. He emphasized that the people must have "confidence" in government, fulfill their obligation of allegiance to it, and appreciate that it was doing more for them than they could do for themselves. "It is, perhaps, of as much importance, in general, that the people should see and acknowledge the measures of government to be wise and good, as that they should be really wise and good," he wrote the Federalist leader, who undoubtedly concurred with his view. "If there is a failure in either respect, they will not secure the happiness of the people."<sup>8</sup> Their view that the people were like children who would

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*Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Jefferson to John Adams, Oct. 28, 1813, Peterson, ed., *Writings*, 1306-1307.

<sup>8</sup> Nathaniel Chipman to Alexander Hamilton, June 9, 1797, in Harold C. Syrett et al., eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1987), 16: 469. Robert M. T. Martin, "Reforming Republicanism: Alexander Hamilton's Theory of Republican Citizenship and Press Liberty," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (Spring 2005): 21-46, argues that the foundation of Hamilton's political thought was his conviction that national power rested reciprocally on the people's "confidence" that the government was acting justly and competently, and on the government's "confidence" that its actions were proper, which he believed justified a continual accretion of governmental power on the national level. Historians generally refer to this interaction as "deference." See Richard R. Beeman, "Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence

get unwarrantedly upset, perhaps throw a collective tantrum, if they imbibed suspicions of their rulers from anti-Federalist politicians constantly provoked Federalist anxiety. For instance, when Maryland’s Democratic-Republican congressman James F. Mercer denounced Congress for servilely following Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton’s fiscal recommendations, David Ross, a Maryland Federalist, charged that Mercer sought to implant public suspicion of the legislature’s honesty and integrity, “thus destroying the confidence of the people in their administrators, on which their happiness so much depends.” Like Chipman, Ross thought public stability and order were endangered when the people questioned the wisdom of their leaders. Federalists had a “genteel” expectation (as historian Philip Greven might call it) that the people, like children vis-a-vis their parents, should always have “confidence” in their leaders. This would keep them “happy” and of placid temperament.<sup>9</sup>

By 1798, Jefferson seemed ready to forgive New England’s ostensible deviations from the democratic faith (i.e., Democratic-Republicanism) during the “Quasi-War” with France. His friend, Virginia planter and states’ rights philosopher John Taylor of Caroline, believed that Virginia’s interests suffered because the northern states dominated the Union. He hoped that Virginia and North Carolina would secede from the Union and form an independent confederation. In 1797 and 1798, disillusioned by the presidential victory of John Adams, whom he considered a monarchist, and the rupture with France, Taylor contemplated “whether it will be better to submit to an immovable fixation of our monarchy for the sake of union; or to break the union for the sake of destroying our monarchy.” He expected peaceful secession, rather than a violent confrontation with the other states. Indeed, he was optimistic that Virginia’s sister states might consequently experience a revival of republicanism, precipitating “a renovation ...upon principles which may generate the public good.” If

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of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 49 (July 1992): 401-430.

<sup>9</sup> David Ross, “Address to the Citizens of Anne-Arundel and Prince George’s County,” *Maryland Gazette*, Sept. 20, 1792, quoted in Syrett, ed., *Hamilton Papers*, 12: 483. For the “genteel” concept of child-rearing, see Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

Virginia remained in a union dominated by New England Federalists and Anglophiles, Taylor anticipated a bitter fate for his state and the south, warning, “the union will exist, but upon principles which will oppress human nature.”<sup>10</sup> He feared that “the southern states must lose their capital and commerce-and that America is destined to war-standing armies-and oppressive taxation, by which the power of the few here, as in other countries, will be matured into an irresistible scourge of human happiness.”<sup>11</sup>

Jefferson’s temperate reply firmly stated his opposition to rending the Union merely to assuage southern pique at New England:

It is true that we are compleatly [sic] under the saddle of Massachusetts & Connecticut, and that they ride us very hard, cruelly insulting our feelings as well as exhausting our strength and substance. If to rid ourselves of the present rule of Massachusetts & Connecticut we break the Union, will the evil stop there?

He believed political disputes were inherent in human nature; they would not be eliminated if Virginia and North Carolina formed their own nation. Envisaging the unlikely secession of Massachusetts and Connecticut, he observed, “Suppose the N. England States alone cut off, will our natures be changed? Are we not men still to the south of that, & with all the passions of men?” In Jefferson’s view, “an association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or vestry.” “In every free & deliberating society” it was natural that “there...be opposite parties & violent dissensions & discords; and one of these, for the most part, must prevail over the other for a longer or shorter time.” Predicting that no federal union

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<sup>10</sup> John Taylor to Henry Tazewell, June 13, 1797, Tazewell Family Papers, Virginia State Library, quoted in Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980), 96.

<sup>11</sup> John Taylor to Thomas Jefferson, n.d., received 13 May 1798, in Barbara B. Oberg, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 30: 348.



could endure if every disgruntled party chose secession to escape from its opponent’s “temporary superiority,” he pointed out that, “If we reduce our Union to Virginia & N. Carolina, immediately the conflict will be established between the representatives of these two States, and they will end by breaking into their simple units.” Therefore, “Seeing that we must have somebody to quarrel with, I had rather keep our New England associates for that purpose than to see our bickerings transferred to others,” he humorously concluded.<sup>12</sup>

Fearing that the pressures of an increasing population on their meager, often scrubby land supply would exacerbate New Englanders’ naturally argumentative character, Jefferson, with a hint of ethnic prejudice, observed their similarity in temperament to the Jews, with the same reputation for standoffishness and snobbery. He explained,

They [New Englanders] are circumscribed within such narrow limits, & their population so full, that their numbers will ever be the minority, and they are marked, like the Jews, with such a peculiarity of character as to constitute from that circumstance the natural division of our parties.

On the other hand, Jefferson had reached the conclusion that the puritanical New Englanders were natural foils to the free-wheeling Virginians, and he believed that what was natural was good.<sup>13</sup>

Unpersuaded by Jefferson’s reasoning, Taylor denied that political parties were inevitable in a free society. Ironically, despite his objections to New England’s Federalist proclivities, Taylor rated Connecticut’s consensual town meeting democracy the ideal form of

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<sup>12</sup> Jefferson to John Taylor, June 4, 1798, in Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings*, 1049-1050.

<sup>13</sup> Jefferson to Taylor, June 4, 1798, in *Jefferson: Writings*, 1050. For Jefferson’s favorable outlook on nature, see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Henry Holt, 1948), and Charles A. Miller, *Jefferson and Nature: An Interpretation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988). For further discussion of Jefferson’s attitude toward Massachusetts, see Arthur Scherr, “Thomas Jefferson’s Nationalist Vision of New England and the War of 1812,” *The Historian: A Journal of History* 69 (Spring 2007): 1-35, which includes some of the material in this paragraph.

government, a disconcerting confession in light of his proposal that Virginia secede from Massachusetts and Connecticut. Perhaps naively, he thought that Connecticut's town meeting form of government proved that people could live happily without political parties or the separation of powers between competing legislative, executive and judicial branches. He wrote Jefferson at the end of June 1798:

That parties, sufficiently malignant to destroy the public good, are not naturally the issue of every popular government, seems to be evinced by the examples of the state governments, and particularly by the eminent example of Connecticut, which has for about two centuries enjoyed a compleat [sic] unanimity under a government; the most democratic of any representative form which ever existed.

If the people were happy under their government, Taylor argued, consensus naturally ensued. He deplored political parties as "artificial" byproducts of constitutions, such as the British and American, that institutionalized a deleterious "scheme of ballancing [sic] power against power." Questioning the venerable Anglo-American system of separation of powers, Taylor instead advocated the greatest possible degree of direct democracy. "Is it not possible," Taylor asked Jefferson, "that our great error has been imitation of the latter [British] precedent, by counterpoising power against power, instead of securing to liberty an ascendant over power, whether simple or complex."<sup>14</sup> He favored unmixed, democratic government, eschewing "mixed government's" checks and balances. For this reason, he praised Connecticut, where, although suffrage was restricted to Congregationalist landholders, the people directly elected the governor and the legislature.

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<sup>14</sup> John Taylor to Jefferson, June 25, 1798, in Oberg, ed., *Jefferson Papers*, 30: 431. A recent historian mistakenly argues that Taylor's praise alluded to the undemocratic constitution of Virginia, which he hoped would secede from a Federalist-controlled Union. But Taylor was actually praising the constitution of his nemesis, Connecticut. K. R. Constantine Gutzman, "The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions Reconsidered: An Appeal to the 'Real Laws' of Our Country," *Journal of Southern History* 66 (Aug. 2000): 473-96, at 481-82.

Taylor derided Jefferson’s prophesy that the Federalist “reign of witches” was merely a political aberration that would destroy itself by unpopular new taxes and war preparations. He retorted “that parties ...are not natural to a republican government really dependent on national will and also that there is nothing supernatural in the party paroxysm which now exists.” Since the crisis arose from the emergence of parties, “the cure must lie in the abolition of these causes,” not in the ascendancy of a different party. Expounding a pessimistic view of human nature, Taylor took little comfort even from the prospect of a Republican victory. Notwithstanding his theoretical support of southern secession from a union dominated by mercenary New Englanders, whose Federalist leaders he charged with “avarice and ambition,” his motives were essentially conciliatory. Warning that a “southern aristocracy oppressing the northern states, would be as detestable, as a northern, domineering over the southern states,” Taylor proposed to summon state conventions to demand a national constitutional convention. Unlike the Philadelphia Convention of 1787, this one would aim for greater democracy, approving constitutional amendments vastly extending the suffrage and implementing rotation in office. Such reforms, Taylor believed, would end popular “submission to anti-republican measures” and give “the people, a real influence over the government.” Ironically, Taylor’s demand for direct democracy had its closest parallel with the New England town meetings.<sup>15</sup>

Jefferson and Taylor were not the only Democratic-Republicans, who admired Massachusetts’ and Connecticut’s political *mentalite*. Many years before Jefferson made the analogy between his “wards” and Massachusetts town meetings as optimal modes of citizen participation, Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the most important Republican newspaper, the *Philadelphia General Advertiser/Aurora*, praised Bostonians’ political acumen, on his return from a journey north in the summer of 1795 selling copies of Jay’s Treaty. On July 1, 1795, shortly after the Senate ratified the treaty, he obtained its text from a Virginia senator, Stevens Thomson Mason, the first “scoop” in

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<sup>15</sup> Taylor to Jefferson, June 25, 1798, Oberg, *Jefferson Papers*, 30: 432-34. See also Shalhope, *John Taylor*, 98-99. Taylor’s proposal was of course constitutional; the fifth article of the U.S. Constitution permits two-thirds of the state legislatures to implement a call for a constitutional convention.

American journalism history. Traveling through upstate New York, Hartford, Connecticut, and the Connecticut River Valley towns en route to Boston, Bache was impressed by the fertility of New England's landscape and its farmers' relative economic equality. He wrote his wife, Margaret Markoe Bache, that the region was "the most agreeable country I think, I ever passed thro' in my life. But little of the land... appeared to be bad."<sup>16</sup>

Bache displayed no personal animus when he encountered alleged Massachusetts monarchist Vice President John Adams on the road from Philadelphia to Boston. As a young boy during the American Revolution, Bache, grandson of U.S. minister to France Benjamin Franklin, had attended Le Coeur's boarding school in Paris with Adams's somber son John Quincy Adams.<sup>17</sup> Bache's newspaper, the Philadelphia *General Advertiser/Aurora*, had occasionally denounced Adams's pro-monarchical sentiments, quoting out of context statements in favor of "balanced government" from his ponderous history of European constitutions, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, written in 1787.<sup>18</sup> Now he mischievously made merry

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache to Margaret Bache, July 15, 1795, Bache Family Papers, Castle Collection, American Philosophical Society, reel 3 (microfilm). On Bache's "scoop," see Everette E. Dennis, "Stolen Peace Treaties and the Press: Two Case Studies," *Journalism History*, 2 (Jan., 1975): 6-14. The relative socioeconomic equality on New England farms during this period is a theme of Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955); Gloria L. Main, "Inequality in Early America: The Evidence from Probate Records in Massachusetts and Maryland," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7 (Spring, 1977): 559-581; and Jackson Turner Main, *Society and the Economy in Colonial Connecticut* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Claude-Anne Lopez, "A Story of Grandfathers, Fathers, and Sons," *Yale University Library Gazette* 53 (April 1975): 177-195; David F. Musto, "The Youth of John Quincy Adams," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 113 (Aug. 1969): 269-82; James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 28; Jeffery A. Smith, *Franklin and Bache: Envisioning the Enlightened Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 61.

<sup>18</sup> See Tagg, 163, 292-94, 324; and Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*

at Adams’s expense. The latter, a zealous Federalist who stalwartly defended Jay’s Treaty as the only viable alternative to war with Great Britain despite its violation of the treaty of alliance between France and the United States dating from 1778, was apparently unaware of Bache’s activities. For his part, Bache neglected to tell him about the motive for his trip and his recent coup in publishing Jay’s Treaty: “At Worcester, a very pretty town of Massachusetts, I overtook the Vice President & breakfasted with him & Mrs. [Abigail] Adams,” he reported to Margaret. “He [Adams] asked me whether the treaty had leaked out in Philadelphia: I told him a little. He assured me that the generality of the people would like it very well after a trial of a few months.”<sup>19</sup>

On July 6, 1795, after vending copies of the Treaty in Boston, Bache attended a town meeting, which he estimated at fifteen hundred, called to protest the pro-British law. He gleefully witnessed a unanimous vote against it. Applauding Bostonians’ political engagement, he wrote his wife: “I watched the countenance of the citizens assembled on that occasion, when not one instance of that stupid gaze was to be seen, so often to be observed among a people less enlightened. All appeared intelligent and to feel the force of every argument that was used.” Manifesting surprising concern for law and order, Bache belied his reputation among Federalists for callowness and impulsiveness. He said he was “highly delighted...by the orderly and spirited manner in which the business was conducted.”<sup>20</sup>

Like Jefferson, Bache viewed the Boston town meeting as epitomizing democracy at work. “I hope every city throughout the Union will follow their example,” he asserted. “I wish Philadelphia particularly could be got together in a town meeting. This is a momentous crisis in our affairs,” he observed of the debate over ratification of the Jay Treaty, “and much depends on our exertions at

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(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 84, citing *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, Dec. 1, 4, 5, 6, 1792.

<sup>19</sup> Bache to Margaret Bache, July 15, 1795, Bache Papers, Castle Collection. For Adams’s support of the Jay Treaty, see John E. Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 339.

<sup>20</sup> Bache to Margaret Bache, July 15, 1795, Bache Papers, Castle Collection; Tagg, 248.

this instant.” He was also pleased by the affability of Massachusetts’ Republican Governor, Revolutionary War legend Samuel Adams, Vice-President Adams’ second cousin. “At Boston I thrice visited the Governor, the venerable [Samuel] Adams, twice by invitation,” he observed. “He is a patriot according to my own heart.”<sup>21</sup> Bache’s testimony, giving us first-hand experience of town meeting democracy in Boston, is valuable for describing the evolution of party politics in that city. Concealing his disappointment at Massachusetts’ Federalist representation, Bache emphasized the direct democracy of its citizens’ political activities.

Another witness to Massachusetts political procedures was the indefatigable merchant and revolutionary, Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835), whose travels took him to Cambridge and London, Paris, Strasbourg (Germany), and Hallowell, Massachusetts (which later became part of Maine). Born in Jamaica, British West Indies, the son of Samuel Vaughan, an English merchant and planter, and Sarah Hallowell of Boston, Vaughan became a radical ideologue during the 1790s. An omnivorous scholar, he studied theology at Cambridge University, law at the Middle Temple, and medicine at Edinburgh before settling down as a merchant like his father. Converting to Unitarianism in London, he was befriended by eminent radicals like Joseph Priestley, Jeremy Bentham, and Benjamin Franklin. Devoted to Franklin, in 1779 he issued the first collected edition of Franklin’s works, and in London in 1806 published his *Complete Works*. Vaughan supported American independence and became a friend of the leading Whig politician, Lord Shelburne, and radicals like Richard Price, Priestley, and Thomas Paine. In 1782-83, he served as an unofficial British negotiator at Paris, in which capacity he helped the American diplomats Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams, secure better peace terms for the thirteen states in the treaty recognizing their independence.

In 1790, Vaughan journeyed to Paris, briefly involving himself in the French Revolution. Elected to Britain’s House of Commons in 1792, he returned to Paris in 1793, once his radicalism aroused the suspicion of William Pitt’s Tory government, which tried to implicate him in treasonable correspondence with France. Unluckily, he arrived at the beginning of war between France and England and the commencement of the Reign of Terror, a time when Englishmen and foreigners might be

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

arbitrarily guillotined as spies and traitors. He immediately went into hiding. Despite Robespierre’s efforts to protect him, he was eventually discovered and imprisoned for a month, and afterwards departed for Geneva. Indeed, on 9 Thermidor (July 28, 1794), the day Robespierre was overthrown, terrorist leader and Committee of Public Safety member Jacques Nicolas Billaud-Varenne, having discovered correspondence between Vaughan and Robespierre, charged in the National Convention that both men were royalists conspiring with Pitt to overthrow the Republic. In fact, Vaughan’s letters had merely advised Robespierre to cease wars of conquest abroad, and suggested that he unite the territories of Belgium, Holland, and the German Rhineland into a great democratic federation and a buffer between France and its enemies. However, Robespierre’s rivals in the Committee of Public Safety, deliberately withholding the correspondence from the Convention, deviously maintained that it proved that Robespierre intended to partition France between himself and his friends and abandon Belgium and the Rhineland to the Austrians and Prussians. After publishing a pamphlet praising France’s new government, the Directory, Vaughan in 1796 risked a brief return to Paris. In 1797 he finally went back to Massachusetts, spending the rest of his life in peaceful retirement at Hallowell with his mother, wife, and children.<sup>22</sup>

Although, as this capsule biography demonstrates, the reckless Vaughan was atypical, even by the febrile standards of late eighteenth century politics, the varied experience of this Old World radical lends his assessment of Boston political life particular depth and insight. A letter he wrote in September 1797 from nearby Cambridge to his friend, Virginia Democratic-Republican and former United States minister to France James Monroe, is particularly edifying. While lamenting Federalist power in New England, he thought there existed a good chance that the Republicans would ultimately defeat their opponents in

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<sup>22</sup> For Vaughan’s ordeals in England and France during the 1790s, see Craig Compton Murray, “Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835): The Life of an Anglo-American Intellectual” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1989), 311-379; *Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v., “Vaughan, Benjamin”; Robert R. Palmer, *Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-64), 2: 121-22; and J. M. Thompson, *Robespierre* (New York: Appleton Century, 1936), 2: 225.

the region. Vaughan's astute comments on Boston's political situation, hitherto overlooked by scholars, merit extensive quotation:

The mass of the people [in Boston] are sincere, but many of them are deceived. Very little is told to them but through the medium of the public papers, which in these parts preponderate for the moment in favor of aristocratical objects. The other [Democratic--Republican] side often manage their public papers [i.e., newspapers] ill, being too frequently personal, instead of offering principles & documents. But though many of the people are thus deceived, they neither forget their sufferings from the English, nor their attachment to liberty. They are sometimes angry with French deprivations [sic]; but their great motive of action is a dread of *anti-federalism* as implying a *dissolution of their present government*, which they are told is the aim of many, especially to the Southward. The clergy also dread the principles of Jacobinism, from their supposed connection with infidelity, rather than from their aversion to a strong dose of liberty. The people seem more uneasy at the apprehension of war, than angry at the French. The hostilities on the side of the [anti-French, European military] coalition, which have been projected by some of the federalists [sic] leaders, if carried into effect at present, would disgust the whole community. In short, the politics of the country [sic] are to a great degree personal, that is, consist of attachments or aversion to particular characters.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Vaughan to James Monroe, Sept. 2, 1797, James Monroe Papers, New York Public Library (Emphasis in original). Vaughan is obviously describing New Englanders' tendency to adopt "deferential" behavior toward their political and social leaders, whose opinions they respect because of their status and venerability in the commonwealth. See J. R. Pole's classic study, "Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy," *American Historical Review*, 67 (April, 1962): 626-646; Richard R. Beeman, "Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 49 (July 1992): 401-430; and Edmund Cook, *The*



Although Vaughan had only recently returned to New England, he obviously took an active interest in its political culture, as well as in the latest national scandals, as an acerbic comment to Monroe demonstrates: “It seems a matter of regret, that some of the supposed friends to liberty, have neither been grave in their character nor correct in money matters.”<sup>24</sup> Vaughan was probably referring to diverse news events of the period, among them the ill-fated land speculation projects of Philadelphians Robert Morris and John Nicholson. Reckless investments by the Bank of Pennsylvania, which had recently caused these prominent individuals’ failure, also precipitated the bankruptcy of their creditor, Philadelphia merchant John Swanwick, a leading Republican congressman, and nearly ruined Alexander James Dallas, Pennsylvania secretary of state, Chief Justice Thomas McKean, and other Jeffersonians. These misadventures scandalized puritanical, anti-Bank New England Federalists like John Adams.<sup>25</sup> They also disturbed the newly-arrived Vaughan.

But the scandals involved Pennsylvanians, not New Englanders, spurring Vaughan’s encomia of the latter’s contrastingly virtuous, democratic political habits. Notwithstanding the Federalist loyalties of many Massachusetts and Connecticut voters, Vaughan was “more & more convinced, that the New Englanders are in general not friends to

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*Fathers of the Towns: Leadership and Community Structure in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Vaughan to James Monroe, Sept. 2, 1797, James Monroe Papers, New York Public Library. Monroe and Vaughan had become acquainted during Monroe’s ministry to Paris from 1794-1796. Murray, 377-79.

<sup>25</sup> Roland M. Baumann, “John Swanwick: Spokesman for ‘Merchant-Republicanism’ in Philadelphia, 1790-1798,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 97 (April 1973): 178-80; Arthur Scherr, “John Adams, Providential Rhetoric and Party Warfare: A Note on Massachusetts Politics in the Late 1790s,” *Mid-America: An Historical Review*, 73 (Jan. 1991): 13-15; William Bruce Wheeler, “Urban Politics in Nature’s Republic: The Seaport Cities in the Federalist Era, 1789-1801” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1967), 89.

aristocracy, though bearing respect to many aristocrats; that the clergy in particular are philanthropic and lovers of liberty; and that the cause of liberty will soon prevail here.” He predicted that, once the French Directory stopped seizing American ships carrying British goods and negotiated in good faith with American envoys, the political tide would turn in favor of the Jeffersonians. “The late directory have behaved unwisely to America,” he pointed out. “But a recantation of their impudence & injustice, far from strengthening their enemies here, will serve to *reconcile the Americans to France*; in which case the present triumph of aristocracy will but deceive them.”<sup>26</sup> Apparently, Vaughan thought that New Englanders, including the clergy, would eventually support the French Revolution and the Democratic-Republican Party.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, even Massachusetts men like his old friend John Adams, Jefferson admired the political structure and the political culture of the New England towns, despite his disappointment at their anti-Jeffersonian proclivities. Like Vaughan, at this juncture he was hopeful that New England would soon transfer its allegiance to the Republicans. In June 1797, congratulating Aaron Burr on his election to the New York assembly, he confessed the Republican victory in the city had surprised him. He had assumed that New York was irremediably aristocratic, “what with the English influence in the lower, and the Patroon influence in the upper parts of your state, I presume little is to be hoped.” He was more interested in finding out Burr’s opinion of the possibility that the “Eastern States” (New England) would join the Republicans. Hopeful that New

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<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Vaughan to James Monroe, Sept. 2, 1797, James Monroe Papers, New York Public Library (italics in original). Despite his strong radical republicanism, Vaughan hoped for compromise between the conflicting parties. He confided to Monroe that he possessed evidence damaging to Federalist John Jay’s handling of the peace negotiations in 1782-83, but would not publish it because of friendship for Jay. Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 224, inaccurately claims that Vaughan gave “muted allegiance to Federalism.”

<sup>27</sup> Recent studies which rehabilitate the New England Congregationalist clergy, depicting them as more respectful of individual rights (“liberal”) than had previous scholars, include David B. Davis, “American Equality and Foreign Revolutions,” *Journal of American History*, 76 (Dec. 1989): 742-43; and Robert J. Imholt, “Timothy Dwight, Federalist Pope of Connecticut,” *New England Quarterly*, 73 (Sept. 2000): 386-411.

England’s farmers would ultimately perceive that their natural interests dictated their support of Jefferson, he asked, will “the people there, who are unquestionably republican, ever awake to the true state of things?” He visualized Massachusetts becoming a leader in the republican reform of the nation, as it had in conducting the resistance to Great Britain before the Revolution.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, New England Federalist leaders were confident they could retain the region in the party’s hands. Acknowledging Boston artisans’ potential refractoriness, they relied on the small farmers for their support base. Federalist leader Fisher Ames, congressman from Dedham, a rural suburb of Boston in Suffolk County, confided to a friend his belief that, although devious demagogues were taking over the large towns, they would be defeated by the more numerous farmers, provided the “country folk keep firm and steady.”<sup>29</sup> He may not have been aware of the extent to which his views corresponded with those of the supreme eulogist of “husbandmen” as the “chosen people of God,” Jefferson himself. Historian Henry F. May argues that the Federalists were right in believing that the small town Eastern farmer in the late 1790s felt an affinity for the party’s law and order ethos. He observes, “New Englanders of many kinds still believed in a special New England culture, centered on education and the village way of life, and buttressed by religion.”<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, Jefferson’s attitudes toward New England were favorable, even at this dismal moment for the future of the Republican Party, and in Jefferson’s eyes, for America’s representative democracy.

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<sup>28</sup> Jefferson to Aaron Burr, June 17, 1797, in Mary-Jo Kline, ed., *Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1: 300.

<sup>29</sup> Fisher Ames to Thomas Dwight, Sept. 27, 1795, in Seth Ames, ed., *The Works of Fisher Ames, I*: 174, quoted in Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 258-259. On the transition of the Boston artisans from the Federalists to the Republican party in the 1790s, see Gary J. Kornblith, “Artisan Federalism: New England Mechanics and the Political Economy of the 1790s,” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Launching the Extended Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 249-72.

<sup>30</sup> May, 259.

Although the New England states had yielded him no electoral votes for the presidency either in 1796 or 1800, he remained optimistic that they would eventually convert to Democratic-Republicanism. In this hope he gained solace from an unexpected source: ex-president John Adams, who wrote him shortly after returning to Quincy in 1801, assuring him of Massachusetts's loyalty: "This part of the Union is in a state of perfect Tranquility and I See nothing to obscure your prospect of a quiet and prosperous Administration, which I heartily wish you."<sup>31</sup> Likewise, the Democratic-Republican voices in favor of the New England life-style and political *mentalite* that have been examined reveal that Massachusetts possessed symbols of nationality within itself attractive to members of diverse parties and regions, affording a basis for national unity transcending partisan rancor between Federalists and Jeffersonians.

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<sup>31</sup> John Adams to Jefferson, 24 March 1801, in Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 1: 264. This letter must have been especially painful for Adams to write. Not only had he been humiliated by Jefferson's victory over him in the presidential election, he had not recovered from the death of his son Charles, primarily the result of alcoholism, on November 30, 1800. In this letter Adams bitterly informed Jefferson of Charles's death, probably expecting a commiserating reply in return. However, Jefferson failed to reply, as was his wont when deaths took place. As he later explained to Adams, attempting to console him after the death of Adams's daughter, Abigail ("Nabby") Adams Smith, he considered death an unpleasant topic and usually tried to avoid discussing it, both for his own peace of mind and, he thought, that of others. "I have ever found time and silence the only medicine [sic], and these but assuage, they never can suppress, the deep-drawn sigh." Jefferson to John Adams, Oct. 12, 1813, in Cappon, 2: 386. After John's wife Abigail wrote Jefferson some angry letters in the summer of 1804, in which she turned condolences over the recent death of his youngest daughter Maria (Polly) at age twenty-five into a scathing diatribe against Jefferson for subsidizing radical pamphleteer James T. Callender's scurrilous attacks on Adams during the election of 1800, Jefferson ceased further contact with the Adams family until John Adams renewed their correspondence in January, 1812. See Cappon, 1: 265-282.