# THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND POLITICS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC: MYTHMAKING IN THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The Founding Fathers and Politics in the Early Republic: Mythmaking in the Educational Community

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This dissertation will compare how the politics of the early American republic (1790-1800) are portrayed in educational resources and scholarly works. The purpose of this project is to demonstrate that educational materials are both incomplete and positively biased, and therefore teachers of secondary social studies should limit their use when planning instruction on the Federalist era. The scope of this dissertation includes an examination of recently produced and widely used educational resources such as textbooks and videos, comparing these with recent scholarship focused on the period.

This dissertation will review trends in historiography and history education in order to place selected resources and current pedagogy in context. The project will then assess how common modes of political conduct are portrayed in these resources through three illustrative case studies: the establishment of Alexander Hamilton's financial program during the presidency of George Washington, the election of 1796 and subsequent passage and enforcement of the Alien and Sedition Acts during the tenure of John Adams, and the politics surrounding the controversial election of 1800 which elevated Thomas Jefferson to the presidency.

These case studies reveal that modern textbooks and, to a lesser degree, educational videos, are deeply flawed in their presentation of the politics of the founding

era, presenting a more sanitized picture than what is documented in contemporary scholarship. The research shows that consolidation of the publishing industry and the pursuit of higher profit margins has reduced the variety and overall quality of available textbooks. In addition, organized political groups, many of them conservative and residing in large states like Texas and Florida with vast purchasing power, have intimidated authors and publishers, contributing to bland narratives that sidestep substantive controversies. Finally, video treatments of this era are often produced for entertainment, rather than educational purposes, providing superficial treatment of political developments that focus on scandal and personal conflict.

This dissertation concludes by recommending a shift in pedagogy away from these materials and toward the use of a constructivist approach that would allow students to develop their own interpretations of historical developments through an examination of a range of primary and secondary sources.

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Kathryn, for without her unwavering support there would be no dedication to write. More often than I can possibly recall, she buoyed my spirits, pushed me onward and cared for our young son while I was researching, reading and writing. I also dedicate this to the memory of my mother, Judith Lyle DeBiasse (Reynolds). I know she would be proud. I am also grateful for the support I received from friends and colleagues, particularly Steve Deats, who helped me to stay focused on the light at the end of the tunnel. My final dedication is to Jordan—at two already a great lover of books. May your future be as bright as your beautiful smile and your joyous spirit.

CONTENTS

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has been very kind to the founding fathers and our understanding of this nation's early years. While public approval of our political leaders and governing institutions has reached historic lows, the reputation of those who forged the republic appear to be at an all-time high (Gallup; NBC). As historian Ron Chernow highlighted in a recent New York Times article, politicians from both sides of the aisle routinely pay homage to the peerless leadership and impeccable character exhibited by our nation's early leaders (The Founding Fathers A29). Meanwhile a visit to the official "Tea Party" website reveals a determined effort to capitalize on an image of the founders that contrasts greatly with those who currently occupy positions of power in our nation's capital ("Official Tea Party").

The present fascination with the founders and their brand of politics begs a number of important questions: Are the members of the founding generation fully deserving of such reverential treatment? Was the political behavior of those who forged and then governed the nation through its first decade really all that different from what we see today in Washington? If the answer in both cases is "no", then how do we explain this misplaced affection for a political past that never was? Where do these romantic notions about political life during the formative years arise and why have they established such deep roots in the American psyche? And finally, what impact do these attitudes have on current political actors and their ability to successfully govern the nation?

Certainly, popular media has contributed to a number of myths about the character and political behavior of our nation's early leaders. Recent television

documentaries and glossy magazine tributes often present reverential profiles that are devoid of complex drama that might shed negative light on the political behavior of the founding generation. The same is often true of the many cultural institutions that are charged with preserving and telling the story of our nation's past. For example, a visit to the official websites of Washington's Mount Vernon or John Adams National Historic Park reveal portraits that skirt some of the most controversial political events of our nation's formative years ("Official Mount Vernon"; "Official John Adams").

However, the public school system, and the curriculum and associated resources that are used to teach our youth about the past, must be credited as among the most powerful contributors to our collective understanding of political life during the early decades of the republic. Unfortunately, curriculum standards that would guide students to a meaningful, informative and critical understanding of the politics of the age are conspicuously absent, a victim of partisan strife and infighting among educational theorists and practitioners. Often acting in their place are textbooks which largely ignore or gloss over the gritty politics of the age—another casualty of politics, as well as dramatic changes in the publishing industry that have stripped away both coverage and controversy. As a result, what little text is dedicated to political developments during this crucial period in American life is often bland and innocuous, leaving unmentioned even widely known personal scandals and heated political developments. What little treatment exists often characterizes the politics of the age as both noble and enlightened, as if the founders uniformly put the good of the entire nation ahead of vanity and personal gain. It is no wonder that Americans are fed up with the nation's current leadership and pine for a

past that perhaps never was—how could any political officeholder or aspirant measure up against the mythical greatness of the founders and the golden age of the early republic?

This dissertation will evaluate the utility of popular textbooks and educational videos as instructional resources for teaching secondary students about the politics of the founding era (1790-1800) and explore the historical, political, economic and institutional factors that contribute to their shortcomings. My research will compare the interpretations of this period found in contemporary educational resources with those embodied in scholarly works in order to demonstrate that the former are both incomplete and positively biased, and that the more critical and balanced perspective found in the latter shows that the founding generation employed political tactics that were quite often crude, partisan and mercenary—similar, in fact, to those that are routinely utilized—and often roundly criticized—today.

Research for this dissertation will have several key components. First, it will be important to focus on important trends in American historiography since the dawn of the 20th century. This chapter will examine the emergence of history within the United States as a distinct discipline and the evolution of its methodology and interpretive focus over the past century. This will provide some important context in which to better understand the contemporary scholarship that will serve as a counterpoint to the educational materials under review. Once a context for recent scholarship has been established, it will be important to take a close look at the recent wave of biographies and other works on the founding age that have been written for a general audience to better understand how they reflect and build upon these historiographical traditions. Finally, my research will also include an evaluation of recently produced documentary videos which are often used in

secondary classrooms for instructional purposes. For example, the History Channel, American Experience, and A&E have sought to ride the wave of interest in the founders which began in 2001 with the publication of John Adams by David McCulloch, each producing a number of biographical portraits of uneven depth and breadth.

While pressure from minority groups, left-leaning historians and civil rights leaders has managed to connect the tragic history of slavery to the founders, critical appraisals of their political character and conduct are conspicuously absent in most of these documentary videos. For example, while the History Channel's Founding Brothers includes extensive coverage of slave ownership among the founders and Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemmings, little is said of the likely deal that Jefferson forged with Federalists to secure victory in the disputed election of 1800—an agreement that appears to have sacrificed critical elements of a platform that had earned him widespread electoral support. Similarly, while a popular biographical profile of Alexander Hamilton produced by the American Experience reveals the horse trading that placed the permanent national capitol on the banks of the Potomac in exchange for the assumption of state debts, there is no mention of the degree to which speculation in public securities among members of the first Congress help to explain passage of the major elements of Hamilton's debt program.

This chapter will also include a focus on secondary level curricular trends and the consequent development of textbook resources popularly used throughout the educational community. This section will begin with a discussion of how and why American history became part of the secondary curriculum and will then turn to an examination of how that curricula has been altered by legislation, state education officials and professional

organizations. Once the context of American history education has been established, contemporary developments will be explored, including highly charged political battles over standards and textbook resources. As noted by the American Textbook Council in its 2000 report entitled History Textbooks at the New Century:

> This new generation of history textbooks should be of interest and concern to all Americans. The ways that history textbooks affect how students see themselves, their nation, and the world cannot be quantified. But their civic impact is uncontested. American history textbooks are the official portraits of our country's past that are purchased by local and state governments and that are assigned to students with the foreknowledge that these students will someday participate in public affairs. How much these students know and what they think about their nation and world will indelibly affect civic character. The history textbooks that succeed nationally during the next few years will have an influence on social studies beyond the textbook cycle itself. They will reflect how the United States intends to represent itself and its ideals to the youth of the early twenty-first century. They will be important indicators of "who we are" and "what we are" as a nation and people after a decade of exposure to multiculturalism (Sewall 2).

The failure to develop national curriculum standards for United States history and the impact this has had on classroom instruction will also be explored. It will be demonstrated that the fierce factional battle over standards waged between academic traditionalists and multiculturalists has only served to increase the overall importance of textbooks in the instructional process. As noted by Sewall:

> Textbooks are the draft horse of this social studies curriculum. They are familiar, efficient, portable, and relatively cheap. In many or most classrooms they are the sole source of information about the subject for teachers and students alike. They provide an organized sequence of ideas and information. Textbooks structure teaching and learning. Textbooks are time savers, providing a prepackaged "delivery system" that helps conserve teachers' time and energy. For all the tech talk in schools today, textbooks are likely to remain classroom staples for years to come. The Association of American Publishers concedes that CD-ROM formats have disappointing sales. A standard student textbook and teacher's annotated edition (TAE) remain predominantly the sources of most classroom teaching and learning (4).

However, overreliance upon the text is fraught with an array of difficulties. With the textbook often acting as the *defacto* curriculum, their content has come under increasing scrutiny by political actors with strong, often conflicting agendas. According to Frances FitzGerald, author of the groundbreaking study on American history textbooks titled *America Revised*:

> Textbook publishers write history-on-demand, tailoring their products to reflect the current thinking of an organized education establishment. Various school committees, especially in the larger states, virtually dictate what is proper material for their educational wards. Since fortunes are made and lost in the textbook adoption process, the publisher is, at best, a hapless middleman (qtd. in Blassingame 562).

As a result, modern textbooks writers often shy away from controversial topics or critical appraisals, while including an array of different people groups in order to satisfy as broad a constituency as possible. According to Lacy:

> Textbook adoptions are not so much a selection of books for their virtues as a process of elimination of books for their vices. What is left is likely to be the book that has offended no one rather than the book that has extraordinary virtues… (qtd. in Blassingame 572).

This viewpoint was echoed by Degler and Kirdendall in a symposium sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which was assembled following publication of *American Revised*. The two explain that the "reason why history textbooks seem so bland is that they are reflective of what a pluralistic society wants from the past. Each group wants its own story included and few want the seamy side of their past displayed" (qtd. in Blassingame 576). Finally, the politics of textbook adoption and changes in the publishing industry have slowly undermined the quality of textbooks in a variety of tangible ways. As noted by FitzGerald:

> Written by a committee and designed to offend no one, today's textbooks are 'incredibly dull'—passionless, impersonal tomes that acknowledge neither conflict nor motivation. In a 'natural disaster theory of history,' they discuss 'problems'—from the Missouri Compromise to the Vietnam War—in ways that imply simplistic solutions, as though 'reasonable people might have come to some mutual understanding if only they had been able to find the right shape for the negotiating table (qtd. in Blassingame 562).

Unfortunately, the decline in quality of American history textbooks has gone almost unnoticed outside the classroom doors. Even as the textbook has become more central to the instructional process, fewer checks appear to be in place to ensure that students are being exposed to a rich, intellectually engaging and accurate appraisal of the past. As FitzGerald noted in 1979:

> But most scholars do not take secondary-school (or even college) textbooks seriously—not even when they have a hand in writing them. They do not make a practice of reading textbooks in their field, and no academic journal reviews textbooks on a regular basis. One consequence is that new scholarship trickles down extremely slowly into the school texts…Another consequence is that there is no real check on the intellectual quality—or even the factual accuracy—of school textbooks. The result is that on the scale of publishing priorities the pursuit of truth appears somewhere near the bottom (43).

Unfortunately, Fitzgerald's observation is even more apt today, as the authorship of most texts has shifted to non-academic writers and designers whose main focus appears to be on "readability" and compelling visuals, rather than factual accuracy and authenticity—all, according to Joseph Featherstone, conducted without the benefit of scholarly input or review (qtd. in Blassingame 568).

Because an evaluation of the way contemporary textbooks characterize the politics of the founding generation is the main purpose of this research, an examination of recent trends in textbook publishing will assume a prominent role in this chapter. The preceding treatment of historiographical and educational trends is designed to provide context for this discussion so that the reader has a better understanding of the centrality of

the textbook in American classrooms as well as an appreciation for the political and economic factors that directly contribute to the historical content contained therein.

In the next three chapters, this dissertation will explore a variety of political behaviors and will be organized around illustrative case studies. The behavioral themes are common among contemporary political analysts and include: money and politics, "influence peddling" and the "revolving door," presidential campaign ethics and tactics, partisan warfare, patronage and political power, and finally, "horse trading" and "log rolling" in political life. The case studies will examine key political developments during the first decade of the American republic. Here educational materials—both textbooks and videos—will be evaluated against a variety of scholarly works produced within the same timeframe. This will involve the close textual reading of multiple sources around the same subject matter in order to note bias in what appears (and fails to appear) in sections detailing Hamilton's financial program, the election and presidency of John Adams—including the dreaded Alien and Sedition Acts, and the election of 1800. Each of the case studies is intended to demonstrate the degree to which educational materials provide an incomplete and positively biased portrayal of the politics of the founding era.

The first case study will explore the establishment of Alexander Hamilton's financial program in the early 1790s. After a review of educational literature that emphasizes Hamilton's role in establishing a sound fiscal and monetary system for the young republic, a more critical appraisal relying on scholarly research and the primary record will reveal how this program sought to reward predatory speculative behavior, bind the interests of the wealthy elite to the welfare of the new nation and tax the broader population in order to effectuate this outcome (Chernow, *Hamilton* 297-306). It will also

be demonstrated that Hamilton sought and acquired the support of the legislature by providing financial incentives for Congressmen who were eager to engage in speculative ventures (Chernow, *Hamilton* 305). In addition, passage of the Assumption Bill provides a classic example of "horse trading" as Jefferson, who served with Hamilton in Washington's cabinet, and his ally, James Madison, reluctantly agreed to swing votes among political allies in favor of the assumption of state debts in order to secure a permanent southern location for the national capitol on the banks of the Potomac (Wood 143-157). Finally, it will be demonstrated that Hamilton successfully utilized extensive patronage powers associated with the newly created Treasury Department to undermine both the power of the states and opposition to his financial program, and to advance the prospects of the Federalists as an emerging party organization (Prince 268-274). This initial case study will conclude by asking whether secondary school students might be more intellectually engaged by a debate over Hamilton's program that mentioned both the obvious need and subsequent economic benefits of his plan as well as the unseemly political maneuvering that brought it into existence.

A second case study will survey the tumultuous election of 1796 and tragic presidency of John Adams. An examination of popular textbooks and educational videos will demonstrate that the race to succeed George Washington is among the most widely ignored political events in the history of this nation. Where educational resources do allocate attention to this event, most often the focus is limited to the reluctant participation of the main candidates and the difficulty of taking the reins of the presidency in Washington's wake.

However, a review of scholarly resources will demonstrate that the nation's first competitive presidential election was awash with poisonous intrigue, as leading founders jockeyed for position and electoral advantage. Unlike widely used textbooks, the scholarly record shows that the 1796 election cycle featured a number of important political developments. For example, historian Gordon Wood notes that the emergence of formal political party organizations in the wake of Washington's departure had a significant impact on the way in which the president was selected, since it allowed major candidates to amass electoral majorities that would have otherwise been unattainable. This fundamentally reduced the power of the House of Representatives, which the founders had envisioned playing a decisive role in choosing the president (210-11).

The scholarly record also reveals a hateful and vindictive side of some of our more beloved political forefathers. Alexander Hamilton, in particular, is revealed to have been engaged in extraordinary efforts to undermine both Jefferson and Adams and promote the candidacy of his Federalist ally and surrogate Thomas Pinckney (Pasley, *The First* 380). At the same time, Jefferson, who had systematically undermined President Washington after leaving his cabinet, displays considerable moxie by attempting to cozy up to the aging, yet still popular leader, in order to burnish his own presidential credentials and electoral ambitions (Meacham 297).

The 1796 contest also reveals several aspects of presidential politics that would be familiar to modern observers. For example, the scholarly record describes the emergence of a fully functional grassroots campaign in Pennsylvania, where Republican operatives prepared pre-written ballots that violated local election laws. New Jersey witnessed a

different form of electioneering, where heavy arm twisting within the state legislature swung the state into the Federalist column (Freeman, *Affairs* 220).

While several educational resources touch on the vicious press attacks launched by both sides in this vituperative contest, contemporary scholars reveal the truly shameful broadsides that ultimately shattered the longstanding friendship of Adams and Jefferson. In fact, the emergence of the party press as a vehicle for political warfare is itself a topic which is only partially conveyed by most of the educational resources (McCullough 462-63).

The scholarly record reveals quite vividly how high the stakes were during this election cycle. Tensions ran so high that many political leaders and major newspapers spoke openly of secession should the outcome not go their way (Pasley, *The First* 376). Even the significance of the outcome—a narrow victory for Adams which placed his rival in the cabinet as vice president—gets little attention in many textbooks, though Jefferson's conduct while serving Adams goes a long way toward explaining the latter's failed, single term in office (Meacham 305-15).

This second case study will also focus on the enactment and enforcement of the Alien and Sedition Acts during the presidency of John Adams. These laws targeted those who were thought to be disloyal during a period of heightened international tension and were the most controversial feature of Adams brief and stormy presidency. After a review of selected educational resources, many of which frame these acts as an unfortunate response to legitimate national security fears and offer criticism that is limited to concerns about the suppression of civil liberties, an analysis of scholarly resources and the primary record will confirm an additional blemish on Adams's tenure—blatant

electoral partisanship which sought to crush Republican opposition on the eve of the presidential election of 1800 (McCulloch 504-07).

As war raged in Europe, Republican opposition to Adams intensified, particularly in the emergent party press. In response, Adams and the Federalist controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts. These laws authorized the government to arrest and deport aliens—in particular those with French sympathies—suspected of fomenting domestic unrest and, perhaps most alarming, permitted the arrest and imprisonment of newspaper publishers who criticized American government officials, including the president. Rarely mentioned in educational materials is the fact that the acts excluded Vice President Jefferson, a Republican, from its protections and that the laws were set to expire upon the conclusion of the upcoming presidential election cycle (Wilentz, *The Rise* 78). That a sitting president would seek to muzzle legitimate opposition through the use of unconstitutional legislative and enforcement powers set to expire following a campaign for reelection demonstrates the lengths to which the founding generation would go to retain political power in the young republic. Unfortunately, the vile political nature of the Alien and Sedition Acts, so clearly revealed by scholars examining the primary record, is largely overlooked by contemporary educational resources.

A third and final case study will examine the contested and controversial election of 1800. This campaign was as bitterly fought as any in American history, as the Republicans, led by Thomas Jefferson, attempted to roll back Federalist programs by gaining the White House and a majority of seats in the Congress. Here, because of a flaw in our nation's early voting methods, Thomas Jefferson ended up in a tie with his Republican running mate Aaron Burr. Burr refused to decline the presidency and so the

vote was thrown into the House of Representatives, which remained under the control of the Federalists until the new Congress was sworn into office. The House remained deadlocked for a week, precipitating an unprecedented constitutional and political crisis, ultimately resolved when Hamilton and other key Federalists surprisingly used their considerable influence to tip the scales toward Jefferson, who was finally selected on the thirty-sixth ballot.

A review of the educational literature will highlight the nasty partisanship which characterized the 1800 election campaign. However, when our attention is turned to the outcome of the disputed election, these sources uniformly ignore the likely deal between Jefferson and the Federalists that led to his ascendance to the presidency. Instead, the educational materials rely upon an interpretation of Jefferson's victory that focuses on Hamilton's distrust and personal hatred of Burr. While it is true that Hamilton thought Burr was unfit for the presidency, a number of primary sources and recent scholarly works reveal that Hamilton and leading Federalists sought a quid pro quo with Jefferson that would preserve high priority Federalist programs and patronage positions in exchange for the necessary votes to put Jefferson in office (Chernow, *Hamilton* 636-639).

Scholarly works and primary materials provide important insight into the outcome of the most consequential election in American history and shed important light on the willingness of the founding generation to practice the kind of backroom politics typically ascribed to politics of the modern era (Freeman, *Affairs* 250-53). However, despite widespread evidence of political "horse trading" and efforts to thwart the public will by tying Jefferson's hands, none of the educational materials even hint at what appears to be the scandalous corruption of our presidential politics. That this type of wheeling and

dealing was as much a part of the early history of our republic as it is today is central to my thesis, and there is perhaps no better place to look than politics surrounding the election of 1800.

To sum up, my dissertation aims to document the significant omissions and positive bias contained in these popular educational materials by allowing scholarship produced during the same period to serve as a point of contrast that tells a much different story of the politics of the founding age. My hope is to raise legitimate questions about the quality of these instructional materials, to speculate on why a more historically accurate perspective is not presented to our youngsters, to consider the impact of these deficiencies on our collective understanding of history and American political life, and to suggest pedagogical methods and resources that can decrease reliance on the text and provide a more intellectually engaging picture of political life during the Federalist era.

# Chapter 2

# HISTORIOGRAPHY AND HISTORY EDUCATION

## Trends in American Historiography

A thorough evaluation of the way in which popular educational resources characterize the political behavior of the Founding Generation during the early years of the Republic must be preceded by some discussion of educational and scholarly trends. If the purpose of this research is to assess the educational value of widely used textbooks and videos as sources materials for teaching this critical period in American history, it will be important to clarify the context in which these resources have been produced. This perspective will allow for the establishment of qualitative standards by which these materials will be evaluated.

Since the turn of the 20th century, the essential mission of American public schools has continually evolved, and the curricula—and place of historical study within—has been hotly debated and undergone periods of marked change (Banner 5-6). Thus, it is essential to understand how the mission of public schooling and, more specifically, the role of history education, have evolved over time. The goal here is to better appreciate what societal priorities are reflected in contemporary curricular standards, resource materials and pedagogical techniques and how these priorities influence the way in which the political behavior of the founders is represented.

As we shall see, while not determinative, curricular guidelines established by organizations like the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) as well as individual state standards will play an important role in shaping the content and interpretive perspective adopted by mainstream textbook publishers and video producers

(Evans 149-71). So will the efforts of political actors who work through a variety of channels to frame the American story as portrayed in a wide variety of resources—particularly high school textbooks (Erekson xi-xiii). Finally, it has been observed that prevailing standards and approved resource materials have a significant impact on the pedagogical approach that teachers utilize in their classrooms (Pruess 33-34). Thus, it will be important to trace the evolutionary arc of curricular standards, resources and pedagogy in a way that provides both perspective and insight on current developments.

In addition, historical scholarship has undergone an enormous transformation since the discipline was formally recognized—again, near the turn of the 20th century. Throughout the 1800s, the field "distinguished itself from moral philosophy, organized itself into a discipline as a distinct branch of knowledge with its own institutions, and [began] to develop its enduring protocols of research, scholarship, teaching, and professional practice" (Banner 5). Maturity came in 1907 with Clarence Paine's founding of the *Mississippi Valley Historical Association* (the forerunner of today's *Organization of American Historians*) and subsequent efforts by leading Progressives to both define the field and its manifestation within the public school curriculum (Ravitch 28-31). Since then we have witnessed a protracted debate over which topics represent legitimate areas of study and how historians should go about their work (Banner 6). Thus, it is essential to understand how we arrived at the prevailing modes of scholarship that will serve as a point of reference by which the selected educational resources will be evaluated.

Finally, in addition to establishing a firm context for the evaluative process, it is also important to clarify which educational and scholarly resources will be featured throughout this investigation as well as the rationale for their selection. As stated

previously, each of the case studies will focus on the political dimensions of a distinct historical event (or series of related events) that illuminate the conduct of political leaders during the Federalist era. Within each case study the interpretation of these events found in textbooks and educational videos will be compared with the work of scholars who write primarily for a general audience.

In order to qualify for inclusion within this study, the educational resources must have been both recently produced and widely used. For example, the three survey texts applied to each case study are the most recent editions available from their respective publishers. The three are also cited by industry surveys as among the most widely used throughout the nation (American Textbook Council 2011). In addition, the selection of three texts was intended to ensure that different reading ability levels were represented: below grade level (Appleby), on grade level (Danzer) and advanced readers (Kennedy). Finally, two of the three titles (Danzer and Kennedy) were also identified as among the most widely used by teachers and school administrators across New Jersey in an independent electronic survey administered in January 2014 (Appendix). Similarly, the educational videos used for this study were all produced within the last decade, with the exception of one (*Thomas Jefferson: Philosopher of Freedom*) that has a production date of 1995. And while no data exists to quantify the use of the featured videos on a national scale, the above referenced statewide survey does indicate regular use in classrooms across the state of New Jersey when teachers are planning for instruction on the Federalist era (Appendix).

With regard to the scholarly resources that were selected to serve as a counterpoint to the educational materials outlined above, each was published within the

past twenty years by historians who are popular with both academics and the general (albeit well educated) public. Recent texts were chosen so that the publication dates of the scholarly and educational materials would roughly coincide, thereby ensuring that each was produced within the same historiographical period. It would do no good to compare interpretations of the presidential election of 1800 presented by modern textbooks with those featured in scholarly works from the early 1960s. Since it takes roughly ten or fifteen years for scholarship to filter down to secondary level textbooks, most current editions have been written based upon scholarship produced between 1990 and 2005 (FitzGerald 20-27). Books, manuscripts and other works prepared by academics for an audience of the same have largely been omitted here, since they often embrace a rather meticulous approach that does not provide relevant or legitimate comparison with materials written for students in a high school classroom. Of course, a large number of additional scholarly books and manuscripts were used throughout the research and writing process. Many of these reach back decades and all are cited in the bibliography for reference purposes.

As previously stated, the past century has witnessed dramatic changes in the study of American history. At the dawn of the 20th century the study of history as a distinct discipline within the United States emerged from the shadows of several loosely related intellectual endeavors (Banner 5-6). Up until this point, those who sought to chronicle noteworthy developments of the early republic mostly confined their work to biographical tributes of major figures and their impact on political and diplomatic events (Guerty 3). However, the development of formalized methods of historical inquiry during

the turmoil of the progressive era would have a significant impact on the evolution of the field.

The progressive era galvanized early historians, leading to new perspectives on political life during the founding era. A key turning point was Frederick Jackson Turner's 1910 address to the nascent American Historical Association entitled *Social Forces in American History*, which led to a departure from traditional modes of historical inquiry that focused exclusively on political and diplomatic events. Nearly two decades prior, Turner's "Frontier Thesis" had upended the emerging field by shifting the focus westward—away from traditional accounts which viewed the history of the republic through the lens of European events, and toward the role of American frontiersmen in shaping the history and unique character of the republic (Kornblith and Lasser 8). In his address to the AHA, Turner observed that the progressive era represented a revolution as significant and powerful as the break from England and establishment of the American republic under the constitution of 1788. According to Turner, the times required fresh approaches to historical inquiry:

> Historians needed to reach out to the social sciences as well as the humanities to write the kind of history that would make sense of the great transformation going on around them, changes not captured in more purely political narratives. In calling on American historians to focus on social forces rather than discrete political events, formal institutions, or heroic actions, Turner laid out an ambitious agenda for future scholarly research (Kornblith and Lasser 8).

Turner's address represented a "call to arms" and served as the initial salvo in what would become an ongoing struggle to define the nature, techniques and legitimate

sources of historical inquiry—a debate which would have a significant impact on the way in which the Federalist era is represented in both scholarly and educational materials from the progressive era until today. As noted by historian Peter N. Stearns in his survey of the emergence of social history, progressive historians were responding to an overall "dissatisfaction [that] had emerged with standard school versions of American history, which relied largely on the accumulation and interpretation of political and biographical data" (237).

While Turner is widely known for his efforts to acknowledge the role of the western frontier in shaping American events, from the standpoint of political history it would be Turner's "Sectionalism Thesis" that would have a significantly greater impact on subsequent interpretations of politics in the early republic. According to this view, the "characteristics of the people who inhabit an area—their ethical values, their social condition, and the stage of their economic development—constitute the social forces that will determine political behavior" (Jensen 6). While Turner did not publish much in support of this approach, the "Sectionalism Thesis" served as one of several themes that guided his graduate teaching and, as a result, his students produced a number of significant works that cast new light on the political behavior of elites during the formative period of American history. For example, in 1894 one Turner disciple, Orin G. Libby, published *The Geographical Distribution of the Vote of the Thirteen States on the Federal Constitution, 1787-8*, which scrutinized electoral maps in an effort to establish a causal link between voter behavior and geographic location (Fitzpatrick 71-72). A similar approach was taken by Carl Becker, whose 1909 study entitled *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776* transformed the way the story of the

revolutionary era was developed and told by focusing on economic forces in determining political life and events (Wilentz, "American Political Histories" 24).

The efforts of Libby, Becker and others would lay the foundation for what would become the best known (and most controversial) study of political behavior among the founding elite—Charles A. Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, which was published in 1913. Beard's efforts to identify the impact of social class on the outcome of the constitutional settlement reached at the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 represented a breathtaking revision of historical methods and interpretive conclusions. By stripping away longstanding myths which in the past had acted to limit criticism of the founding generation, Beard liberated future scholarship, leading to more varied and critical portrayals of those who would forge our nation's destiny (Fitzpatrick 71-75).

Following Beard's lead, other progressive era historians, such as Vernon L. Parrington, combed through the correspondence of the founders in an effort to uncover intellectual and philosophical currents that might have nurtured incompatible ideological assumptions held by the Federalist and Republican parties (Wilentz, "American Political Histories" 24). Together, the progressives were the first group of American historians to tackle what they believed were well-established myths regarding the political behavior of the founders and to present a more critical appraisal of this formative period of the American republic.

It should be noted that while Beard, Turner and other progressive historians continued to focus on fundamental social forces that they believed shaped the founding era, other scholars pursued the study of everyday life, giving birth to another strand of social history that continues to vie for the attention of both scholars and textbook

publishers (Kornblith and Lasser 8-9). In fact, the end of progressivism, which coincided with the American involvement in the Great War, led to a decline of scholarly interest in political history and a corresponding rise in historical inquiry aimed at the experience of ordinary Americans. According to Stearns "[A]ttention to social history increased in the early decades of the twentieth century, reaching something of a high point with the 1927-1931 publication of the initial twelve-volume History of American Life series, edited by Arthur Meier Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox" (237). This series, which traced the evolution of cultural habits and customs among the varied ranks of the American public, was wildly popular and therefore considerably influential among practicing historians. According to Gary J. Kornblith and Carol Lasser:

> Over the next generation, Arthur Meier Schlesinger brought the work of social historians to the general reading public. In 1922, he published *New Viewpoints in American History*, which included synthetic essays on 'The Influence of Immigration on American History,' 'Economic Influences in American History,' and 'The Role of Women in American History' among other topics (9).

As we shall see, while the tone and substance of social history will become more radical in response to the convulsions of the 1960s, the propensity of historians to explore the quaint and often comical social customs of the founding generation would have a residual impact on the way in which educational materials would present information about the character and public behavior of the founding elites.

Interest in what some considered rather mundane aspects of life in the past would be short-lived. As noted by Stearns, "[W]ork in social history trailed off somewhat in succeeding decades. . .[as] innovation centered on the rising star of intellectual history; its

fascination with the evolution and causal role of elite ideas challenged conventional history but moved away from social historical interests as well" (237). For those interested in the political behavior of the founding generation, the emergence of intellectual history as an additional sub-genre provided another lens through which the actions of key players could be referenced and evaluated.

The origins of the "history of ideas" can be traced to the publication of Arthur O. Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* in 1936, which "traced the development over many centuries in many cultures of the metaphysical idea of a hierarchy of life forms" and led to the birth of *The Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1940. However, intellectual history did not become a "major, recognized subfield of Unites States history [until] the 1950s" (Hollinger 14). As noted by Hollinger:

> Previous generations of historians had studied ideas in America before, but usually in strict relation to politics. George Bancroft, Francis Parkman, and Henry Adams, to cite three great nineteenth-century historians, attended to some of the ideas held by the presidents and generals who dominated their great narrative. . . What happened in the 1950s was a greater acceptance of the reality of thinking as a human activity like voting, fighting, farming, manufacturing, exploring, fishing, and litigating (14).

Perhaps most influential in establishing intellectual history as a reputable approach within the discipline was Richard Hofstadter, whose 1948 *The American Political Tradition* "gave new and striking credibility to the basic methodology postulate that political ideas were not merely epiphenomenal—the consequences of some prior economic or social conditions—but were forces that could define a political movement

and explain the popular appeal of a given political leader. Hofstadter integrated the study of political ideas into the study of basic American political history as no previous scholar had done" (Hollinger 15). Resulting scholars would build upon this seminal text to provide unique insights into the political behavior of the founding elite by seeking to establish causal links between their scholarly influences and policy preferences. The following serves as an example of this approach:

> Thomas Jefferson was the architect of the American Republic because he was its leading thinker. Among the philosopher-statesmen of the early Republic Jefferson was pre-eminent for a variety of reasons. His prime interest was the philosophy of society; his major objective the study of government. Yet it was more than a passion for scholarship which motivated his efforts. He was engaged in creating a society and in building a democratic government. Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson were the pioneers of American self-government. It was no mere intellectual adventure; it was an adventure in learning by doing. They were engaged in the practice of knowledge. Realization that they were innovators gave a zest to their thought and a passion to their activity (Loewenberg 180).

The notion that ideas matter and the corresponding view that their evolution should therefore be studied as part of any meaningful historical inquiry continues to influence the way in which the politics of the founding era are represented in scholarly and educational materials. As we shall see, the political battles of the Federalist era are uniformly framed as a clash of ideas embodied by the thinking and writing of Hamilton

and Jefferson (Berkin 6). Whether the foundational beliefs and resulting behavior of both are aptly portrayed in textbooks and educational videos deserves thorough investigation.

In an abrupt departure from the Progressive era model, a new generation of historians writing in the patriotic aftermath of World War II would eschew the focus on economic conflict and instead focus on the ongoing search for national consensus. According to Kornblith and Lasser:

> American entry into World War II brought an end to the Great Depression and prompted a broad-based groundswell of patriotism. For a rising generation of Americans, a mutual commitment to win the fight for freedom against fascism—and, later, communism—took precedence over any internal disagreements. With this political and cultural shift, historians in the late 1940s and 1950s turned their attention to historical factors that brought Americans together by putting aside, at least for a moment, their study of forces that drove them apart (9).

These developments led to a conservative "consensus historiography" that, over the ensuing decade, would restore luster to the image of the founding generation. Among the major works of consensus historiography were David Potter's *People of Plenty* (1954) [and] Louis Hartz's enormously influential *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955). Scholars like Richard Hofstadter *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (1948) and Daniel Boorstin *The Genius of American Politics* (1953) would become leaders of the "consensus school" of political historians who would hold sway until the rise of radicalism associated with the turmoil of the 1960s and its focus on race, ethnicity, and social class conflict as the primary factors guiding the nation's political destiny (Wilentz, "American Political History" 24).

Political strife caused by the rising call for civil rights among varied minorities as well as the turmoil unleashed by a deepening American involvement in Vietnam fractured the consensus model (Stearns 241-43). Starting in the early 1960s, the origins, role and historical importance of political parties would become the focus of leading historians and political scientists, and this trend produced a number of seminal works. William Nesbit Chambers' *Political Parties in a New Nation: The American Experience, 1776-1809* (1963), Rudolph M. Bell's *Party and Faction in American Politics: The House of Representatives, 1789-1801* (1973) and John F. Hoadley's *Origins of American Political Parties, 1789-1803* (1986) collectively highlighted the trend toward partisan affiliation and conflict during the early years of the republic, placing organized political conflict on the frontline of contemporary scholarship focused on the Federalist era (Jensen 16-20).

At the same time, another strand of historiography emerged during the 1960s which sought evidence of commonly held ideas that bound together political associations during the founding age in period media and propaganda. Led by scholars such as Gordon S. Wood, who authored *Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969), and Bernard Bailyn, whose *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967) mined a similar vein, this new breed of historians tried to sustain the consensus despite the trend toward fragmentation that accompanied the social and political discord of the late 1960s (Horsman 5-6). The scholarship of Wood, Bailyn, and their allies would somewhat temper the assimilation of a conflict and strife into educational materials developed for secondary students during the late 1960s, ensuring that coverage of the founders would remain largely reverential and devoid of criticism. However, a second, more radical,

wave of social historians would demand that the social and political discord evident throughout American history receive due treatment in textbooks produced during the subsequent decades.

The emergence of the "New Social History" in the 1970s temporarily pushed aside scholarly and public interest in pure political history dedicated to the founding era and created a rift among historians wedded to more traditional historical methods (Stearns 237). The arrival of a cadre of influential historians committed to a "bottom up" retelling of the past has had a significant influence on the profession as well as the tone and content of secondary textbooks. Thus, some additional perspective on the resurgence of social history in the wake of the convulsions of the Civil Rights and Vietnam era is merited.

According to Stearns, renewed interest in social history began to emerge in the early 1960s, "when Harvard University established a Ph.D. field in social and economic history, applied to the major geographical areas" (238). By the middle of the decade, several scholarly journals had appeared (*Journal of Social History* and *Historical Methods Newsletter*) that infused a renewed focus on grassroots political behavior that was attributable to the quest for basic civil and political rights (Stearns 238). These new social historians "argued. . .that neglect of most people outside elite ranks and of most activities outside political and diplomatic machinations did not provide a complete picture of the past" (Stearns 245-46).

However, scholars were careful to distinguish this new movement from past attempts to shift the telling of history away from the political and diplomatic adventures of those in positions of power by noting that prior efforts had:

> involved simple descriptions of 'how people lived' in the past, with attention focused on costumes, eating utensils, and housing design. The purpose of this kind of research was to add some human touches to the drier stuff of academic history [an approach that] could evoke nostalgia or wry disgust at the weirdness of ancestral ways; it had no larger analytical purpose. Cattily, but not perhaps inaccurately, new social historians would label this approach 'pots-and-pans' and would huffily insist on distinguishing their work from the whole genre (Stearns 239).

According to the new social historians, the problem with this approach is that it tended to treat the lower classes, including various racial and ethnic groups, "indirectly, through descriptions of their environment rather than through their own experience" (Stearns 240). What was needed instead was recognition of the political impact of ordinary Americans—particularly women and minorities—on political developments which had until then been exclusively attributable to the founding greats (Pasley, *Beyond the Founders* 1-18).

This new brand of social history proved very attractive to both practitioners and educators. On the one hand, this approach broadened the accessibility of historical inquiry by expanding the scope (and availability) of source materials—suddenly, personal letters, objects and other memorabilia sitting for decades in family attics became useful tools for uncovering the politics of the past. It also redefined the credentials of practitioners, opening the field to a wider variety of scholars whose interests lay beyond established texts and their related modes of inquiry (Pasley, *Beyond the Founders* 5-6). On the other hand educators found the narratives generated by the new social historians

more compelling than the traditional focus on “dead white men” that had dominated texts and other available resources (Evans 132-34). Simply put, the new social history was more relevant—and often controversial—and therefore enlivened classroom pedagogy (Stearns 248). However, the translation of social historiography to the classroom was not a seamless endeavor. According to Stearns:

> With maturity, issues of how to present social history in the classroom, how to define its main findings for high school as well as college students, and how to relate it to conventional coverage became pressing. Political pressures to deal with various minority groups with new seriousness aided the translation of certain kinds of social history to mainstream textbooks. On the other hand, attacks on the effectiveness of history teaching plus pressure from American conservatives to reconvert history teaching to an emphasis on hallowed elite values raised questions about how far social historians could go in conveying their approach to the larger discipline as a teaching field. [Thus], it remained true that social history had made fewer advances at the classroom level than in research (248).

Despite these challenges, by the mid-1980s “about 35 percent of all practicing historians in the United States claimed to be social historians” a shift evidenced by an emerging “array of specialist publications such as the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, *Social Science History*, and topical ventures such as the *Journal of Family History*” (Stearns 247). In fact, according to Kornblith and Lasser, by this time “the use of social-historical concepts and approaches was commonplace among professional historians. *A People and a Nation*, the first college-level survey text to focus on the social history of ordinary Americans, appeared in 1982 and quickly proved a huge commercial

success. Within a few years every major textbook publisher offered at least one social history survey" (11). For the last three decades social history has edged out political and intellectual history as the preference of leaders within the field. In fact, "since 1980 the Bancroft Prize has been conferred upon works of social history more often than it has upon works of either political or intellectual history" (Kornblith and Lasser 11).

The popularity of social history has had a significant impact on recent scholarship focused on the founding generation and, more particularly, on the way in which textbooks and other educational materials treat the Federalist era. One significant effect was to substantially reduce the number of pages dedicated to political developments during this period, as publishers and producers of educational videos trimmed political content to make way for coverage of women, minority groups and average Americans (Ratzlaff and Schick 111-25). Another impact was an increased focus on the relationship between political elites and the institution of slavery—with considerable attention paid to Jefferson's relations with Sally Hemmings, slave ownership by Madison and Washington and, to a lesser degree, efforts by Hamilton, Adams and other members of the founding generation to bring the institution of slavery to an end (Berkin 6). Additional attention was also dedicated to social conventions of the period, such as the ethos that resulted in the deadly duel between Hamilton and Burr (Freeman 159-98). Coverage of these topics, while of obvious interest to historians and young scholars, has necessarily reduced coverage of the key political developments that will be examined by this research.

Alarmed by recent trends, in 2005 the Republican majority United States Congress:

> voted to spend millions of dollars in federal funds to help K-12 students learn about their nation's past. Lawmakers were careful to specify that the money would go toward teaching 'traditional American history,' defined as '(A) the significant constitutional, political, intellectual, economic, and foreign policy trends and issues that have shaped the course of American history; and (B) the key episodes, turning points, and leading figures involved in the constitutional, political, intellectual, diplomatic, and economic history of the United States'. Notably absent from this list of topics suitable for the education of American schoolchildren was any mention of social history. The omission was not accidental. Social history has long been perceived by its champions and detractors alike as an alternative to "traditional" history—an alternative that some criticize as subversive and others applaud as more inclusive and engaging than standard narratives. Its practitioners claim that their methods, subjects, and sources hold the potential to challenge interpretations of the nation's past that emphasize the achievements of Great White Men (Kornblith and Lasser 8).

The battle between social historians and traditionalists has been the defining feature of the field in the modern era and has significantly shaped ongoing analysis of politics during the Federalist era (Pasley, *Beyond the Founders* 3-9). While social historians have successfully pressed their case in academic circles and enjoyed limited approval among general audiences, developments in the new millennium have considerably altered the scene.

One shift has been a renewed interest in the study of the early republic and the leaders of the revolutionary era, the origins of which can be traced to the founding of the

*Society for Historians of the Early American Republic* (SHEAR) in 1977 and the subsequent launch of the *Journal of the Early Republic* (JER) in 1981. SHEAR would attract a generation of mainstream scholars who were largely responsible for moving the founding era to the frontline of historical research and writing—producing works that tip their cap to preceding historiographical traditions, but which are decidedly more moderate and balanced in tone. The society can also be credited with generating considerable popular interest in the period throughout the ensuing decades, thus exposing relatively vast segments of the general readership to interpretations of the founding era that are more traditionally focused on political and diplomatic developments. (Pasley, *Beyond the Founders* 3). Thus, while the social historians continued to produce scholarship that was often critical of American political institutions and practices, the new generation of founding era scholars produced thematic and biographical works that were more balanced in tone, and thus considerably more conservative than works produced by the social historians.

This revitalized interest in the early republic has witnessed the publication of a steady stream of biographies focusing on the founding generation. Within the last decade the field has produced significant biographical profiles of Washington (Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington*, 2004), Hamilton (Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 2004), Adams (McCullough, *John Adams*, 2001), Madison (Willis, *James Madison*, 2002) and Jefferson (Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson*, 2003 and Meacham *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* 2012). Published in the patriotic aftermath of 9-11, these works became wildly popular among general readers. For example, McCullough's *John Adams* has gone through multiple printings, sold well over a million copies, and spent months at the top of

*The New York Times* best seller list (Gelless 1). The popularity of these rather traditional biographies has led some to opine that American historiography has been hijacked by a "founders chic" which has "utterly ignore[d] the implications of the older and more recent work on late-eighteenth-century popular politics, and [which placed] the founders back up on their now somewhat more human-scaled pedestals" (Pasley, *Beyond the Founders* 9).

However, these critics have been simply overwhelmed by the sheer popularity of these works, which feature vivid prose that breathes new life into the giants of the founding generation. As a result, these works have collectively reshaped both scholarly and popular conceptions of our nation's founding generation and therefore will serve as the foundation for the comparative analysis presented in this research.

The popularity of these biographical tributes have given rise to several "docudramas", such as HBO's *John Adams* (2008) and documentaries such as the History Channel's *Founding Brothers* (2002), and American Experience's *Alexander Hamilton* (2007) and *John and Abigail Adams* (2005). Several of these productions feature "talking heads" drawn from the ranks of popular scholars cited above, and therefore somewhat mirror the interpretive perspective contained in their works. Significantly, a number of these videos regularly find their way into secondary classroom instructional programs (Appendix). Thus, as we shall see, students who are treated to the best of these educational videos are often exposed to a more vivid perspective on politics in the early republic than that found in their school-issued textbook—and one that is often more revealing of the political behavior and tactics of the founding generation.

One important outcome of the popularization of founding era historical biographies has been a split between scholars whose work is more reverential and written for mass appeal, and academic historians whose work is often more critical and written exclusively for a scholarly audience. This historiographical divide has been noted by several historians, who have commented on the trend. Writing in the April 2007 issue of *Magazine of History*, Sean Wilentz confirms that "some critics have suggested that this renewed interest [in popular biographies of the founding fathers] marks a mass yearning for an earlier, nobler, more glorious time in American history, and especially in American politics. If so, it is nostalgia most academic historians do not seem to share" (23). Thus, it is important to note that by focusing on popular scholarly works rather than purely academic accounts of the period, the reference point by which the selected educational materials will be evaluated is relatively moderate in tone and provides a relatively benign perspective on the political behavior of the founders. Highly academic works that might take a more critical view, but which are not widely circulated, have largely been omitted. As we shall see, this is important since even these moderate, mainstream biographical portraits present a far more critical perspective on the political behavior of the founders than textbooks that are widely used in American classrooms.

To recap, historical scholarship has undergone a significant evolution over the past century. The progressives made great strides in defining the field and challenging existing myths about the political ideas, motivations and behaviors of the founding generation. Subsequent generations of scholars brought forth new approaches that broadened the field of inquiry and expanded methodologies. Historians working in the crucible of the Civil Rights/Vietnam era gave rise to a left-leaning social history that

focused on party strife, social conflict and the rising voice of everyday people who up until then had been viewed as passive bystanders in the political process.

These developments significantly diminished scholarly interest in the founding generation, except to set these icons up as targets of scorn and derision. However, coincident with the conservative revolution brought on by Ronald Reagan's presidency, a small group of scholars sparked renewed interest in the founding era. In the new millennium, American historiography may have received a jolt from the terrorist attacks of 9-11 and subsequent military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, paving the way for a new breed of scholars whose wildly popular traditional biographical profiles of the founders were embraced by a general readership yearning for a deeper connection to the nation's glorious beginnings.

As a result, the popular scholarly works which will serve as a counterpoint to the textbooks and educational videos reviewed here represent fairly balanced accounts which aim to restore some of the luster rubbed off the founding generation by post-consensus scholars who found little to commend about the politics of the age. While not entirely immune from prior social, intellectual and radical traditions, these works tend to present the founding generation in a favorable light, and do so with a fairly straightforward biographical, thematic or chronological narrative.

Whether this recent trend toward a resuscitation of the founders' collective image has impacted the development of secondary history standards, curricula and textbooks is a question which must be addressed prior to undertaking a review of educational materials. The way in which secondary students come to understand the politics of the Federalist era has been strongly influenced by established curricular goals and prevailing

modes of instruction. As we shall see, both have changed considerably over time as educational theorists of differing ideologies have battled each other over how best to prepare students for the challenges of citizenship in a democratic society.

## Trends in American History Education

The wide scale incorporation of history into secondary school curricula coincided with the surge of immigration to the United States, the consequent expansion of the youth population and the expansion of public education in the latter decades of the 19th century. Prior to 1900, history instruction in secondary schools appeared as a hodgepodge of history, civics, geography, political economy and philosophy. In the middle of the 19th century, New York and Massachusetts—at the time recognized leaders in the development of public education—positioned history prominently in their statewide curricula (Roorbach 8-9). Beyond these northeastern outposts, what passed for history instruction in most secondary programs were occasional references to noteworthy historical figures and events that appeared in McGuffy's readers and other basic literacy texts (Ravitch 28). Much of the impetus for incorporating the study of history—particularly American history and those Western ideas that gave rise to the revolution and republic—was a widely acknowledged need to assimilate newcomers whose life experiences had not prepared them for the kind of active citizenship a republican form of government demands (Anderson and Cayton 357). As Ruth Elson observed in *Guardians of Tradition* a half century ago, the "value judgment is their stock and trade: love of country, love of god, duty to parents, the necessity to develop habits of thrift, honesty,

and hard work in order to accumulate property, the certainty of progress, the perfection of the United States. These are not to be questioned" (qtd. in Evans 5).

Initial efforts to define the study of history within an overall public school environment led to the formation of the *Madison Conference* (or *History Ten*) in 1892. This assemblage of notable historians and educators (which included Woodrow Wilson) grew out of a broader effort by the National Education Association (NEA) to standardize what was widely viewed as a rather chaotic public school curriculum. The committee produced a report which "presented the framework for the modern-style history that swept into the curriculum. . .[and] established the formalization of history as a legitimate discipline for secondary schools, described the purposes and benefits of studying history, and laid out a program for schools" (Evans 7). The *History Ten* also weighed in on the prevailing pedagogy, which was often limited to rote memorization of simple texts. They recommended better "methods of teaching history, especially questioning, critical discussion, student participation, primary documents, and the use of maps, reference books, and historical novels rather than reliance upon a single textbook" (Ravitch 28). This initial step toward the formal inclusion of history as part of a thoughtfully designed public school curricula led to a subsequent effort to more fully specify the content and pedagogy that would characterize history education for the ensuing decades and implied significant change in both areas.

Building upon the efforts of the *History Ten*, in 1896 the NEA asked the *American Historical Association* (AHA) to form a new committee that would prepare recommendations for a course of study at the secondary level and consider appropriate entrance requirements for students seeking to continue work in a college environment

(Evans 10). This “Committee of Seven” is widely credited with the establishment of the first secondary history curricula—one that emphasized the development of both basic and discipline-specific intellectual skills using traditional pedagogical approaches, and which eschewed emerging social sciences as tangential, and thus unworthy, of student focus (Evans 11).

The AHA exerted its influence at a propitious time, for as the 20th century approached the democratization of public education—characterized by universal enrollment of a rapidly expanding non-native population, and the consequent construction of thousands of school buildings—contributed to the decline of the traditional classical curriculum (Jenness 57-64). This would leave a broad opening for alternative curricular approaches for the next generation of secondary schools which the Committee of Seven hoped to define. Working through the committee, the AHA strove to “move history from its marginal status to a more prominent and secure position in the changing educational enterprise” (Orrill and Shapiro 730). Clearly, the AHA wanted history to be front and center in American classrooms. According to Orrill and Shapiro:

> Formally, the AHA constituted the committee in December 1896 in response to a request from the National Education Association (NEA) for a report on college entrance requirements in history. From the start, however, the AHA was determined to expand this mandate, mindful that in the long run the NEA-sponsored recommendations were intended “not for the schools of one section or of one kind, but for the schools of the nation.” Given the competition among subjects, this was an opportunity for influence not to be missed. The Seven accordingly set about over the next two years to transform the NEA request into a

> comprehensive and systematic "investigation of the subject of history, as it is studied and taught in the schools (729).

More specifically, the Committee of Seven report recommended that secondary-level history instruction be divided into four distinct blocks (ancient, medieval, modern, and American), which corresponded to an emerging organizational pattern for secondary schools—a four year program of study that grouped students according to their chronological age (Jenness 69-70). In addition, like the History Ten, the Committee of Seven "condemned rote learning and advocated critical thinking, multiple sources, and correlation with other disciplines" but similarly failed to provide specific guidance about how these techniques were to be developed and used by secondary educators (Ravitch 28-29).

As noted by Orill and Shapiro, the work of the Committee of Seven was "a remarkable success. Within a very short time, their proposals gained acceptance in many schools; and this, along with the swift adoption of their curricular recommendations by influential policymakers, effectively established history as a core subject in K–12 education. (731) To the delight of the AHA, by the turn of the century, the Committee of Seven had largely succeeded in formalizing history instruction in the secondary school environment (Hertzberg 16).

However, with regard to teaching methodologies, neither the History Ten nor Committee of Seven recommendations laid a firm foundation for instructional approaches that went much beyond traditional textbook-driven methods. In fact, the Committee of Seven report called for "only limited use of the so-called "source method" in classroom settings, [arguing] that it was entirely inappropriate to model education for the many on

the specialized investigative practices of a few" (Orill and Shapiro 732). In addition, the committee report cautioned that primary materials, including the use of literature, objects, photos and other "remains of the past" be used sparingly and always "in connection with a good textbook" (Evans 14). According to Hazel Hertzberg's authoritative study of trends in social studies education:

> The Seven. . .saw the sources not as the major or only curricular base but as supplementary instruction, especially intensive study of a period and individualized work. Sources were useful for kindling the imagination, making the past real, and developing some understanding of the process of historical investigation. Sources were an insufficient basis for valuable generalization. Even historians drew on secondary materials for new points of view. The aim of historical study in the high school, the committee pointed out, was 'the training of pupils, not so much in the art of historical investigation as in that of thinking historically.' Even when one has learned to establish certain facts accurately, one may still be unable to understand their historical significance (15).

In calling for a primarily textbook centered approach, the committee had hoped that "under the tutelage of an able teacher, the student would be 'tempted to range beyond the limits of the text and give free reign to his imagination'" (Evans 14). As we shall see, the failure of the Committee of Seven to speak clearly and forcefully on pedagogical matters would leave the door open to efforts by a new generation of educators to steer classroom instruction away from developing critical and independent thought, and toward assimilation and social conformity through the use of prescribed textbooks. These pedagogical strands continue to have a profound impact on the way in which secondary

students come to know the history of this nation, and, more specifically, the political behavior of the founding generation.

Consistent with the NEA charge, the Committee of Seven also crafted the broad outlines of college entrance requirements, which were forwarded to the relevant committee. The recommendations were taken up by a group of university presidents who would subsequently form the College Board in an effort to create uniform admissions practices through the use of standardized tests (Orrill and Shapiro 734). Unappreciated at the time, this would ultimately have a profound impact on the debate over secondary school curricula that would be unleashed by progressive reformers.

Just as progressive historians would substantially reshape historiographical trends prior to the Great War, they also aimed to revolutionize the way history was taught in American public schools. While the progressives praised the Committee of Seven for ensuring that history education would have a significant place within a multidisciplinary public school curriculum, many progressives sought to make history more relevant to young learners who they hoped would emerge from their studies with the knowledge, skills and habits of mind to actively participate in the reformation of American public life (Orrill and Shapiro 741). This shift in educational priorities gave birth to what became known as the "social studies movement," which sought to infuse a broad range of social scientific techniques and modes of inquiry into the secondary curricula (Jenness 73-75). The progressives also objected to the firm reliance on historical chronology embedded in the Committee of Seven recommendations, arguing that dividing the study of history into four discrete blocks was:

> alien and deadening to historical work. Historical thinking. . .does not move from early to more recent times along the lines of this slow chronological crawl. Instead, it originates in problems that emerge from 'the living present' and then draws upon history as an instrumental means to address them. This meant that school history should be organized topically rather than chronologically, and that there should be 'a readjustment of our program in such a way as to place more emphasis on the recent period' (Orill and Shapiro 740).

In seeking to shift secondary pedagogy away from memorization of factual information and identification of patterns of development, the progressives intended "history" education to serve as a vehicle for social change that would train students to identify problems and use their knowledge of history and human behavior to develop far reaching solutions that would reshape the contours of American life (Evans 15-16).

Persistent criticism of the Committee of Seven report by progressive academics led to the creation of the Social Studies Committee of the NEA Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, which completed its report in 1916. The 1916 report, which was in fact one of three reports commissioned by the NEA to reframe social studies education for the modern era, reflected this progressive consensus and, more specifically, the views of its most prominent committee member—John Dewey. The report called for "greater emphasis on current issues, social problems, and recent history and a greater emphasis on the needs and interests of students. . .a significant shift from the pattern [of historical study] recommended by the AHA committees of the preceding decades" (Evans 21).

The pre-war reports of the NEA committees were highly influential, and as such they have been interpreted by generations of scholars seeking to better understand the origins of modern social studies education (Jorgensen 13-20). Collectively, the reports reflect the progressive ideal of "social efficiency" which placed the needs of the general society over that of the individual—"[G]ood citizenship," one of the reports claimed, "should be the aim of social studies in the high school" (Evans 23). To that end a third report proposed a course of study called "Community Civics," while its 1916 companion recommended another entitled "Problems of Democracy" (Evans 25-26). Each was designed to train students to identify and define modern problems and use the varied tools of social science inquiry to seek lasting solutions. Both demonstrate how "progressives felt an intense urgency about the seriousness of social problems and thought that historical study should contribute directly to purposeful efforts to achieve a better future" (Orill and Shapiro 741).

It would be a mistake, however, to view the progressive agenda as the product of a highly cohesive group of academics and educators. Just as the progressive political movement was powered by often disparate groups with competing motives (and visions) for national reform, such was the case within the realm of education. The primary split emerged between Dewey and his followers, who advocated a student-centered approach that was designed to uplift and enlighten the masses so that they could become contributing members of a democratic society, and disciples of David Snedden—dubbed the "educationists" or sometimes "progressive pragmatists"—who believed that the "purpose of schooling was not primarily to stimulate the intellectual development of individual minds. . .but instead should make students 'fit to carry on the group life'.

Schools, that is, were agencies that existed to serve the social order. . .[an approach that would emphasize] vocational skills and hygienic habits" (Orill and Shapiro 742). The "educationist" camp appealed to pessimistic elements within the progressive ranks that were primarily concerned with assimilating foreigners and using the expansion of governmental power as a means of social control, rather than the more enlightened—or Jeffersonian—belief in democratic processes and republican institutions. According to educational historian Diane Ravitch:

> The ideal of democratizing culture, of giving all students access to the ideas and historical events of other cultures, took a back seat to a fervent belief in the goal of social efficiency. Critics of the academic curriculum were outspoken in their attacks on teaching not only history, but algebra, literature, and almost everything else that did not prepare students for their future lives. Some of these critics thought of themselves as progressive educators, but they relied on a narrow and distorted version of John Dewey's ideas about democracy and the social role of the schools (29).

Snedden and his followers also were driven by intensifying international competition and the "perceived need to boost economic productivity" among the working classes who toiled away in an increasingly mechanized industrial economy (Evans 28). Adherents of this view "believed that the children of the immigrant masses required vocational and industrial programs, not 'bookish' courses" [and that] "the only reason to teach history was to train students for good citizenship, which he defined as 'submission to established political order'" (Ravitch 29). The experts spoke of this curricular differentiation as 'meeting the needs' of children from different classes" [in a] "modern

school [that] would offer an academic curriculum only to future professionals, while those likely to be ‘common wage earners’ received vocational training” (Ravitch 29).

The educationists were given a substantial boost by the publication of another NEA report, entitled the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE), often referred to as the “Cardinal Principles” report of 1918. According to Orrill and Shapiro, the CRSE:

> pronounced that, henceforth, the governing mission of high school no longer was to engender ‘intellectual power’ but instead should be to fit the student for democratic life ‘through activities designed for the well-being of his fellow members and society as a whole’. . .[such as] ‘health,’ ‘command of fundamental processes,’ ‘worth home membership,’ ‘vocation,’ ‘citizenship,’ ‘worth use of leisure,’ and ‘ethical character’ (Orrill and Shapiro 742-43).

This profound split among progressive educators blunted implementation of the recommendations found in the rash of committee reports (Ravitch 30). So did the failure of the reports to “provide many practical examples [of how a more student-centered approach would work], which led to little immediate change in actual teaching practice in most history courses” (Evans 26). At work also was opposition by history traditionalists who were unwilling to relinquish their attained status and corresponding control over the curriculum (Jenness 84-88).

The failure of the progressives to score a resounding victory set the stage for an ongoing conflict over curriculum and pedagogy that stretched into the interwar years and, in many ways, continues until this day (Evans 32-45). As Orrill and Shapiro have observed, “these two contending points of view—one focusing on intellectual

development and the other emphasizing social behavior—continue to oppose one another in a long-unresolved debate about the central purpose of schooling in the United States" (743). This standoff continued unabated until 1921, when leading educationists formed the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) which sought to transcend the conflict by developing a model for social studies education that would engender widespread support (Hertzberg 35).

However, the educationists were quickly supplanted by disciples of John Dewey, who steered the organization (as well as his own Progressive Education Association) toward a student-centered approach that honored the intellectual development of secondary youth (Jenness 90). Under the leadership of Harold Rugg, the NCSS made three significant contributions. First, to the dismay of the remaining traditionalists, the organization promoted a problem-centered approach designed to draw upon a full range of social scientific endeavors. Second, Rugg developed the precursor to what would become a standardized textbook that reflected the priorities and approach outlined above. Third, the NCSS established a powerful network of educators working in the field that would systematically undermine traditional approaches to history instruction, thereby achieving a level of classroom implementation that had eluded the earliest progressive educators (Orrill and Shapiro 744-45).

This last development would finally prompt the AHA to reconsider its longstanding adherence to a traditional history curriculum—brought about through participation on the Commission on Social Studies (1929)—and open the door to more integrative social studies as the nation plunged into the Great Depression. In a telling anecdote of how far the traditionalists had fallen, the AHA handed "over control of its

professional journal on history education to the NCSS. . .Whether intentional or not, the changing titles of this journal tell a story about the diminishing fortunes of history in the school curriculum: *The History Teacher's Magazine* (1909), *The Historical Outlook* (1918), *The Social Studies* (1934), and then *Social Education* (1937)" (Orrill and Shapiro 745-47).

These developments are significant for my research, since the more far reaching embrace of Dewey's progressive approach led to a greater use of inquiry methodologies focused on the development of critical thinking skills that are fundamental to intellectual growth. In addition, the success of the NCSS meant that history would lose its preeminence and assume a position beside other modes of social scientific inquiry. [However, this was not the case at the post-secondary level, where creation of College Board entrance examinations that reflected traditionalist priorities would lead to "rival curriculum models for history education—one advocated by the NCSS and the other framed by the examinations of the College Board" (Orrill and Shapiro 748)]. Finally, the success of the NCSS in establishing the widespread use of common textbooks in secondary classrooms set the stage for the politicization of their content—battles which continue to define how the politics of the founding era are represented and taught to millions of high school students.

As the Great Depression intensified, the focus of left-leaning educators and academic thinkers turned to the merits of "social reconstructionism." Shaken immeasurably by near total economic collapse, broad swaths of the nation came to doubt fundamental American institutions and practices and, in their despair, many became open to new forms of political and social organization (Anderson and Cayton 369).

The shift toward a more radical agenda for American education began in 1932 with a speech to the Progressive Education Association by George S. Counts, in which he urged teachers to lead students toward a critical examination of "our social institutions and practices. . .[using] issues-centered study in the vein of Harold Rugg's work" (Evans 50-51). Centered at Columbia's Teachers College, the social reconstructionist movement occupied the intersection of John Dewey's model for social studies education and Charles A. Beard's historiographical approach. However, in a unique twist, the social reconstructionists envisioned teachers and their pupils as the vanguard of a far reaching social transformation of ill-defined character (Hertzberg 47-48). As might be expected, the social reconstructionists sustained intense criticism from left wing academics who found them naïve, and conservatives like the educationist David Snedden, who considered the approach "subversive." Meanwhile, conservative groups, newspaper editors and other members of the establishment vilified Teachers College as a communist front organization (Evans 51-52).

Despite these attacks, a number of prominent social reconstructionists (Beard and Counts among them) would serve on the 1929 Commission on the Social Studies, giving its series of reports a reconstructionist bent that unleashed a storm of controversy when it was released during the height of the Great Depression (Hertzberg 52-53). According to Ravitch, the Commission "had little to say about the study of history but a great deal to say about the social, political, and economic changes needed in American society" (30). Significantly, the bulk of classroom teachers found little to commend in the report, which had no apparent scope and sequence and was filled with "glittering generalities" that might appeal to the heart but had little practical relevance in the classroom (Evans 57-

58). According to Orrill and Shapiro, critics of the Commission Reports were quick to point out that:

> the definition of social studies was no more settled when the commission adjourned than it had been at the outset [and as a result] what had come to be regarded as the center of the school curriculum—the studies that most directly prepared students for life in a democracy—was left vacant and open to any and all claimants. Over time, this decentering of the curriculum may have been the most consequential of the many outcomes that resulted from the social studies movement (747).

The import of these reports was further diminished by the fact that four of the sixteen members as well as the sponsoring organization (AHA) refused to endorse the final recommendations. Following publication of the Commission's report, the AHA turned publication of its professional journal over to the NCSS and "thereafter would defer to the NCSS in all matters related to K-12 education" (Orrill and Shapiro 747). This occasion would mark the nearly fatal defeat of those dedicated to teaching history in a secondary school setting.

The next decade witnessed the elimination of history instruction at the elementary level—replaced by "expanding horizons" curricula devoid of historical information—and the elimination of chronological survey courses at the secondary level (Jenness 102-09). Instead, students examined themes such as commerce and transportation, and explored "problems of social living" and "current events" (Ravitch 30-31). Throughout the 1930s, secondary students encountered a problem-centered approach to contemporary issues that relied very little upon historical perspective or interpretive skills. Accordingly, in many

states “one could become a social studies teacher without having taken any college course in history” (Ravitch 31).

However, for the purposes of this research, it is significant to note that the radicalism of the social recontructionists was embraced by a number of textbook authors, including Harold Rugg, who increasingly challenged teachers to apply the problem-centered approach to arrive at conclusions that would transform American society (Evans 59-63). Predictably, Rugg’s textbooks were subjected to intense scrutiny by conservative organizations that were suspicious of an increasingly subversive curriculum. In a portent of the textbook wars that would dominate the end of the century, Orlen K. Armstrong published a lengthy attack on Rugg and the “new’ historians in the September, 1940 issue of *American Legion Magazine*, which had over one million subscribers. Entitled “Treason in the Textbooks,” Armstrong catalogued Rugg’s “subversive goals” and “attacked fused courses [i.e. social studies]. . .that ‘formed a complete pattern of propaganda for a change in our political, economic, and social order’” (Evans 75-76). The following year, the National Association of Manufacturers commissioned a 1941 study of social studies texts (many authored by Rugg) which found that many “criticized our form of government, held the private-enterprise system in contempt, and were poorly written by persons not real authorities in their fields” (Hertzberg 66). Opposition to the social reconstructionists became so intense that Rugg textbooks were “banned from a half-dozen schools systems” while book burnings took place in such nearby towns as Mountain Lakes and Wayne, NJ (Evans 76-77).

American entry into World War II and the consequent rise in national patriotism would play a crucial role in the further resurgence of traditional history instruction in

secondary education. The slow but inexorable movement of the pendulum began with publication of an article by Allan Nevins in *The New York Times* which "charged that American history was neglected in schools and colleges, that legislative and school requirements on the matter were chaotic, and that 'probably the majority of American children never receive a full year's careful work in our national history'" (Hertzberg 67). The *Times* quickly followed with a survey that supported Nevins' claims, the results of which were touted in a lengthy article in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. Subsequent publication in the *Times* of the results of a test of historical knowledge among 7,000 college freshmen revealed a "striking ignorance of even the most elementary aspects of United States history" (Hertzberg 67) Advocates of social studies, who no doubt thought they had secured total victory over the traditionalists during the interwar period, were now decidedly thrust upon their heels. While the NCSS formed an Academic Freedom Committee to counter the rising tide of criticism, events were clearly trending against a progressive vision for social studies education (Evans 82-83).

As the United States emerged from WWII victorious and economically vital, the soul-searching tendencies of the progressives and the self-critical rants of the social reconstructionists were overwhelmed as "consensus" historians sought to craft a unifying narrative in the face of an emerging communist menace (Jenness 115-18). Just as the progressives had sought to project their ideology and historiographical vision upon American education, historians of the post-war decade sought to eradicate the social studies and its reformist agenda from the secondary curricula (Evans 94-104). The movement got its start with the 1945 publication of the Harvard "Red Book," which represented the first major challenge to the progressive tradition that began with the

Cardinal Principals report. According to Jenness, the 1945 “report utterly ignored the possibility of social reconstruction through the schools [and] passionately argued the case for history as the one ‘core’ subject matter in the high school” (115-16).

The “Red Book” report inspired traditionalists bent on eradicating what they viewed as decades of drift toward vocational citizenship education through the broad adoption of social studies in the secondary curricula. Led by Arthur Bestor, who formed the Council for Basic Education in 1956, advocates of bolstering the intellectual heft of the curriculum unleashed a sustained attack upon the educationists who they believed controlled the NCSS (Hertzberg 92-93). This included an outright assault on recent efforts by the organization to develop “citizen education” programs that were excoriated as “leftist propaganda” (Evans 108-10). Other critics, fueled by the national angst produced by the launch of Sputnik in 1957, claimed that American was in danger of losing the Cold War because secondary textbooks had failed to teach “American politics, American economics, American history, and American ideals” (Evans 116-17). In the end, the political environment of the Cold War years was simply too much for the NCSS, and as a result the problem-centered approach of the social reconstructionists temporarily disappeared from American classrooms. According to Evans, as the Cold War rhetoric heated up and progressive educators retired from the scene the traditionalists focus on academic disciplines gradually replaced an amorphous social studies program preoccupied with solving social problems that were no longer the concern of many Americans. By the end of the 1950s, a consensus had emerged that “a return to basics was in order, along with a new focus on disciplined knowledge” (Evans 119-22).

The catalyst for what would be called the “new social studies” movement is generally attributed to the 1959 *Woods Hole* conference, which gathered leading scientists in the immediate aftermath of the Sputnik launch and which sought to redefine curricular aims to meet the communist threat (Jenness 129-33). However the call to arms for the social sciences came from Charles R. Keller, whose 1961 *Saturday Review* article entitled “Needed: Revolution in the Social Studies” was the first to articulate in full a new curriculum and approach to secondary programming. Keller first urged the abandonment of the confusing and amorphous term “social studies” in favor of “history and the social sciences” which captured more precisely the relationship between traditional historical inquiry and the several related disciplines. He then outlined an entirely new approach, aimed at acquainting students with the tools and techniques used by historians in the field—an inquiry approach that deemphasized the role of classroom texts and empowered students to construct their own interpretations of historical events (Hertzberg 99-100). Subsequent efforts by supporters of the new social studies engendered considerable support within academic and policy-making circles (Jenness 133-40).

However, the rising tide of unrest brought about by the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War led to renewed efforts to merge the inquiry methods advocated by the “new social studies” movement with a problem-based approach aimed at fulfilling the aims of radicals bent on transforming American society (Evans 134-40). An ideological clash soon erupted within the educational world that played out in a series of academic freedom cases throughout the 1970s, as teachers sought to implement a constructivist approach that challenged students to explore the social strife portrayed on nightly

television news broadcasts. This would lead to a second round of (often violent) textbook wars, as state and local school boards sought to reaffirm an American consensus in the face of increasing domestic unrest. For example, in Kanawha County, West Virginia, a 1973-4 "battle over [the] adoption of [textbooks]. . .[involved] stormy meetings and several individual acts of violence and intimidation, including dynamite used against school property and bullets shot at school buses—luckily empty of students—spurred by citizens who wanted a school program 'that emphasizes basic skills and patriotic indoctrination'" (Evans 141). Similar reactionary forces in Georgia sought to block a social studies textbook that allegedly "creat[ed] disruption and dissension in our society" (Evans 141).

Intensifying opposition and the failure to effectively promote a long-range vision of reform contributed to the failure of the "new social studies" movement (Evans 145-47). As a result, the future of social studies education remained clouded by a contentious past and shifting national priorities. As the 1970s drew to a close, social conservatives, prominent business groups and right-wing academics began promoting a "back-to-basics" agenda aimed at restoring academic rigor, shared values and, most importantly, the study of traditional history to the social studies curriculum (Evans 150-51). For many, opposition to prevailing scholarship—that had also started to filter into secondary social studies curricula—centered on multiculturalism. Critics bemoaned the creation of a "politically correct" course of study which gave "too much attention to women, minorities, and the laboring masses in comparison with traditionally celebrated groups and leaders; bashe[d] cherished American and Western values…and denie[d] the reality of objective historical truth" (Nash 102). By 1980, even the NCSS had to concede that

"public concern about basic knowledge and the basic skills in education is valid" (Evans 151).

Accordingly, that same year leading academics and secondary history teachers formed the "History Teaching Alliance" which received federal funding to promote professional development in the field, and launched the "National History Day" competition to encourage greater curricular focus on state and local history for secondary students (Nash 111). With the conservative tide ascendant, all that was needed was a catalyst that would create a broader wave of reform as far reaching as the progressive agenda had been under the leadership of John Dewey. In only three short years a presidential commission would issue a report on the "crisis" in American public schools, unleashing a wave of inquiry that would substantially alter social studies education over the ensuing decades.

The 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, which sought to increase the competitiveness of American schools by raising teacher standards, increasing the length of the school day and reestablishing curricular focus on the core academic disciplines, had a far reaching impact on public education—primarily by serving as a wake-up call for groups that wished to seize the policy agenda in their respective curricular areas (Gagnon 9). While critics alleged that the report offered "a corporate agenda for schooling [and] a new version of education for social efficiency," the stage was set for a renewed assault on the progressive legacy of social studies curriculum and instruction (Evans 153).

Almost immediately, a band of talented academics and conservative politicians began to exploit the crisis mentality that followed publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Nash 105). Building upon a 1975 survey conducted by Richard S. Kirkendall for the

Organization of American Historians which declared "history is in crisis," leading movement figures such as Diane Ravitch, E.D. Hirsch and Chester Finn began to press for the restoration of western values and traditional history instruction throughout the K-12 curriculum. Backed by prominent conservatives at the highest levels of government—including Education Secretary William Bennett and *National Endowment for the Arts* Chairwoman Lynne Cheney—as well as the results of a newly minted National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which showed that secondary students were "extremely weak" in their knowledge of American history—the group reached the height of its power and influence in 1987, when they joined forces to form *The Bradley Commission on History in Schools* (Nash 109). Perhaps to an even greater degree than past commissions, the Bradley report embodied the political tenor of the times—in this case the conservative "Reagan Revolution"—and therefore represented a resounding victory for traditionalists who sought to restore history to its rightful place in the secondary curriculum. In the words of one of the authors, "the case for the importance of history has not been so cogently and powerfully made since 1892, when the National Education Association (NEA) appointed a distinguished Committee of Ten to examine the entire high school experience" (Gagnon 17).

The commission made nine specific recommendations and offered a curricular framework comprised of six thematic strands, suggested topics of study and a basic scope and sequence for K-12 instruction. The recommendations include a course of study that moves "beyond the acquisition of useful information" to include a "study [of] broad, significant themes and questions. . .[as well as] training in critical judgment based upon evidence, including original sources…" (Gagnon 23). The report also recommended that

more time be devoted to the study of history and that the kindergarten through sixth grade "curriculum be history-centered"—an explicit rejection of the expanding horizons paradigm proposed a generation earlier by progressive educators. In an apparent nod to the social historians, the commission also recommended that "the history of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and men and women of all classes and conditions should be integrated into historical instruction" (Gagnon 24). This "infusion" approach was intended to anticipate the demands of various constituent groups while eliminating the factional squabbles that had become a source of division among history educators and textbook review committees (Pruess 24-29).

Meanwhile, in an effort to avoid the pitfalls that befell earlier efforts at secondary social studies curricular reform, Ravitch and her cohorts offered pedagogical guidance, imploring teachers to achieve the commission goals "not just through books, but through simulations, debates, role-playing, dramatics, computer games, videodiscs, field trips, movies, and anything else that teachers can find or devise to get their students to understand" the past (Nash 110). Pedagogical techniques were to be shared through existing professional networks as well as publications like *Magazine of History*, which was founded by the *Organization of American Historians* in 1985 to present teachers with "up-to-date research, original documents, and lively lesson plans on historical topics" (Nash 111).

The movement to restore history to a prominent position in the secondary curricula took another big step forward with the adoption of the California History-Social Science Framework in 1987. Viewed as a critical "victory for history over social studies," Ravitch crowed that "California is the only state in the nation that actually has a history

curriculum that meets the demanding specifications set by the Bradley Commission" (Nash 113). As a large, progressive state, traditionalists believed that other states would follow suit in adopting standards that would restore history to curricular prominence.

Criticism of the Bradley report was somewhat limited and ineffectual. Opponents maintained that the authors "took an extreme position regarding the balance of history and the other social sciences [and] all but ignored. . .the problem of making the study of history relevant and meaningful to students" (Evans 156). Critics also noted the absence of "educational theorists or curriculum specialists" on the panel and alleged that the "few professors of education who were included had clearly established that they favored a history curriculum" (Evans 157). But the tide had clearly turned against the social studies and there was no turning back.

The NCSS responded to the Bradley Commission report by joining with the AHA, *Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*, and *Organization of American Historians* (OAH), to form the *National Commission on Social Studies* which produced *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* (1989). The panel, which was dominated by historians who sought to capitalize on the momentum generated by the Bradley report, was unsurprisingly "supportive of the goals of the traditional history camp," further pushing progressives and educationists within the NCSS to the margins of the debate (Evans 159). It is noteworthy that the NCSS, historically the principle champion of social studies education, would endorse a document crafted by movement traditionalists and speaks volumes about how far Ravitch and her colleagues were able to move the discussion by the end of the 1980s. According to one author, as "the 1980s ended, and as history made its biggest advances in the curriculum since the

end of the nineteenth century, disagreements between the professional community and conservative educators over social history, new methodologies, and global approaches seemed to be fading away" (Nash 113-14). A similar conclusion is drawn by Evans, who notes that by "the mid-late 1980s, the decline of issues-oriented social studies was apparent, and a renewed interest in traditional history was the trend in vogue. Progressivism in schools appeared to be dead…" (160).

However, this proved to be only a brief calm before the coming storm. For conservative educators, placing history at the forefront of the secondary curriculum turned out to be the easy part of the struggle. The more difficult part would be ensuring that the historical narrative embodied in any new curriculum standards and textbook resources reflected an interpretive perspective that could be embraced by political conservatives and commentators who were fast becoming a driving force behind educational reform. As Nash observes, if "K-12 social studies curricula were changing in favor of history, then textbooks would have to change too" (114). The question was whether conservatives could successfully guide the development and implementation of standards (and spur the production and adoption of corresponding textbooks) that would celebrate American exceptionalism and the accomplishments of "Great White Men"—including, of course the founding fathers—and banish the self-loathing, "politically correct" narrative that had come to characterize most textbooks since the late 1980s.

Rather than sit on the sidelines while a myriad of state and local school boards attempted to craft standards reflecting a renewed focus on history, prominent academics formed the *National Center for History in the Schools*, which convened at UCLA to develop a set of national standards that would drive curricular reform into the new

millennium. Even before their formal release, the *National Standards for United States History* were swept up in a storm of controversy. Internal dissent emerged early in the process as members jockeyed over the representation of various minority groups. One member, Mark Curtis, charged that the "so-called multicultural agendas in history threaten to balkanize American society. They will serve to drive people apart and will diminish the critical importance of teaching about our common heritage" (Nash 161). Another prominent conservative on the panel, Chester Finn, submitted a written statement which echoed Curtis's concerns about the draft standards:

> We must teach about diversity, to be sure, but must never lose sight of what binds us together as a nation. . .the great unifying Western ideas of individual freedom, political democracy, and human rights. . .We agree wholeheartedly that in the past schools did not present history in a very balanced way. . .But the solution to this problem is not. . .to turn things around 180 degrees and blame, or even worse, ignore Western tradition (Nash 162).

Murmurings among dissenters on the panel were followed by the first public salvo fired against the still unreleased standards. Penned by former NEH chair Lynne Cheney, her editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* castigated the standards as a "politically correct" attempt to incorporate marginal groups at the expense of key developments and personalities that forged our national identity. Adopting a caustic tone, Cheney "asked readers to 'imagine an outline for the teaching of American history in which George Washington makes only a fleeting appearance and is never described as our first president'" (Pruess 31). Soon, political commentators and members of Congress joined the fracas, with Republican Senator Slade Gorton declaring "these standards are ideology

masquerading as history" (Evans 166-67). The stridency of the debate was further elevated when talk radio host Rush Limbaugh weighed in, spotlighting a previously unspoken aspect of the educational reform agenda—the desire to craft a curriculum that discouraged inquiry that might shed an unfavorable light on our nation's past and provide a sanitized perspective that would promote national patriotism and conservative values. According to Limbaugh:

> What?...history is an exploration? Let me tell you something, folks. History is real simple. You know what history is? It's what happened. It's no more…The problem you get into is when guys like this [Gary Nash, the principal author] try to skew history by, 'Well, let's interpret what happened because maybe we don't like the truth as it's presented. So let's change the interpretation a little bit so that it will be the way we wished it were.' Well, that's not what history is. History is what happened, and history ought to be nothing more than what happened (Evans 166).

As the proposed National Standards came under intensifying pressure from conservatives, several states responded by developing new standards that reflected the anti-intellectualism embodied in Limbaugh's remarks. For example, in Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed into law new state standards which stipulated that "American history shall be viewed as factual, not as constructed, shall be viewed as knowable, teachable, and testable, and shall be defined as the creation of a new nation based largely on the universal principles stated in the Declaration of Independence" (Bell).

The conservative backlash against the *National Standards for United States History* had several important effects. First, it effectively killed future efforts at

developing a uniform set of national history standards and shifted this responsibility—and the often contentious debate that comes with the territory—to the state and local level. Almost overnight, formerly mundane state board of education meetings focused on curriculum, and the adoption of United States history textbooks became media sensations (Erekson 3-15). Further, it moved education policy and decisions about curriculum, textbooks and instructional practices before the harsh glare of an increasingly ubiquitous and partisan news media (Evans 166-71). Together, these developments initially contributed to the balkanization of curricular standards, as state and local school boards crafted standards and adopted textbooks and other resource materials that aligned with the ideological views and political priorities of their most vocal constituents—often well-organized minority groups determined that any new standards and texts include frequent and positive references to their identified group. As noted by Sewall:

> United States history became a captive of identity politics and historians on the make. The time had come to redistribute the nation's historical capital…a view shared ardently by many senior historians and the American Historical Association leadership…The old master narratives in yesteryear's textbooks—faith in progress and patriotic pride—have vanished, too rosy and innocent in view. What has replaced them is too often a nation that has repeatedly fallen short of its ideals, led by a patriarchy that deserves censure for its past treatment of female, non-white, and Native Americans, for trade in black human labor, and for its exploitation of the wilderness landscape and of immigrants. Young readers will encounter minority heroism and suffering. They may learn about a nation's shameful past, learning about events in such a way as to undercut civic confidence

> and trust. They may hear lurid tales of Western rapacity, genocide and cruelty. They may learn to despise American planters, frontiersmen, intellectuals, and businessmen. They may conclude, with the Middle Passage, that the nation's record is indelibly tainted from the start (26-28).

However, for a variety of reasons any regional disparities among state curricular standards and classroom texts would be short-lived. First, as the battle over standards played out in state capitols across the country, school board officials in states like Texas found it expedient to craft innocuous standards that avoided controversial topics. As a result, a recent appraisal of state history standards concluded that a "majority of states' standards are mediocre-to-awful. In fact the average grade across all states is barely a D" (Pruess 34).

The fight over national standards paralleled a struggle over the content of the next generation of United States history textbooks to be produced in the post-Bradley era. Starting in the late 1980s, while Ravitch and her cohort were successfully making their assault on social studies education, a small, but vocal band of educators and social historians sought to incorporate multicultural perspectives into textbooks and curriculum standards across the nation (Evans 160-62). According to Gilbert T. Sewall of the American Textbook Council, the 1990s witnessed an extraordinary:

> effort to bring minorities, women and people of color into the story of America…[which] is likely to be portrayed as an unfinished journey; one with many historical injustices heaped on minorities, women, and immigrants; a polity, society, and culture that should be moving toward a more particularized and fully egalitarian state; and include lessons mourning for the past's many victims" (3).

The success of the multiculturalists, and the corresponding (and related) rise of conservative educators and policy-makers, would lead to a contentious national dialogue over how the story of America would be told. This struggle would dominate the 1990s, leading to a third round of textbook wars that would pit social historians espousing multiculturalism against conservative activists and academics who demanded texts that celebrated shared values and America's exceptional past. The outcome of this battle would significantly alter the composition of secondary textbooks and their coverage of the politics and personalities of the founding era.

In the absence of national standards dictating the content of the United States history curriculum, each state was left to develop a curriculum that would guide the course of study at the secondary level. After witnessing the meltdown of the national standards movement, many states crafted curriculum standards which acknowledged the published guidelines of respected organizations such as the NCSS, were inclusive of women and minorities, and which were strikingly devoid of specific and controversial subject matter (Evans 168-70). Despite extraordinary efforts to avoid factional squabbles, many states still found the development of history standards a tortuous process. For example, New Jersey standards that were years in the making were immediately rejected after an onslaught of criticism from left and right, only to be replaced two years hence by an even more innocuous body of cumulative progress indicators that are nearly devoid of specific historical references. In the face of growing criticism by an emerging chorus of anti-standards educational leaders such as Alfie Kohn and Susan Ohanian, many states simply abandoned the project altogether (Evans 169-70). As a result, by the end of the century, many states had either no history standards to guide local curricula or had

adopted standards that were so vague as to make them meaningless to classroom practitioners. This development is profoundly important because in many schools the classroom textbook would by default become the curriculum, and therefore the content of these texts became a matter of intense public scrutiny.

As has been mentioned, starting in the late 1980s and continuing through the early 1990s multiculturalists and social historians had successfully altered the complexion of many of the more popular textbooks used in classrooms across the United States. As Sewall of the American Textbook Council observed:

> Publishers cater to pressure groups for whom textbook content is an extension of a broader political or cultural cause. They make books whose content is meant to suit the sensitivities of groups and causes more interested in self-promotion than in fact, scholarly appraisal, or balance. For many educators, "inclusion" is more than a watchword. It is the thematic center of curriculum reform. At the same time these publishers wish to offend no one and nobody. Editors search earnestly for historical figures who will obtain the perfect identity rainbow, who will provide role models for the largest number of groups, who are gatekeepers' favorites, or who fight valiantly in one way or another against the sins of the forefathers. But diversity stitched into lesson after lesson impairs the integrity of the entire product. The multicultural imagination does not result in better history or, to use the cliché, history, warts and all. Instead, the changes tend to give students a selective, puzzling, and fishy view of the nation and world. Blandness is the descriptive word that experts regularly apply to textbook prose. The exception: when history textbooks encounter certain kinds of injustice at the hands of

> Western Civilization or the American Regime. In such passages textbooks come to life. The tone may change to pleading and crusading (42).

However, the cause of multiculturalism would be partially reversed in the new millennia by political and economic forces that would substantially revise the content and interpretive perspective of most secondary United States history texts. First, the 1990s witnessed an unprecedented consolidation of the commercial media industry which transformed textbook publishing, limiting the number of choices available to state and local boards charged with adopting new resource materials. According to Sewall, as of today the "national field of four major social studies textbook publishers compares with a dozen or more major history textbook makers twenty years ago. During the last decade, formerly independent education publishing houses have disappeared or become brand names inside large companies…(13).

The problem presented by consolidation was compounded by the ability of several states—for example Texas, Florida, North Carolina and California—to shape the content of American history textbooks as publishers sought to align their resources with newly adopted state standards in the largest markets. Moreover, in states like Texas, publishers must also be mindful of politically conservative and extremely powerful watchdog groups that make it their business to review resource materials under consideration by the State Board of Education (SBOE). Because of its large school-age population, conservative politics, and past involvement in challenging publishers to eliminate what many residents viewed as anti-American passages in secondary textbooks, Texas would form the leading edge of a movement to challenge the multiculturalists who had dominated the textbook wars throughout the 1990s (Pruess 19-35).

The origins of this tradition can be traced to pro-confederacy groups which rejected northern historiography on the Civil War at the turn of the nineteenth century. More recently, Mel and Norma Gabler, would dedicate their lives to striking what they viewed as subversive content from American history books during the Cold War. The Gabler's legacy lives on in *Educational Research Analysts*, which is viewed has highly influential by members of the Texas SBOE and which has shaped the textbook adoption process in several nearby states (Pruess 29). As explained in a 2002 editorial in the liberal *Texas Observer*:

> Publishers have thus learned to tread carefully before the watchful eye of volunteer readers. . .who, with a few well-placed objections, can make the difference between a textbook's adoption or rejection, not just in Texas, but also in the rest of the nation, which tends to follow the lead of the larger markets (Pruess 32).

According to author Gene B. Preuss, in 2002 "more than 250 volunteers read for nine conservative organizations that aimed to root out controversial and inaccurate statements in history textbooks up for adoption by the [Texas] SBOE. The field director of one of those organizations, *Citizens for a Sound Economy*, remarked to the *New York Times*, 'What we adopt in Texas is what the rest of the country gets.' With its tremendous buying power mandating how textbooks are written for the rest of the nation, few states can overcome the weight of Texas's influence" (32). After Mel Gabler's death in 2004, the textbook crusade was picked up by a variety of websites such as *Conservapedia*, which published excerpts of textbook reviews that advanced the conservative agenda.

The state of Texas not only presents political challenges for textbook publishers, it also represents an extraordinarily lucrative market—$4.5 billion by one estimate—for an increasingly competitive textbook publishing industry (Pruess 32). Textbook publishing is surprisingly lucrative and profitable, "accounting for an estimated $3.4 billion in sales in 1999, about one-seventh of revenues of all commercial publishing. Part of the appeal is predictability. In addition, state money allocated for textbooks and instructional materials rose rapidly during the late 1990s, helping to assure publishers of increasing revenues and profit margins" (Sewall 10).

With the stakes so high many textbook publishers have engaged in self-censorship in an effort to enhance market share. As noted by Pruess:

> Ironically, because of self-censorship by textbook publishers, modern-day textbook battles have more in common with the Scopes trial than meets the eye. Although the Tennessee Supreme Court overturned Scopes's conviction and only two states considering similar laws prohibiting evolution eventually passed those laws, in the end most biology textbooks remove the theory of evolution from their pages to avoid controversy. Despite the fact that Scopes won the battle, in the end the traditionalists triumphed because the textbook publishers wanted to avoid controversy in order to sell books (33).

This type of self-censorship cuts a variety of ways, as textbook publishers extract all manner of controversy from the pages of each new addition in an attempt to deliver a product that does not offend a broad range of sensibilities. As a result, contemporary textbooks—which in the absence of clear, content specific standards often double as the

classroom curriculum—often fail to provide students with the kind of vivid, intellectually challenging narrative that makes history such a meaningful and enjoyable subject.

In addition, the consolidation of the textbook industry has yielded dramatic changes in the way in which textbooks are written, further eroding the quality of most secondary resources. For example, in an effort to cut costs, "publishers are shrinking their editorial and production staffs, moving toward a writing-for-hire production system and abandoning the royalty-based author system that in the past helped give textbooks authorial voice" (Sewall 10). A good example is *American Journey*, one of the texts examined as part of this research. Listed as authors among the credits are Joyce Appleby, Alan Brinkley, and James M. McPherson, some of the most respected historians of American history over the past several decades. However, those who are familiar with the narrative style and interpretive approach of these authors would be hard pressed to recognize their collective hand in writing this widely used secondary textbook. As noted by Sewall, even the most "elegant writing can be compromised by the school textbook creation process" (10).

However, as we shall see, despite its numerous flaws, *American Journey* has been an extraordinary financial success. While comparatively few teachers and supervisors in New Jersey who responded to an electronic survey rely upon this text, it has been widely adopted throughout the United States—including in large states like California (Sewall 17-19). Much of this has to do with a brilliant marketing campaign in which the publisher (McGraw-Hill/Glencoe) enlisted the endorsement of the *National Geographic Society*, adding its prestigious imprimatur to a market newcomer. According to Sewall:

> Editorial relations between the National Geographic Society and the McGraw-Hill social studies empire remain opaque. The National Geographic Society's contribution to the contents is limited to a small amount of descriptive material and some sharply produced illustrations. The union gives the appearance of licensing one of the nation's most respected non-profit names to McGraw-Hill with revenue solely in mind. However venal this National Geographic Society arrangement with McGraw-Hill, it is dynamite at the box office. The head of a major district adoption committee in Indiana recently confided that the logo was the single most important indicator, in fact, the determining agent, when he chose Glencoe social studies products over the competition (12).

Further, advances in computer graphics, the digitization of American society and a perceived reduction in the attention span of most teenagers has conspired to greatly expand the number and size of textbook images, substantially limiting the word count in most popular textbooks (Sewall 6). According to the American Textbook Council, "the look, the feel, the format of the textbook—count for much more than the actual content: abundant color photographs, glossy drawings, and complicated typography" are deemed necessary if a textbook is going to pass muster with state and local adoption panels (Sewall 13).

Over the past twenty years, conservatives have successfully supplanted an amorphous and present-oriented socials studies curricula with a more traditional course of study focused primarily on history. However, the difficult challenge of generating curriculum standards in an increasingly partisan political environment, combined with the economic realities of modern textbook publishing, have generally conspired to produce

bland curricular standards and survey texts that simply fail to stimulate student interest and thoughtful modes of inquiry.

Further, the residual influence of the social studies, embodied in problem-centered exercises that remain features of many popular texts, combined with the continued incorporation of women and various ethnic groups called for by multiculturalists, has significantly diminished treatment of political and diplomatic developments throughout the chronology—including the Federalist era. As Sewall notes, contemporary textbooks "reflect editorial indifference to style and exposition. Reading specialists, historians, and educators agree that textbooks and other instructional materials discourage close reading for information and that lost text contributes to student confusion and lack of interest" (6).

As we shall see in the following case studies, popular textbooks that often serve as the main source of information about the politics of the founding age often fail to provide the kind of depth and breadth of coverage that would engage students and ensure a basic understanding of this critical period in American history. As Sewall observes, "[C]ompressing complex and significant topics into a few sentences makes history textbooks hard to understand. Why some topics are included and others excluded remains unclear. Details that might fix an event in memory are frequently omitted. Textbooks are vague about things that are interesting and specific about events and people that no one needs to remember. Too many topics are covered superficially" (6-7).

Moreover, what limited treatment appears in widely used texts often avoids the political controversy and personal conflict that were endemic throughout the Federalist era. As a result, unless supplemented with a wide array of primary and secondary source

materials, as well as high quality video productions, secondary students will likely walk away from their study of the early republic bored and blissfully ignorant of the internal strife that dominated our nation's beginnings. Unfortunately, they will also likely have little appreciation for political gifts and hardball tactics that the founders employed to navigate the treacherous politics of the age.

# Chapter 3

## CASE STUDY #1: HAMILTON'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM

Any analysis of the way in which the politics of the early republic are portrayed in educational textbooks and videos must explore the bold program pushed through Congress by the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. The young protégé of George Washington designed an ambitious, complex and interconnected series of legislative proposals which ultimately formed the basis of the American financial system. However, Hamilton's program unleashed a storm of controversy, for it assumed a more vigorous and powerful federal government than many of the founding generation had anticipated. It also arrayed an emerging commercial sector that was primarily located in northern coastal cities against a more populous agrarian base dispersed throughout the south and interior of the new nation. Thus, the stage was set for an alignment of socioeconomic and geographical factions which would coalesce into our nation's first political parties. These elements carried on a pitched battle throughout 1790-1791 using highly sophisticated (and ethically questionable) techniques that in many ways served as forerunners for today's political warfare. However, in many respects, modern textbooks and educational videos fail to convey the unseemly politics that arose during the early days of Washington's first presidential term, leaving secondary students with a bland and highly sanitized impression of the era.

With ratification of the new national charter complete and a newly elected Congress seated in New York, President Washington assembled a cabinet of advisors and turned his attention to pressing national concerns that had festered during the confederation era. The primary challenge faced by the nascent government was

economic. Public finances were in a shambles and the government was starved for revenue. There was also no coherent monetary or banking system to provide the requisite foundation for economic activity. While the new constitution had strengthened the political authority in order to provide a means of addressing these (and many other) challenges, it remained to be seen whether the new administration would be able to find creative and energetic solutions to the nation's economic woes.

Into the breach stepped Alexander Hamilton, who President Washington had tapped as the nation's first Secretary of the Treasury in the summer of 1789. Hamilton was, by all accounts, brilliant, assertive, and fiercely nationalistic. In the early days of his first term the new president had obtained the financial records of the confederation government and discovered a tangle of "floating bond rates, complicated currency conversion tables, and guesswork revenue projections that, taken together, resembled an accountant's worst nightmare" (Ellis, *His Excellency* 203). Washington and the Congress immediately charged Hamilton with drawing up a plan to rescue the nation from the abyss and put the country on a path toward fiscal solvency. For three months the young secretary poured over the nation's financial records and schooled himself in the art and science of public finance (Chernow, *Hamilton* 295-97). The result was a comprehensive program which Hamilton would push through Congress piecemeal throughout Washington's first term in office.

Even before Hamilton had begun work on his comprehensive plan, he submitted a revenue tariff bill to the Congress as a means of funding basic government operations. Working in a short-lived collaboration with Speaker of the House James Madison, the Tariff Act of 1789 was passed on July 4 (Gordon 22-23). With a steady stream of revenue

now secured, Hamilton turned his attention to addressing the national debt. Historical accounts placed the debt figure around $79 million, with $54 million of foreign and domestic debt incurred by the Continental Congress and the rest owed by the individual states (Chernow, *Hamilton* 297). After three months of arduous labor, Hamilton presented his "Report on the Public Credit" on January 14, 1790 (Elkins and McKitrick 115). In it he proposed "funding" the existing debt at par—face value with accumulated interest—despite a market for government paper that had collapsed during the confederation years and regardless of whether the debt issues were held by the original bondholders. In his report, Hamilton argued that restoring investor faith was vital to securing additional loans and that it would be impractical to "discriminate," as Madison had proposed, between the original holders of government debt and those who had acquired it through speculative ventures (Gordon 24-27).

According to his plan, creditors would be paid by a massive new bond issue, the integrity of which would be established by a bonafide revenue stream fed by a host of excise taxes (combined with existing import duties) sufficient to cover interest payments and part of the principle. Historians have long debated whether Hamilton intended to create a "sinking fund" designed to ultimately retire the debt or instead aimed to establish a permanent debt that would bind investors to the long term vitality of the new nation and provide a solid foundation for emerging capital markets. Chernow takes the former position, arguing that Hamilton's characterization of the debt as a "national blessing" was misconstrued and that his report clearly expressed the ardent wish "to see it incorporated as a fundamental maxim in the system of public credit of the United States that the creation of debt should always be accompanied with the means of extinguishment" (300).

However, most scholars side with Gordon Wood, who argues that Hamilton intended to use “the sinking fund to maintain the confidence of creditors in the government’s securities; he had no intention of paying off the outstanding principal of the debt.” According to this view, “retiring the debt would only destroy its usefulness as money and as a means of attaching investors to the federal government” (96).

Thus, in one bold legislative stroke, the new treasury secretary had engineered a viable solution to the nation’s debt problem that would serve to attract additional foreign capital as well as secure critical support for the new government among Americans whose backing he deemed vital to the nation’s survival. The costs, however, were noteworthy, as many of the original holders of government debt felt hoodwinked by speculators (most of them northerners, including several members of Congress) who swept through the countryside buying up “worthless” certificates that suddenly rose in value once Hamilton’s plan was brought into effect (Elkins and McKitrick 117).

Next, Hamilton turned his attention to the liabilities of the various states. Here he offered a bold plan in which the national government would “assume” the debts contracted by the states during the war. This proposal proved even more controversial than the funding plan, as opponents claimed that assumption would diminish state sovereignty and undermine the distribution of power established during the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. Further, several states, particularly those in the south, had repaid much of their debt and as a result the “assumption” bill would require these citizens to pay additional taxes in order to fulfill obligations contracted by their northern brethren (Gordon 28-30).

Opposition to the assumption bill intensified and the legislation failed in Congress on four separate occasions during the spring of 1790 (Elkins and McKitrick 155). In retrospect, the assumption bill would represent a turning point in Hamilton's relationship with James Madison, who led the opposition and who now began to harbor deep suspicions about the intentions of the young treasury secretary (Wills 43-47). Ultimately, passage of the assumption bill would come as a consequence of a deal engineered by Thomas Jefferson, who invited Madison and Hamilton to a dinner in late June where the protagonists were able to strike a deal. According to the "Compromise of 1790," the Virginians would round up enough southern support for assumption in exchange for permanently locating the national capital on the banks of the Potomac starting in 1800 (Ellis *Founding Brothers* 48-50).

In December 1790, Hamilton laid before Congress perhaps the most controversial element of his grand scheme—the creation of a National Bank to act as a repository of government funds and issuer of national currency. While the power to create a bank was not among those enumerated in Article I of the new constitution, Hamilton argued that Congress could act by virtue of powers that were "implied" within Section 8, Clause 18 of the text. Thus began a determined effort by the Federalists to expand the power of the national government beyond what was envisioned by the Anti-Federalist framers of the document. Interestingly, 80% of the Bank's stock was to be sold to private investors who could pay for up to three-fourths of their shares with government securities—the very debt issues that creditors obtained, many through speculation, as part of Hamilton's funding plan (Wood 98). Thus, while funding and assumption had consolidated the nation's wealth among a small group of well-connected investors, the National Bank

provided a safe haven for the emerging elite to reap additional profits through a nationally chartered bank that would hold a virtual monopoly over the nation's most important transactions. Seeing the Bank as an assault on both the Constitution and republican principles, Jefferson and Madison now joined forces to persuade an increasingly divided Congress (as well as President Washington) that the Bank should not be established. However, Hamilton and his growing band of allies in the Congress overwhelmed the opposition, passing the Bank bill which was quickly signed by the president (Chernow, *Hamilton* 349-51).

Finally, with the nation's financial obligations now consolidated and placed on a more secure footing, Hamilton next needed to ensure that tax revenues in support of the new debt issue were sufficient to maintain investor confidence in American securities. As it became clear that import duties could no longer be increased without disrupting foreign trade—an outcome that could antagonize northern commercial interests—Hamilton turned to a host of excise taxes to bolster the revenue picture (Chernow, *Hamilton* 299-300). Most controversial was a tax on the manufacture of distilled spirits. Rural farmers had for generations relied upon distillation of their crop to add value to their produce and reduce transportation costs. The "whiskey tax" unleashed a wave of popular outrage throughout the agricultural hinterlands. Many of the rebellious farmers were either former soldiers or suppliers to the Continental Army who had only recently sold their debt certificates for pennies on the dollar, only to learn that speculators had reaped windfall profits at their expense—profits which were indirectly made possible through the whiskey tax levy (Hogeland 60-70). The "Whiskey Rebellion" was quickly suppressed by an overwhelming show of force which bolstered the credibility of the new regime.

However, Hamilton and his allies had been put on notice that opposition to their plans could move beyond the political realm and manifest as widespread disorder (Flexner 314-20).

Hamilton's economic program was both enormously controversial and a smashing success. In fact, by the middle of Washington's second term the United States "had the highest credit rating in Europe, and some of its bonds were selling at 10 percent over par"—a considerable accomplishment for a nation that "had been a financial basket case" just a decade earlier (Gordon 38). He had boldly laid the foundation of the nation's financial system and established the credit worthiness of the United States, opening a flood of foreign investment that lifted the nation out of the economic morass of the confederation era. However, by design and through implementation, his program expanded the power of the national government within the federal model and awarded the wealthy elite disproportional influence over national policy. Further, in materially rewarding Congress for support of his legislative agenda, he significantly fused the legislative and executive powers, thereby challenging fundamental constitutional checks and balances. Finally, through funding and assumption, Hamilton opened sectional fissures (which would also manifest as a partisan or "factional" schism) that would fester throughout the antebellum period and lay the foundation for bitter and protracted debates over the purpose of the revolution, the nature of the union, and the political character of the nation.

Popular textbooks and educational videos differ greatly from scholarly and primary resources in terms of what they cover and how they portray the politics of Hamilton's controversial economic program. With regard to coverage, most of the

popular educational materials reviewed here either gloss over the funding issue or treat it as synonymous with the assumption of state debts. In addition to the assumption debate, the battle over Hamilton's proposal to create a national bank tends to receive a disproportionate share of attention in these popular texts, with scattered and uneven treatment of the whiskey tax and subsequent rebellion sprinkled throughout these materials. None of the educational materials reviewed here discuss Federalist patronage, so students are left in the dark about how civil service in the early republic became a vehicle for party building entrepreneurs and the expansion of federal power. Finally, while the texts reviewed here reference the circumstances which led to the nation's capital being located on the banks of the Potomac, most fail to make explicit the connection between this outcome and passage of the assumption bill, thereby glossing over a classic case of horse trading as practiced by the founding generation.

In addition, with the notable exception of Kennedy's *The American Pageant* and the *Founding Brothers* video series, educational materials generally fail to illuminate why Hamilton's program created such a storm of controversy. Furthermore, these resources do not offer secondary students a clear explanation of how Hamilton's program reshaped the distribution of political power in the early republic—a development which would have lasting consequences and fundamentally alter the entire nature of the republican experiment. Finally, only the *The American Pageant* and the *Founding Brothers* video series adequately reveal the shifting political alliances, "horse trading" and "log rolling" openly practiced during the founding era, providing much needed realism that is decidedly lacking in other popular educational resources under review.

With regard to popular textbooks, Joyce Appleby's *The American Journey* provides the least credible synthesis of Hamilton's program. Her explanation of funding and assumption does not clearly distinguish between these separate but related policies. As a result, students are left to piece together an understanding based on a superficial summary of the opposition to Hamilton's plans, which according to the author "unleashed a storm of protest [when] many of the original bond owners—shopkeepers, farmers, and soldiers—sold the bonds [to speculators] for less than their value" and "Southern states complained that they would have to pay more than their share" (256).

When Appleby turns her attention to the National Bank, she rightly points out that "Madison and Jefferson opposed a national bank, believing it would benefit the wealthy [and was] inconsistent with the Constitution" (257). However, her text completely glosses over the constitutional arguments raised during the Bank debate, simply reporting that "Hamilton agreed that the Constitution did not specifically say a bank could be created [however] Congress still had the power to do so. Washington agreed, and a national bank was created" (257). Sadly, the author bypasses a golden opportunity to explore how Hamilton's program raised fundamental questions about the powers of Congress and the meaning of the constitution that persist until this day.

Finally, Appleby's treatment of the whiskey tax is divided among different sections of the text, making it difficult for students to establish cause and effect. Under the heading "Tariffs and Taxes," Appleby discusses Hamilton's preference for manufacturing reflected in his push for the Tariff Act of 1789. This is followed by his call "for national taxes to help the government pay off the national debt," namely a "variety of taxes, including one on whiskey distilled in the United States" (257). In a

subsequent section, Appleby recounts the plight of farmers opposed to the tax "who attacked tax collectors and burned down buildings" only to have Washington and his advisors decide "to crush the challenge" in order to send a message "that the government would use force when necessary to maintain…the social order" (261). Hence, even the most conscientious student could be forgiven for not appreciating how Hamilton's revenue policies were inextricably linked to funding and assumption.

Appleby's treatment of Hamilton's economic program is both superficial and disjointed. Students are not provided with a clear means of visualizing how the different parts of his plan are related, nor are they apprised of the most controversial aspects of Hamilton's plan. Further, the Appleby text fails to emphasize the political drama that unfolded with each new legislative initiative. There is no mention of emerging party or sectional schisms and only an allusion to class tensions resulting from the funding plan. And while this text does provide a brief account of the deal which led to passage of the assumption bill, there is little mention of the politics that led to passage of the other key elements of Hamilton's program. In reading the Appleby text, secondary students will likely garner little appreciation for the political battles that were fought during the early years of the republic—battles which would have a lasting impact on the type of nation which would emerge in the 19th century and beyond.

While Gerald Danzer's *The Americans* does a better job framing the broader controversies which dominated the era, in many ways it also represents an incomplete source of information about the politics of the founding era. To his credit, historian Danzer begins by focusing on the political conflicts which defined the early republic. An entire section within the chapter entitled "Launching the New Nation" is largely

dedicated to fleshing out the emerging discord between Hamilton and Jefferson, with one sub-section entitled “Hamilton and Jefferson Debate” and the other “The First Political Parties and Rebellion.” Thus, unlike the Appleby text, which titles the sub-section on Hamilton’s program “The New Country’s Economy,” Danzer rightly chooses to view the period as one of heightened turmoil and political discord.

Danzer begins by contrasting the politics, personalities and personal histories of Hamilton and Jefferson. By providing two charts—one entitled “Key Players” and another “Contrasting Views of the Federal Government”—the author creates a simple lens through which the young reader can view the controversial nature of Hamilton’s program. Danzer then dedicates three additional paragraphs to explaining the contrasting views of the protagonists, noting that political and ideological “divisions in the new nation were great” and that “differences between the two [men] caused bitter disagreements, many of which centered on Hamilton’s plan for the economy” (184).

However, after thoroughly establishing the political and philosophical conflicts which defined the era, Danzer devotes three paragraphs to a wholly inadequate and misleading discussion of funding and assumption. Sadly, his treatment of the funding plan is abysmal. Not only does he fail to adequately explain the nature and purpose of the funding plan, but he does not even mention the intense fight over “discrimination” or the influence peddling which allowed those proximate to the halls of power to reap substantial gains through speculation in confederation era debt.

Danzer does a somewhat better job reporting the controversy surrounding assumption, noting that while this policy “would increase the federal debt, Hamilton reasoned that assuming state debts would give creditors…an incentive to support the new

federal government." He then reveals that "this proposal made many people in the South furious," since some "Southern states had already paid off most of their debts. Southerners resented assumption of state debts because they thought that they would be taxed to help pay the debts incurred by the Northern states" (184-85).

However, when it comes to describing the politics that ensured passage of this controversial measure the author comes up short. For example, further down the page in a sub-section titled "The District of Columbia," Danzer reports that in order to:

> win support for his debt plan from Southern states, Hamilton offered a suggestion: What if the nation's capital were moved from New York City to a new city in the South, on the banks of the Potomac river? This idea pleased Southerners, particularly Virginians such as Madison and Jefferson, who believed that a Southern site for the capital would make the government more responsive to their interests. With this incentive, Virginians agreed to back the debt plan. In 1790, the debt bill passed Congress, along with authorization for the construction of a new national capital in the District of Columbia, located between Maryland and Virginia (185).

Danzer's treatment of the political maneuvering that led to passage of the assumption bill is insufficient on many levels. First, he moves discussion of the horse trading that led to passage of the assumption bill to a separate section of the text, effectively masking the linkage between passage of the assumption and residency bills. The relationship between these two developments is further confused when the author neglects to specify which part of Hamilton's "debt plan" was linked to relocation of the nation's capital. As a result, students are left to draw inferences and may have difficulty

making this important connection. Finally, the author makes it appear as though it was Hamilton alone who engineered the Compromise of 1790. No mention is made of Washington's role or the dinner table meeting between Madison, Jefferson and Hamilton which produced the deal. In fact, in the Danzer text Madison and Jefferson appear merely as notable Virginians who found favor in the outlines of a deal concocted solely by the Secretary of the Treasury. Thus, Danzer's treatment of the politics of the early republic fails to demonstrate the degree to which the founding generation engaged in the kind of horse trading frequently attributed almost exclusively to politics of the modern age.

Despite such insufficiency on these points, the Danzer text does a better job than Appleby in explaining the controversy around Hamilton's proposal for a National Bank. Like Appleby, the author rightly points out that those in opposition "claimed that the bank would forge an unhealthy alliance between the government and wealthy business interests" and that "since the Constitution made no provision for a national bank, Congress had no right to authorize it" (185). Fortunately for young scholars, Danzer goes beyond the Appleby text by providing the reader with a brief introduction to constitutional interpretation, distinguishing between "strict" and "loose" application of the text with respect to the Bank bill. However, while Danzer notes that with the bank Hamilton "hoped to tie wealthy investors to the country's welfare," he offers no explanation of this issue, leaving the reader with little insight into this important element of the bank controversy.

Danzer's treatment of Hamilton's economic plan is a mixed bag. On the one hand, the author does a good job framing the philosophical and political differences between Hamilton and Jefferson which would lead to conflict as the former began to implement

his financial program. However, the author fails to convincingly portray the controversial nature of Hamilton's plans and the political behavior of key players in the drama that would unfold throughout the early 1790s. In fact, other than a rather disjointed treatment of the Compromise of 1790, the reader gets no clear sense of how key decisions were made that would have a lasting effect on the development of this nation. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen in the author's description of how the Bank bill became law, where, at the end of the section, he reports that "[I]n the end, however, Hamilton convinced Washington and a majority in Congress to accept his views, and the federal government established the Bank of the United States" (185). Here the reader is left with the distinctly inaccurate impression that it was solely Hamilton's rhetorical powers that resulted in the creation of a national bank, rather than political and monetary self-interest among members of the emerging political class.

Of the three popular textbooks under review, Kennedy's *The American Pageant* provides the most vivid, lucid and comprehensive treatment of the politics surrounding Hamilton's financial program. The Kennedy text not only delivers more detail but also provides greater emphasis on the political behavior of the founding generation during the early years of Washington's first administration.

Kennedy begins with funding and assumption, characterizing Hamilton's plan as one designed to "shape the fiscal policies of the administration in such a way as to favor the wealthier groups [who would in turn] gratefully lend the government monetary and political support" (183). The author then provides a robust explanation of the funding plan, which includes wrenching details about the speculative excesses which accompanied the program. According to Kennedy, many Americans:

> believed the infant Treasury incapable of meeting [its existing debt] obligations that government bonds had depreciated to ten or fifteen cents on the dollar. Yet speculators held fistfuls of them, and when Congress passed Hamilton's measure in 1790, they grabbed for more. Some of them galloped into the rural areas ahead of the news, buying for a song the depreciated paper holdings of farmers, war veterans, and widows (183).

Thus, the Kennedy text provides the most explicit link between the funding scheme and Hamilton's overall objective of concentrating wealth in the hands of a small number of enthusiastic supporters of the new regime.

Kennedy mines the same vein in addressing the assumption of state debts, explaining Hamilton's desire to "chain the states more tightly to the 'federal chariot' [and] shift the attachment of wealthy creditors from the states to the federal government. The support of the rich for the national administration was a crucial link in Hamilton's political strategy of strengthening the national government" (183). He then focuses on opposition to the assumption bill, noting that states:

> burdened with heavy debts, like Massachusetts, were delighted by Hamilton's proposal. States with small debts, like Virginia, were less charmed. The stage was set for some old-fashioned horse trading. . .Hamilton persuaded a reluctant Jefferson, who had recently come home from France, to line up enough votes in Congress for assumption. In return, Virginia would have the federal district on the Potomac. The bargain was carried through in 1790 (183).

Thus, the Kennedy text is the only one reviewed here that makes an explicit link between the assumption and residency bills and also identifies key members of the

founding generation as participants in a monumental deal that would shape the nation's destiny.

Kennedy next shifts the discussion to Hamilton's revenue plans. While Kennedy's explanation of the customs duties and excise taxes imposed by Hamilton is somewhat opaque, he does provide a useful illustration (Figure 10.1) which graphically shows how the national debt was being propped up by various sources of revenue imposed by Congress at the behest of the Secretary of the Treasury. Kennedy also points out that the excise tax "was borne chiefly by the distillers who lived in the backcountry, where the wretched roads forced the farmer to reduce (and liquefy) bulky bushels of grain to horseback proportions" (184). Missing, however, from Kennedy's narrative on the excise tax is any mention of the fact that many of these farmers were former soldiers who were victimized by speculators who profited handsomely through passage of Hamilton's funding bill. That said, in a subsequent section focused more specifically on the Whiskey Rebellion, the author provides us with a featured primary source excerpt that drives home the inequitable impact of Hamilton's revenue measures and alludes to the plight of rural Americans upon whose backs the speculators in government debt would reap their rewards. In the excerpt, Attorney Hugh Henry Brackenridge, who mediated between the whiskey rebels and the authorities in Pittsburgh, wrote:

> I saw the operation to be unequal in this country. . .It is true that the excise paid by the country would be that only on spirits consumed in it. But even in the case of exports, the excise must be advanced in the first instance by the distiller and this would prevent effectually all the poorer part from carrying on the business.

> I. . .would have preferred a direct tax with a view to reach unsettled lands which all around us have been purchased by speculating men (186).

By choosing to include this excerpt, Kennedy is alone among the authors of the texts reviewed here in more deeply examining the way in which Hamilton's funding, assumption and revenue plans served to bolster the investor class at the expense of ordinary Americans who had greatly sacrificed to secure national independence from Great Britain.

Finally, Kennedy's treatment of the Bank controversy, while superior to the other texts under review, is somewhat unbalanced. Kennedy provides a lucid and detailed explanation of the constitutional arguments waged by Hamilton and Jefferson over the bank, but the author fails to adequately frame the Virginian's political and economic opposition to the Bank. Other than characterizing the bank as a "financial octopus," Kennedy provides no counterargument against the bank beyond strict constructionism, leaving the impression that Jefferson's protests were solely constitutional. However, in revealing the outcome of the debate the author tells us that "Hamilton's financial views prevailed. His eloquent and realistic arguments were accepted by Washington, who reluctantly signed the bank measure into law" (185). Consequently, while the reader is provided with a detailed summary of the proposed benefits of the bank, there is no mention of the degree to which the emerging opposition distrusted centralization of the nation's commercial banking enterprises into a single public-private entity.

With the exception of the Founding Brothers video series, popular educational videos are even less revealing of the hardball politics inspired by Hamilton's financial program. In part, of course, this is because audio-visual materials tend to include less

factual material than do textbooks. Apart from this issue, however, A&E's biographical portrait of Thomas Jefferson merely describes, in very general terms, Jefferson's philosophical opposition to Hamilton's program. And The History Channel's The Presidents just scratches the surface of the assumption debate and subsequent Whiskey Rebellion. Like the Appleby and Danzer textbooks reviewed above, these widely used videos are simply an inadequate means of conveying to students the rough and tumble politics of the early republic.

While the Founding Brothers series provides the most detailed portrayal of the politics of the age, the film does not provide comprehensive coverage of Hamilton's economic program and instead focuses exclusively on the debates over assumption and the national bank. The bitter feuds between the emerging parties over funding, the excise tax on whiskey, and federal patronage are not even raised in the segment covering Washington's presidency. As a result, students of this period are not provided with a coherent view that reveals the degree to which each component part was essential to (and magnified the overall effect of) the whole.

Nonetheless, the Founding Brothers treatment of the assumption issue is both elaborate and consistent with the accounts offered by contemporary scholars. The segment begins by reporting that "Hamilton introduced the first stage of a radical plan to mend America's ailing economy—the assumption of state debts by the federal government." Noted historian Richard Brookheiser then appears on screen to define assumption, noting that "Hamilton's insight was to consolidate all these debts into one pot and make the federal government responsible for it." The segment then turns to an analysis of the politics of assumption, with historian Carol Berkin explaining that

Hamilton wanted “all the debt to be on the central government and therefore all the attention of men of importance. I want them rooting for us to survive because we owe them money”.

The excerpt then turns to the emerging controversy over the assumption plan, with the narrator pointing out that:

> Hamilton’s plan immediately came under fire. The loudest cries of disapproval emanated from the south. Unlike their northern counterparts, most of the southern states had already paid off their existing war debt. The man leading the charge against assumption was Hamilton’s collaborator on the Federalist Papers, James Madison.

The video then quotes Madison, who opined that a “public debt is a public curse in a representative government, greater than in any other” before observing that “Madison now believed that Hamilton’s funding act, which included the assumption of states debts, would yield too much power to the federal government at the expense of states’ rights.” Joseph Ellis then appears on screen, observing that “Madison begins to see that the Hamiltonian program will make the merchant class and northern capital the central feature in the new society. He begins in effect to see that Virginia is no longer going to be the dominant force in the new union—that’s unacceptable”.

The segment then turns to the political machinations that would sanction the federal assumption of state debts, despite tremendous opposition from Jefferson and his allies in the Congress. According to the video, “Madison possessed the votes in Congress to kill Hamilton’s financial plan and intended to do so. Thomas Jefferson shared Madison’s concerns [however] remained above the fray over assumption until June of

1790. It was then that he encountered a haggard looking Alexander Hamilton outside the office of President George Washington." Ellis then appears on screen to explain that "[o]n this particular day Hamilton looks rumpled, depressed, overcome because his financial program is on the verge of being defeated. And he believes that if defeated it will effectively mean the end of the American political experiment".

The video then cites Jefferson's version of the key events that followed, presumably drawn from extensive (and largely self-serving) notations that would later appear as his "Anas." Here Jefferson notes that Hamilton "opened the subject of the assumption of state debts. But as to his own part, if he had not credit enough to carry such a measure as that he could be of no use and was determined to resign". The video then explains that Jefferson decided to bring Madison and Hamilton together to work through the problem. According to Ellis:

> Jefferson volunteers to be the host for this dinner party, provide the wine. I think that he is performing at that moment of his career a genuinely bipartisan act and wanting to bring together the two competing political opponents Madison and Hamilton in an intimate environment where they might be able to see through the problem.

According to the video, "[n]o official account exists of the dinner party. But somewhere between the main course and the coffee the three statesmen struck a bargain which is described by historian Carol Berkin as follows:

> Hamilton says to himself what can I give them that they'll give me assumption—very practical. And he knows that Jefferson is very eager to have the federal government near Virginia because he still believes that unless you can watch them

> they'll become tyrannical. . .Hamilton said fine, you want to have the capital near you—that's fine with me. You give me assumption and I'll support you on creating a federal city right on your back porch. Right out of Virginia itself.

This view is substantiated by the narrator, who reports that "[a]t the time of the dinner party some 16 sites had been proposed for the capital. But after some deft political horse trading by Hamilton and Madison, Virginia's status changed considerably." It is also supported by Ellis, who observes that Virginia "is given the location of the capital of the soon to be called Washington, D.C.. The Virginians see it as a projection of Virginia and something that they are offered and accept as a trade for their support of Hamilton's financial plan".

Finally, the narrator closes this section by observing that if "Jefferson's version is to be believed, then the Compromise of 1790 must surely rank as the most meaningful dinner party in American history. The United States would now have a permanent site for its capital and a new economic policy".

Thus, the Founding Brothers video does a commendable job highlighting the complex personal and sectional politics that produced the Compromise of 1790. In this version, the politics of the founding generation are vividly exposed, and backroom deals over vital domestic policy issues are portrayed as routine business among the founding giants.

The only other popularly used videos to discuss the politics of assumption are The Presidents, which is also produced by The History Channel, and Alexander Hamilton, which is brought to us by American Experience. The treatment of the subject by each is

far less detailed than the Founding Brothers series and significantly less analytical as well.

For example, in describing the assumption plan the narrator of The Presidents states that "[w]hat Hamilton did was build the framework of a national banking system. He proposed that the new government assume the leftover war debt of the thirteen original states, thereby establishing a federal line of credit". This summary not only fails to explain how the assumption plan would serve as a "framework of a national banking system," but because the series does not even address creation of the bank, it implies that somehow assumption alone provided the necessary fiscal and monetary responsibilities of a centralized banking system.

The American Experience production does a somewhat more credible job by explaining Hamilton's interest in using assumption to bind the nation's creditors to the long-term health of the new national government. Here the narrator informs the viewer that "[M]ost of the states' debt is held by wealthy and powerful men. Hamilton needs these leaders of society to support the new federal government". Historian Ron Chernow then appears on screen to elaborate, stating that Hamilton "felt that if the federal government assumed the debt from the states, that all of the creditors would feel that they had a direct financial stake in the survival of the still shaky, new federal government -- because that became the government that was going to pay them off". Like the other educational resources reviewed here, it should be noted that both The Presidents and Alexander Hamilton fail to address the political implications of funding and discrimination, instead conflating this issue with those raised by the assumption of state debts. As a result, one of the most controversial policies decisions of the early republic is

simply absent from view, leaving students with a diminished appreciation of how thoroughly Hamilton's program served to fortify the investor class at this crucial juncture of American history.

Both videos also address the Compromise of 1790. In The Presidents, Richard Brookheiser appears on camera to explain that in order to get assumption through Congress Hamilton "had to make a deal with people who were reluctant to have it done". The narrator then tells us that these:

> included people such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, a state that had paid off most of its war debt. The issue of assumption, as it was called, became Washington's first test as president. Behind closed doors he urged Madison, Jefferson and Hamilton to consider a compromise. The deal was straightforward—Hamilton got the funding and the Virginians got the federal capital to be permanently located on land that belonged to Virginia. Washington let others hammer out the details.

Here The Presidents strays from the interpretation offered by Founding Brothers by elevating George Washington's role in orchestrating a deal between feuding members of the founding generation. The video then concludes that:

> The dinner party would prove to be the last time that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison collaborated with Alexander Hamilton to defuse a national crisis. Though each of those men were devoted to the success of the American experiment, they could not agree on the role that the nascent federal government should play in the lives of its citizens. As that debate intensified, men once united

> in the cause of liberty would find themselves deeply divided over the true meaning of their hard won independence.

Overall, The Presidents provides a misleading and superficial account of the assumption issue. Not only is the nature and purpose of assumption poorly explained, but the role of George Washington in engineering a deal is, as we shall see, elevated far beyond what is substantiated by the primary record and recent scholarly accounts (Chernow, *Hamilton* 321-31, Wood 89-94).

The treatment of the Compromise of 1790 found in Alexander Hamilton is also quite superficial and offers a unique interpretive twist. Here the producers at American Experience choose to highlight Jefferson's distrust of urban, commercial center s like New York as a fitting location of the nation's capital. Hence, the narrator opens treatment of the landmark deal by noting that "Jefferson has a more pressing concern than assumption -- the location of the nation's capital, presently situated in New York City. He is eager to move the seat of government far from the foul air of the country's commercial center [to a] nice piece of empty land on the banks of the Potomac, not far from their plantations in Virginia". Emphasizing the simmering tensions between Hamilton and Jefferson, the series then points out that "Hamilton wants to keep the capital where it is", setting the stage for the dramatic compromise to follow. According to Alexander Hamilton, the horse trading that landed the permanent capital on the Potomac went like this:

> One day, the two neighbors cross paths on the street. They agree to meet for dinner at Jefferson's house on Maiden Lane to talk out their differences. Jefferson invites a key congressman and fellow Virginian, James Madison. The result is one

> of the most famous meals in American history -- the Dinner Table Compromise. Hamilton seizes on the capital as a bargaining chip. If the Virginians will support federal assumption of the debt, he will agree to move the capital south. He knows this deal will not endear him to his fellow New Yorkers.

Thus, in the rendering provided by American Experience, the dinner is arranged by Jefferson and Hamilton themselves, rather than by Madison as most historians conclude. In addition, the series chooses to emphasize Hamilton's betrayal of his fellow New Yorkers, rather than the passage of assumption, which would have far greater implications over the long haul. Indeed, following this description of the "Dinner Table Compromise" historian Richard J. Payne appears on screen to inform the viewer that "this goes back again to Hamilton the outsider. He isn't from New York, he's a West Indian. And so he's willing to sacrifice state and local interests for the broader national purpose, a strong United States. If that meant sacrificing New York, he'd do it -- and he did it". To its credit, Alexander Hamilton does return to the relative tradeoffs of the deal as it concludes this segment with the narrator asserting that "Jefferson thinks that by gaining the capital for the south, he has won a major victory. But soon the larger implications of assumption will become evident, and he will begin to view his colleague with profound distrust". Thus, while Alexander Hamilton provides a somewhat unique perspective on Hamilton's economic program, it shares many of the deficiencies of the other educational videos reviewed here—namely, a failure to deal comprehensively with Hamilton's program and to explore the profound political implications of Hamilton's early success as Secretary of the Treasury. This, combined with the extensive coverage of Hamilton's steamy affair with Maria Reynolds contained in the video, should give

educators pause when considering whether to use Alexander Hamilton to teach the politics of the early republic.

The Founding Brothers series does a creditable job with the politics surrounding the creation of the national bank. In fact, the series is unique among the educational resources reviewed here in citing a relatively obscure passage from Hamilton's lengthy defense of the constitutionality of the bank which provides additional insight as to why, despite intense opposition, the bank legislation was approved by Congress and signed into law by President Washington.

Despite this commendation, the video falters out of the gate when introducing the proposed bank to young viewers. Here the narrator states that although "Jefferson had worked with Hamilton to secure passage of his plan for the assumption of state debts, he was bitterly opposed to the Secretary of States' [sic] newest proposal, the creation of a national bank". However, this minor slip in attribution can be quickly forgotten as the series launches into a full bodied exploration of the politics of Hamilton's proposal for a nationally chartered central bank. Historian Carol Berkin begins by noting that the

> bank is in many ways the last piece that Hamilton wants to put in place for his vision of what the country can be. This is a brilliant mechanism to put public and private monies together and create in essence a capital pool that is money to be made available to entrepreneurs who would engage in risky ventures. Well, Jefferson and Madison saw this and they were--it was their worst nightmare.

Noted historian Jack Rakove then appears on screen, summarizing the nature of republican opposition to the bank. According to Rakove, what "really disturbed Madison and Jefferson about Hamilton's policies was they thought Hamilton really was building

the kind of government that looked like the corrupt, influence laden government that they associated with Britain".

The narrator returns to highlight Madison's efforts to defeat the bank bill in Congress, noting the Virginian's constitutional objections, which are principally related to an enhanced potential for civil liberties violations that might accompany the expansion of federal power envisioned by supporters of the bank. According to Madison, "[I]f Congress could incorporate a bank, they could incorporate companies of manufacturers or even religious societies. Congress might even establish religious teachers and pay them out of the treasury of the United States". The narrator concludes that "Madison's argument found favor among his fellow southerners. Yet it was no match for the political power wielded by Alexander Hamilton and his Federalist colleagues, who enjoyed a majority in Congress." The video even quotes the firebrand Senator William McClay of Pennsylvania, who laments that "Mr. Hamilton is all powerful and fails at nothing he attempts," providing students with a clear indication of the degree to which the executive and legislative functions had been fused under the Federalist banner in the wake of funding and assumption.

The video then turns to the divisive split in Washington's cabinet that would yield a full blown sectional and factional divide before Washington concluded his first term in office. The narrator informs viewers that Washington sought the counsel of Hamilton and Jefferson as he weighed the constitutionality and economic necessity of the bank. Secretary of State Jefferson's opposition is then cited: "[T]he incorporation of a bank and the powers assumed by this bill have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the United States by the constitution. Nothing but a necessity invincible by any other means can

justify such a prostitution of laws which constitute the pillars of our whole system of jurisprudence".

The stage is then set for Hamilton's dramatic appeal, which provides secondary students with some unique insight into the politics behind passage of the bank bill. According to the film, after "pacing in a friend's courtyard rehearsing his argument for the bank bill," Hamilton drafted an opinion which argued that the "nation is threatened with war and large sums are wanted on a sudden to make the requisite preparations. Taxes are laid for the purpose but it requires time to obtain the benefit of them. If there be a bank, the supply at once can be had".

This passage, which appears in Hamilton's February 23, 1791 *Opinion on the Constitutionality of a National Bank*, is significant because it demonstrates the willingness of at least one member of the founding generation to invoke national security concerns in order to garner support for policies that are primarily domestic in nature. This set a powerful precedent that would be followed by subsequent administrations willing to exploit external threats, real or imagined, to further their domestic political agenda. For Hamilton this strategy would prove highly effective, since the disastrous campaign against Little Turtle and the Native Americans of the Northwest Territory had left frontier Americans vulnerable to additional attacks from Miami and Shawnee raiders supplied by British troops still (illegally) garrisoned at Fort Detroit (Anderson and Cayton 192-95). As Hamilton himself later references in his opinion on the bank, "[A]n Indian expedition is to be prosecuted," that would aim to restore order to the vast territory and push back British attempts to destabilize their former possession. (Freeman, *Writings* 636).

While it is not surprising that the passage cited above does not appear in any of the popular textbooks or educational videos reviewed here, it is noteworthy that recent scholarly works also fail to incorporate Hamilton's peculiar argument into their treatment of the bank debate. Thus, the Founding Brothers video series actually exceeds both scholarly and secondary resources in representing the ruthless politics that resulted in the establishment of the Bank of the United States in 1791. However, it does so almost accidentally, since immediately following this citation the narrator informs viewers that while "Hamilton wisely appealed to the President's belief in a strong national defense. . .more importantly, he convincingly argued that the government's power to create a bank was not only constitutional, but that it was inherent in the very definition of government" (FB). This leaves the impression that Washington was principally swayed by the merits of Hamilton's constitutional argument, not his jingoistic appeal to the safety of the nation at a time of heightened anxiety over threats both near and far.

Finally, the Founding Brothers series concludes the segment on the bank by noting that "Washington signed the bank bill into law on February 25, 1791. The defeat was a stinging one for Thomas Jefferson, both politically and personally. His differences with Alexander Hamilton had now evolved into something much larger—a fight for the future of America," thereby setting the stage for the intense partisan conflict that would characterize Washington's second term and, more particularly, the tormented presidency of his successor, John Adams. The film concludes by taking measure of Hamilton's rise to power, noting that by:

> October of 1791 the booming economy and shrinking national debt left little doubt as to who held more influence within George Washington's cabinet—

> Alexander Hamilton. George Washington tipped his cap to Hamilton when he hailed the success of the Bank of the United States as "striking and pleasing" in his third annual address to Congress. Meanwhile, John Fenno, editor of the pro-government *Gazette of the United States*, gushed that Alexander Hamilton was a "star of the first magnitude in our political hemisphere".

Clearly, according to the video, passage of the main components of Hamilton's financial program had altered the political landscape of the new republic. Clear political lines were being drawn and the coming era of intense partisan conflict would serve to expose even more vivid examples of political behavior not generally associated with the founding generation.

Finally, as previously noted, while Founding Brothers does a commendable job in its coverage of the politics of assumption and the national bank, it fails to address other key elements of Hamilton's economic program. In fact, only The Presidents touches on the excise tax on whiskey and the rebellion that followed, and does so in a very cursory manner. First, the video fails to connect the excise tax on whiskey to Hamilton's program, merely pointing out that in "1794, Pennsylvania farmers were up in arms over a federal excise tax on liquor. They even dusted off an old battle cry—'no taxation without representation'". Thus, students are not even told that the tax would provide a vital source of revenue in support of Hamilton's debt program. Historian Richard Brookheiser then appears on screen, noting that "Washington's point of view was, wait a second, in 1776 we were rebelling against taxes that had been passed in London by the King and Parliament. But these taxes now, in 1794, these were passed in Philadelphia. That's the law of the land, you have to pay them". The segment then abruptly concludes by noting

that as “the nation’s first commander in chief, Washington personally mustered 12,000 volunteers to march to Pennsylvania. This show of force was all it took to put down the rebellion”. Secondary students viewing The Presidents in classrooms throughout the country might be excused for failing to appreciate the outrage inspired by the tax on whiskey or the importance the Washington administration attached to the revenue to be collected from the western farmers. In fact, the video leaves the distinct impression that presidents routinely “personally mustered” thousands of troops to put down rebellions over minor taxes that curiously inspire revolutionary movements across the land. With so little context to draw upon, it is a surprising The Presidents even bothered to include these events in the series at all.

Finally, the Alexander Hamilton video does an extremely poor job in its treatment of the bank and says nothing whatsoever about the excise tax on whiskey or the rebellion to follow. With regard to Hamilton’s proposal of a national bank, the series simply allow an actor portraying Jefferson to state that he “disapprove[s] of his actions as secretary of the treasury. With his bank and funding system, he is recreating here the rottenness and corruption of England”. Unfortunately, this sentiment is expressed without providing the viewer with an explanation of why Hamilton proposed the bank and what it was intended to do. This type of decontextualized criticism is one of the defining features of this video and therefore another reason why teachers may want to look elsewhere when framing lessons about the politics of the national bank controversy.

Having said that, compared to the other popular videos reviewed here Alexander Hamilton does provide greater insight into how the Treasury Secretary’s program impacted the distribution of political power in the young nation. For example, the series

follows its discussion of the Maria Reynolds affair with an assessment of Hamilton's immense power, noting that the young cabinet officer "now seems to be single-handedly running most of the Federal government. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson has fewer than a dozen employees, and Vice President John Adams has no power in Washington's administration. Hamilton controls the Customs Service, the Coast Guard, and appoints a vast network of men to collect import duties and taxes". Ron Chernow then observes that Hamilton appears to be operating "as something more like a prime minister. So that when you say to people that Hamilton was the first treasury secretary, it doesn't quite capture the magnitude of his power -- or why Hamilton was so controversial". This segment of the video is fairly unique among educational resources in that it alludes to the structural shifts precipitated by Hamilton's plan and explains how early Federalist programs would lay the foundation for a more highly organized and geographically diverse political party—one that Jefferson and Madison would view as threatening to republican principles. Thus, while Alexander Hamilton possesses many of the flaws embodied in the other popular videos under review here, it does provide students with some unique and important insights into the politics of the age—even if it does so in a somewhat superficial and almost unintentional manner.

Where educational materials provide a generally incomplete and incoherent synthesis of Hamilton's economic program, scholarly works provide a much clearer picture of the intellectual coherence of the Treasury Secretary's plan and the degree to which it fundamentally altered the nation's political and economic trajectory. Unlike the educational resources reviewed here, recent scholarship has clearly addressed the controversial nature of the funding debate, separate and apart from the issues associated

with the assumption of state debts. In particular, scholars have explored the moral and political questions surrounding "discrimination" in a way that portrays some members of the founding generation as both mercenary and oligarchical.

Perhaps the best treatment of the funding issue comes from John Steele Gordon, author of *Hamilton's Blessing: The Extraordinary Life and Times of Our National Debt*. After an informative summary and exploration of the issues at hand, Gordon cites several primary accounts which confirm the degree to which the announcement of Hamilton's plan to fund the entire debt at par became a vehicle for speculative excess. James Jackson, a congressman from Georgia, spoke on behalf of his rural brethren who were being systematically divested of government paper by ruthless speculators armed with the particulars of Hamilton's plan. Shortly after Hamilton's *Report on the Public Credit* was released in January, 1790, he wrote:

> Since this report has been read in this house, a spirit of havoc, speculation, and ruin, has arisen, and been cherished by people who had access to the information the report contained,…Three vessels, sir, have sailed within a fortnight from this port [New York], freighted for speculation; they are intended to purchase up the State and other securities in the hands of the uninformed, though honest citizens of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. My soul rises indignant at the avaricious and immoral turpitude which so vile a conduct displays (25).

Similarly, James Madison wrote to Jefferson that speculators hunting for securities were "still exploring the interior and distant parts of the Union in order to take advantage of the ignorance of holders" (Sharp 35).

It was not only merchants and other moneyed men who participated in the speculative frenzy. A number of leading congressmen saw fit to trade on their inside information, and fumed at a proposal, ventured by Madison, to bring a measure of equity to the funding debate. It would require that the government discriminate between the original holders of government securities and those who obtained them through speculation (Flexner 234-35). One wealthy representative who benefitted from speculation in government paper, New Jersey's own Elias Boudinot, responded to levelers like Jackson by stating that he would be "sorry, if on this occasion, the House should decide that speculations in the funds are violations of either moral or political law. A government hardly exists in which such speculation is disallowed." He concluded his remarks with a transparent effort to cut off debate on Madison's proposal, acknowledging that while "the spirit of speculation had now risen to an alarming height;…the only way to prevent its future effect, is to give public funds a degree of stability as soon as possible" (Gordon 26).

Elkins and McKitrick paint a similar portrait of Hamilton's ambition and the effects his funding plan would have on the political character of the new nation. After rehearsing Hamilton's stated opposition to discrimination—that it represented a "breach of contract" and reduced the "liquidity" of government securities by calling into question their value—the authors relate one "final reason" which does not appear in Hamilton's *Report on the Public Credit* but nonetheless was certain to feature prominently in his thinking on the subject—"[H]e did not want holdings in the public debt widely dispersed. He wanted the resources which they represented concentrated as much as possible in the hands of a particular class of men, because he wanted those resources maximally

available for productive economic uses" (117). Similarly, Gordon Wood notes that "Hamilton had no objection to having the public debt concentrated in the hands of a few moneyed men, for he hoped to use the debt as a source of economic productivity for the nation" (96). Finally, Chambers provides a window on the material gains unleashed by Hamilton's funding and assumption policies—an estimated take of 40 million dollars "for holders of public securities and speculators"—men who Jefferson, in the aftermath of the debt debate, would refer to derisively as "stock jobbers" (Chambers 37).

Thus, unlike the educational resources reviewed here, recent scholarship clearly differentiates between funding and assumption and explores the moral and political questions raised by Hamilton's insistence on funding the debt at face value. With the recent bursting of speculative bubbles in technology stocks and mortgage-backed securities, it seems curious that textbook publishers and the producers of educational videos have not revisited their treatment of the funding issue in order to better help students understand the origins and behavior of the investor class that continues to dominate political decision-making in Washington.

Educational materials and the scholarly record are uncharacteristically in full accord on the subject of assumption. Both capture the consolidating spirit of Hamilton's plan as well as the politics which led to the Compromise of 1790. In fact, the back room horse trading that led to passage of the assumption bill and the removal of the national capital to the banks of the Potomac may be the one instance where the politics of the founding era are laid bare for the student of American history. For reasons that are not entirely clear, textbook publishers and educational video producers are less reticent about reporting these events than they are about other unseemly examples of political behavior

that are equally well documented in the primary record and scholarly realm. This provides a ray of hope that we may someday arrive at a point where the founders are viewed through the same critical lens applied to subsequent generations of political leaders.

However, when textbooks and educational videos turn to the subject of the national bank these sources again fail to capture some of the less flattering aspects of this episode. Compared to the scholarly record, educational materials focus almost exclusively on the constitutional issues surrounding the bank debate and leave unearthed the role the bank would play in consolidating national wealth and power—rewarding those who reaped enormous financial benefits from both funding and assumption and increasing their influence over national policy.

The political and economic effects of the bank are clearly elaborated in several scholarly publications. For example, Sharp reports that while Jefferson and Madison objected to the bank primarily on constitutional grounds, they "were also disturbed by what the establishment of the bank seemed to represent, namely Hamilton's growing power and ambition, the centralization of authority in the federal government, and the apparent tying of government financial policy to the interests of a relatively small group of wealthy citizens" (38). Similarly, Chambers describes the bank as a mechanism to secure "a happy and fruitful marriage between the special interests of 'moneyed men,' and the larger interests of orderly national government, from which the one might derive strength and authority, and the other [material] gain" (37). Finally, Meacham notes that Jefferson and Madison feared that the bank "would enable financial speculators to benefit from commercial transactions made possible by government funds" (249).

Additionally, none of the educational materials reviewed here cite a significant other reason why such feverish opposition emerged to Hamilton's bank proposal, particularly among the southern states. The origins of this point of conflict lay in Hamilton's insistence that the bank, once approved by Congress, be located in Philadelphia. As he explained to Washington, "[I]t is manifest that a *large commercial city* with a great deal of *capital* and *business* must be the fittest seat of the Bank" (Chernow, *Hamilton* 350, emphasis in original). However, in addition to a general southern distrust of banks and northern commercial interests, Madison and his allies feared that "placing the bank in Philadelphia might plant the national capital there permanently, reneging on the promised move to the Potomac," an outcome that would void the delicate compromise which resulted in the passage of an assumption plan that so clearly favored northern interests (Chernow, *Hamilton* 350). The issue of where the bank would be located emerges in the scholarly literature as a key element of the debate in Congress. Rudolph Bell, studying political cohesion in the early republic, analyzed the voting patterns of the First Congress and found that southern votes against the bank were a reflection of fears "that establishment of a national bank in Philadelphia would damage their sectional interests and threaten the agreement to locate the capital on the Potomac" (129). Sadly, neither the concentration of wealth among the elite nor the connection between the location of the bank and the Compromise of 1790 are referenced in any of the educational materials under review. Perhaps a closer look at these elements of the debate would spotlight the transformative nature of Hamilton's program and demonstrate the degree to which the founding era politicians were parochial in their outlook, despite mythical portraits which often place them above local and regional preoccupations.

With regard to the excise tax on whiskey and the subsequent rebellion by western farmers, the scholarly record provides a much more coherent portrait of cause and effect. While educational resources tend to portray the tax as a simple revenue measure disconnected from Hamilton's debt program, scholars make it clear that this tax was both fundamental to propping up the new debt issue and inherently unfair in assigning the burden to those who were least able to pay.

William Hogeland has authored perhaps the most authoritative account of this episode. In it he describes the role that the excise tax would play in Hamilton's overall financial architecture as follows:

> The [R]eport [on the Public Credit] urged a three-part program, familiar from the Morris period: paying interest on, rather than paying off or voiding, the federal domestic debt; hugely expanding that debt by absorbing in it all the states' debts; and raising revenues for interest payments on the expanded debt by adding to the customs laws new duties on imported wine and spirits, and imposing an excise on domestically distilled spirits.
>
> But so important was the tax portion of the proposal that Hamilton appended a fully detailed revenue bill—the only aspect for which he included a sample law. Far from waiting to reveal what might have seemed the most controversial element, Hamilton wanted creditors to see exactly how his revenue-raising measures would work (60).

Further, Hogeland's account makes it clear that other forms of taxation that could reliably service the debt, such as import duties, were rejected by Hamilton and his supporters in light of the deleterious effect they would have on trade among the class of

citizens who “were the very people who held the federal bonds and would thus directly benefit from the proceeds of the whiskey tax” (63). Hogeland also informs us that Hamilton designed implementation of the tax to further consolidate the distilleries and shift production to larger eastern facilities that would become part of a more mechanized industrial economy. This would help explain the violent reaction of western farmers who, by virtue of the new tax, would be placed at a competitive disadvantage (69). Finally, the author provides additional insight into the politics of the age by noting that in presenting the tax to Congress Hamilton argued that whiskey was not “a necessity but a luxury item consumed by those who could afford, by definition, to pay the tax.” In fact, throughout the debate he framed the tax as a “public-health effort. . .present[ing] a letter from the Philadelphia College of Physicians, who said that domestic distilled spirits, the cheap drink of the laboring classes, had become a ravaging plague requiring immediate treatment” (63). Thus, like his effort to secure passage of the bank bill on national security grounds, we see Hamilton raising the alarm about a domestic health crisis in order to persuade Congress to adopt legislation that would redistribute wealth toward the upper class, consolidate the liquor industry among eastern commercial distillers and provide a steady revenue stream sufficient to stabilize the value of a debt issue that proved to be a financial windfall for the favored class of citizens. Sadly, none of this is even hinted at in the treatment of this topic by contemporary educational resources.

The final element of the Hamiltonian program that receives no attention in the educational materials but which had a fundamental role in solidifying the Federalist hold on the levers of government is the creation of a politicized civil service that would strengthen the party’s grip on power by extending its influence beyond the northeastern

merchant-moneyed class to a more geographically dispersed and emergent middle class whose livelihood and political affiliation were linked to government employment. Though not widely discussed, even among scholars of the early republic, Presidents Washington and Adams made great use of federal patronage to reward loyal supporters and build a "grass roots" network that would coalesce into a formal party organization. In fact, from 1789-1801 over two thousand "federal men" were appointed to the customs and internal revenue service, post office, and judicial department in a rapidly expanding national authority, whose power began to extend far beyond Philadelphia (Prince 268-74).

The establishment of a civil service based on the British model is perhaps most attributable to Alexander Hamilton, who more than most understood how patronage could be used to garner support for the fledgling national government. As early as 1782, writing as the *Continentalist*, Hamilton sketched out his vision for the powerful role patronage would play in strengthening the federal government vis-à-vis the states:

> The reason of allowing Congress to appoint its own officers of the Customs [and] Collectors of taxes…is to create in the interior of each State, a mass of influence in favor of the Federal Government…by interesting such a number of individuals in each State, in support of the Federal Government, as will be counterpoised to the ambitions of others, and will make it difficult to unite the people in opposition to the first and necessary measures of the Union (Prince 8).

Likewise, once appointed Secretary of the Treasury following adoption of the new constitution, Hamilton began to see how patronage could also be used to bolster the fortunes of a Federalist party whose primary aim was to solidify national authority in the

hands of like-minded men. Hamilton would come to head what was by far the largest federal department and the only one with considerable reach into the politics of the states as well as the interior of the nation (Anderson and Cayton 197). With Washington's blessing, the young secretary worked to exclude Anti-federalists from all government positions while staffing customs, post office, judicial and revenue departments with loyal supplicants (Prince 8-10). The results were predictable and revelatory—the national authority was vastly strengthened and given a decidedly Federalist hue. In fact, one could argue that the politicization of the emerging federal bureaucracy did more to effectuate Hamilton's policies than any other single stratagem employed during the early years of the republic, particularly when one considers the cumulative weight of judicial action in support of Federalist programs that extended well into the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, it is hard to conceive how popular textbooks and educational videos manage to disregard these developments, particularly when they have considerable bearing on topics which do receive considerable treatment.

In sum, educational materials provide uneven and incoherent coverage of Hamilton's economic program. The controversy over assumption and the deal which brought the capital to the banks of the Potomac receives the most consistent and comprehensive treatment. The controversy over the establishment of a national bank is also widely covered, but with less consistency in approach than the Compromise of 1790. Textbook publishers and documentary producers can be praised for their coverage of these events, since it does expose the willingness of key members of the founding generation to engage in the kind of "horse trading" that is commonly practice today. However, the failure to dig more deeply into the funding controversy, particularly the

debate over discrimination and the widespread speculation which followed, is inexcusable. So is the failure to link the complaints of the whiskey rebels to the funding plan and the use of federal patronage by Hamilton and his supporters to commandeer the reins of government. None of the materials reviewed here unpack the interlocking web of features which made Hamilton's program so controversial—and so overwhelmingly successful. Hamilton was by most measures the most brilliant and ruthless of the founding generation—it is a shame that our young scholars walk away from the study of his program lacking an appreciation of both.

# Chapter 4

## CASE STUDY #2: ELECTION OF 1796 AND THE ALIEN AND SEDITION ACTS

With respect to the treatment of Hamilton's economic program, the educational materials reviewed here provide young readers with a spotty and incoherent picture of the politics which led to the establishment of our nation's financial infrastructure. By comparison, contemporary scholarship reveals the emergence of a rising political elite capable of acting ruthlessly in support of its interests. However, as George Washington prepared to withdraw from public life American concerns quickly pivoted to the international scene, as the nations of Europe again squared off over trade and territory. Efforts by Washington's successor to maintain a neutral course would further stoke the fires of partisan conflict, leading to an unprecedented crackdown on political dissent that was in clear violation of fundamental freedoms only recently enshrined in the Bill of Rights. As we shall see, popular textbooks and educational videos provide an incomplete picture of these events, leaving secondary students with a less damning portrayal of the political behavior of the founding generation during one of the most tumultuous periods in American history.

When monarchical England declared war on revolutionary France following the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, the young United States was in danger of being swept into an increasingly globalized conflict among the great powers of Europe. Tensions ran high as European nations preyed upon American merchant shipping that was vital to the nation's economic livelihood. The war also stoked partisan and sectional tensions, since the largely southern Jeffersonian Republicans sympathized with the

French revolutionaries while the Federalists, who predominated in the New England states, looked to England for their commercial sustenance and political inspiration.

In many respects, the events in Europe unmasked fundamental disagreements over the nature and purpose of the American Revolution—differences which had been swept under the rug during the war against England and initial establishment of the American republic. Jefferson and his followers viewed the French radicals as brothers-in-arms who were inspired by the events in America and dedicated to establishing similar republican institutions on European soil. Hamilton and the Federalists, however, viewed the French revolutionaries as a dangerous rabble that threatened to disorder the international scene and compromise the security and liberty of those most capable of governing (Elkins and McKitrick 308-29). That Jefferson had been serving in France as the American envoy during the upheavals led by Daniel Shays only served to broaden the chasm between his Republican followers and Federalists like Hamilton and Washington, who saw firsthand the fragility of American republican institutions throughout the Articles of Confederation period (Chernow, *Hamilton* 431-35).

President Washington believed that the new nation needed at least twenty years of international calm in which to bolster the political and economic institutions embodied in the new constitution and Hamilton's elaborate program (Ellis, *Founding Brothers* 135). However, the United States was bound by international treaty to aid France in her war with England. While the 1778 *Treaty of Alliance* had been forged with a monarchical regime that no longer ruled the French nation and had been embraced by Louis XVI primarily to thwart the imperial interests of her principle rival, the fact remained that the United States owed her independence to French financial and military support and was

morally—if not legally—bound to join the fray against England (Elkins and McKitrick 356). Despite this, Washington, who received considerable input from Hamilton, drafted a *Proclamation of Neutrality* in April 1793 which forbade United States assistance to any of the belligerent parties (Chernow, *Hamilton* 435-43). The proclamation prohibited the citizenry from providing material or military support and prescribed punishments for violations of this policy. While Washington's directive was consistent with his stated goal of providing some breathing room for the development of domestic institutions, it was viewed as a betrayal by the French and their American friends because it effectively eliminated an anticipated source of political and military support for the revolutionary cause. As a result, the proclamation unleashed a pamphlet war between Madison (writing as "Helvidius") and Hamilton (using the pseudonym "Pacificus") which presaged a broader partisan battle over the direction of American foreign policy that would explode during the presidency of John Adams (Freeman, *Writings* 801-09).

Despite Washington's proclamation, Jefferson and his Republican supporters continued to press their case in a variety of ways. At the same time, a new French envoy appeared on the American scene who would actively stoke the fires of pro-French elements thirsty for British blood. Edmond-Charles "Citizen" Genet arrived in Charleston on April 8, 1793, and immediately set about arming American privateers to make war on British shipping. He also recruited Americans to fight against Britain's allies in Spanish-controlled Florida. Finally, Genet helped to organize French-leaning "Democratic Societies" throughout the south, creating a network of political supporters that would morph into an organized opposition to Federalist policies during Washington's second term (Wood 185-89). Genet's actions represented an open defiance of American

neutrality and Washington summoned the envoy to Philadelphia before he could do irreparable harm to American security interests. However, Genet's actions exposed deep fault lines among the American citizenry and threatened to further undermine the ability of Washington's cabinet to work cooperatively in the face of an increasingly hostile international environment (Bernstein 102-03).

Throughout the remainder of 1793 and early 1794, it became increasingly difficult for the United States to remain neutral in the face of a widening conflict. British interference with American trade and support for hostile Native Americans in the frontier territories acquired from England through the *Treaty of Paris*, led Congress to place an embargo on trade (Elkins and McKitrick 352-54). As tensions mounted, President Washington dispatched Federalist ally John Jay to London to reach a settlement intended to avert war. Jay, whose negotiating leverage was undermined by Hamilton's unauthorized back-channel discussions with British ambassador George Hammond, was unable to obtain satisfactory terms on several outstanding issues, notably those held dear by southern—largely Republican—interests (Chernow, *Hamilton* 461-62). With Washington's support, the treaty, whose terms were withheld from public scrutiny until they were leaked by Republican sources, was adopted by the Senate by a vote of 20-10, with no margin to spare on the necessary two-thirds majority (Elkins and McKitrick 417-22). Jefferson and Madison had argued vehemently against the accord, attempting to portray it as an act of capitulation to our former foes and, in essence, the formation of an alliance with England against France. Historians remain divided on whether the United States could have obtained better terms under the circumstances, though most concur with Joseph Ellis who called the treaty:

> a shrewd bargain for the United States. It bet, in effect, on England rather than France as the hegemonic European power of the future, which proved prophetic. It recognized the massive dependence of the American economy on trade with England. In a sense it was a precocious preview of the Monroe Doctrine, for it linked American security and economic development to the British fleet, which provided a protective shield of incalculable value throughout the nineteenth century. Mostly, it postponed war with England until America was economically and politically more capable of fighting one (Ellis, *Founding Brothers* 136-37).

Passage of the *Jay Treaty* and the spread of French leaning, Republican aligned "Democratic Societies" during Washington's second term had set the stage for conflict with France when John Adams assumed the presidency in 1797 McCullough 443-47). When French aggression intensified in the spring of 1797, Adams convened his cabinet to evaluate policy options. Adams proposed authorizing a diplomatic mission to negotiate terms with France similar to what Jay had achieved with his British counterparts. After some partisan wrangling over who would best represent the nation—Elbridge Gerry's Federalist credentials were suspect—Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall and Gerry departed for France in July, 1797 (McCulloch 485-86). Upon arrival the American's were greeted by representatives of the French foreign ministry who demanded a substantial bribe and a formal apology prior to the commencement of formal negotiations with Talleyrand. Outraged, the American commissioners nonetheless conducted a brief and delicate diplomatic dance in order to avoid an outright rupture that would lead to war. However, when it became apparent that the French were uninterested

in negotiating in good faith, Marshall and Pinckney headed for home in the spring of 1798, leaving Gerry to persist in what was clearly a useless endeavor (Wood 242).

Back in the United States, the fate of the mission became intense fodder for further partisan intrigue. Republicans pressed for full publication of the dispatches filed by the commissioners, certain that they would betray a greater willingness by the French to negotiate than the administration had let on. Republican partisans, however, misread the situation, failing to realize that Adams had kept the most damning filings secret in order to minimize an almost certain backlash against French impudence. When Adams reluctantly turned over the remaining dispatches to Congress a firestorm broke over the nation's capital, with Federalists clamoring for war and the Republican opposition cowed into submission by those who now viewed them as traitorous (McCullough 495-98).

Even before his diplomatic efforts had visibly foundered, Adams had met with his cabinet in order to prepare for the worst. Once the "XYZ Affair" broke, he ordered the arming of merchant vessels and fortification of the navy to engage the French fleet in what would become known as the "Quasi War." At Hamilton's urging, Adams would also raise a standing army of 15,000 men, to be commanded by an aging George Washington, to prepare for a French invasion of the United States (Ellis, *Founding Brothers* 193-94).

Hamilton's efforts proved exceedingly controversial, leading to fears among some Republicans that the Federalists were intent on smashing the political opposition. These measures further emboldened Republican attacks on Adams and his supporters, particularly in the emerging party press, and the Federalists responded by passing extraordinary legislation designed to bolster domestic security and clamp down on

political dissent. The *Alien and Sedition Acts* were a legislative package of four separate bills passed at the peak of the French crisis during the spring and summer of 1798 (Weisberger 209-13). First to be passed (on June 18) was the *Naturalization Act*, which extended the residency requirements for foreigners who desired to become citizens of the United States from five to fourteen years, thereby reversing the traditional policy of open immigration and rapid assimilation of foreigners which had existed from the period of colonization. This was followed in quick succession by the *Alien Act*—sometimes rather paradoxically referred to as the *Alien Friends Act*—of June 25 and the *Alien Enemies Act* (July 6), which authorized the president to arrest and deport aliens "he shall judge dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States, or shall have reasonable grounds to suspect are concerned in any treasonable or secret machinations against the government" as well as "any foreign natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects" of a nation with which the United States was at war (Elkins and McKitrick 591). This legislative tandem targeted the French-leaning, immigrant-dominated "Democratic Societies" which Federalists viewed as security risks and which were suspected of fomenting domestic unrest. Finally, on July 14, the Federalist-controlled legislature passed the *Sedition Act*, the final, and perhaps most alarming (at least to native born Americans) emergency measure. The *Sedition Act* permitted the arrest and imprisonment of newspaper publishers who criticized American government officials, including the president (but, remarkably, not the sitting Republican vice president). Between late 1798 and the end of John Adams presidency two years hence, twenty five Americans were arrested under the law and ten were convicted and jailed as a consequence—including Matthew Lyon, a Republican Congressman from Vermont (Wood 256-62). Though this provision directly contravened

civil liberties protections enshrined in the 1st Amendment, perhaps even more troubling was a "sunset" provision which would cause the acts to expire upon the inauguration of a new president (Wilentz, *The Rise* 78). That a sitting president would authorize an attack on the political opposition through the use of unconstitutional legislation set to expire following a campaign for reelection clearly demonstrates the lengths to which the founding generation would go to retain partisan advantage in the young republic. Sadly, while most educational materials routinely cite the unconstitutional nature of the Alien and Sedition Acts, their obvious political nature, which is so clearly revealed in scholarly resources and the primary record, remains largely obscured.

Established textbooks and widely used educational videos are largely consistent with modern scholarship in their coverage of partisan tensions during the Adams administration. Though Joyce Appleby's *American Journey* only dedicates three pages to the Adams administration, she prefaces this section with a discussion of the emergence of political parties during the Washington administration (264-68). Here the author outlines the contrasting views of supporters of Hamilton and Jefferson on issues of constitutional interpretation, the scope of federal power, the role of the people in governance, and both economic and foreign policy. Appleby also includes a sidebar contrasting the views of Washington and Jefferson on the desirability of political parties and another contrasting loose and strict interpretation of the constitution as articulated by Hamilton and Jefferson respectively. The author is to be commended for allowing the founders to speak with their own voice as this section of the text relies heavily upon primary sources to convey the contrasting political views of the founding generation.

Appleby next turns to the 1796 presidential election, glossing over the intense political rivalry that would emerge between Adams and Jefferson. After framing the contest by outlining the caucus nominations, the author blandly states that "Adams and Jefferson, once good friends, became bitter rivals" (268). With Adams quickly declared the victor, Appleby launches into a brief (two page) treatment of the XYZ Affair, *Alien and Sedition Acts* and subsequent *Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions* (269-70). After a brief discussion of the French treatment of the American diplomatic mission which precipitated the 1797-98 Franco-American crisis, the author explains the origins, nature and purpose of the Alien and Sedition Acts as follows:

> As public anger rose against France, Americans became more suspicious of aliens—immigrants living in the country who were not citizens. Many Europeans who came to the United States in the 1790s supported the ideals of the French Revolution. Some Americans questioned whether these aliens would remain loyal if the United States went to war with France.
>
> Federalists responded with strict laws to protect the nation's security. In 1798 they passed a group of measures known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. Sedition refers to activities aimed at weakening the established government. The Alien Act allowed the president to imprison aliens, or send those considered dangerous out of the country (269-70).

Appleby's treatment of the Alien and Sedition Acts provides an extraordinarily sanitized view of one of the most overtly political—and thoroughly unconstitutional—episodes in American history. Unlike recent scholarship on this issue, Appleby's text characterizes these laws almost exclusively as national security measures, ignoring their

underlying partisan purpose. In addition, the author ignores the role of the president in crafting these acts and lays the blame squarely on an amorphous "Federalist-controlled Congress." While it is true that elements within the nation were girding for an expanded conflict with the French, Appleby's focus on the *Alien Act*, which targeted European émigrés who might represent a security risk, rather than the more overtly partisan Sedition Act, which placed the party press in the government crosshairs, avoids one of the most controversial issues of the founding era. In fact, when Appleby turns her attention to the Republican response to the *Alien and Sedition Acts*—namely, the *Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions*, which aimed to "preserve people's liberties by standing up to what [Republicans] regarded as Federalist tyranny"—the reader is left unmoved by the purported threat to personal freedoms given the author's singular focus on the deportation of dangerous aliens rather than the arrest of legitimate (albeit highly partisan) newspapermen (270).

Further confusion awaits the young reader in a half-page graphic entitled "The Alien and Sedition Acts" which defines the constituent pieces of legislation, summarizes why they were passed, and highlights the historical "results" and national "reaction." Here, the author strikes a discordant note, claiming that in crafting the legislation the Federalists wished to "strengthen the federal government" and "silence Republican opposition" (269), a marked departure from the main body of the text which says nothing about either motive. Thus, we have in Appleby's treatment of the Alien and Sedition Acts a rather disjointed presentation—one which cannot seem to settle upon a coherent explanation of the origins and purpose of some of the most controversial pieces of legislation ever approved by the United States Congress.

Gerald Danzer provides the secondary reader with a more thorough and balanced account of the political drama which played out during the early months of the Adams administration. However, things begin rather blandly in his treatment of the partisan struggle that would culminate in the election of 1796. Here Danzer simply points out that "Americans faced a new situation: a contest between opposing parties" which, following the balloting, led to the election of "a Federalist president and a Democratic-Republican vice president" (194). This characterization fails to underscore both the intense partisan activity leading up to the balloting and, more importantly, the politically volatile outcome which resulted in the cohabitation of the executive branch by the hostile leaders of bitterly opposing factions. Indeed, Danzer makes no mention of how the election outcome positioned Jefferson to continually undermine the sitting president, leaving Adams both vulnerable and isolated as he tried to steer the nation through uncharted political seas. It is also worth mentioning here that none of the texts reviewed report on Adams critical (and politically costly) decision to retain Washington's cabinet—men who owed their allegiance to Hamilton, who by then had turned on his former Federalist colleague, and who now led an emerging faction on the right that was equally hostile to Adams leadership. Rather than focus on these more politically salient features of Adams ascendancy, Danzer simply concludes this section of the text by highlighting "the growing danger of sectionalism" reflected by the fact that "[A]lmost all the electors from the southern states voted for Jefferson, while all the electors from the northern states voted for Adams" (194). This bland recitation skips over the consequential partisan drama and political uncertainty that characterized this election cycle.

However, things improve when Danzer turns his attention to the XYZ Affair and *Alien and Sedition Acts*. First, Danzer does a respectable job establishing the geopolitical context of the American mission to France, noting in some detail the relevant arc of Franco-American relations as well as internal political developments in France that would confound efforts to reach a peaceful resolution to the existing crisis. He also provides useful details in describing popular reaction to the news that the American envoys had been mistreated by their French counterparts, noting, for example, that the feeling in the United States became "so anti-French that audiences refused to listen to French music"—a public response remarkably akin to the renaming of "Freedom Fries" precipitated by muted French support for the Iraqi War a little more than two hundred years hence. The author also provides students with the opportunity to analyze the ubiquitous "Paris Monster" political cartoon, providing further evidence of the depth of American anger fueled by the XYZ Affair (195).

Danzer's treatment of the *Alien and Sedition Acts* is both reasonably detailed and appropriately balanced. The author provides a clear sense of the heightened national security concerns precipitated by the proliferation of "Democratic Societies" populated by recent immigrants who harbored intense anti-British sentiments. According to Danzer, "[S]ome of the most vocal critics of the Adams administration were foreign-born. They included French and British radicals as well as recent Irish immigrants who lashed out at anyone who was even faintly pro-British, including the Federalist Adams" (195).

However, Danzer also makes it clear to young readers that under the Alien and Sedition Acts "the federal government prosecuted and jailed a number of Democratic-Republican editors, publishers, and politicians" and that "outraged Democratic-

Repubicans called the laws [both] a violation of freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment" and a "serious misuse of power on the part of the federal government" (195). Further, Danzer provides the reader with a rarely cited speech delivered by a leading Federalist proponent of the measures, which hints at the willingness of many members of the founding generation to trade personal freedoms for enhanced domestic security. With the recent disclosure of widespread government electronic surveillance of ordinary Americans, Connecticut Representative "Long John" Allen's quote is timely:

> Liberty of press and of opinion is calculated to destroy all confidence between man and man; it leads to a dissolution of every bond of union. . .God deliver us from such liberty, the liberty of vomiting on the public floods of falsehood and hatred to everything sacred, human and divine (195).

Danzer concludes with a fairly lengthy exploration of the doctrine of nullification raised by Jefferson and Madison in their seminal *Virginia and Kentucky* resolutions, and the author carefully sets the stage for the recurring issue of states' rights versus federal power that will arise repeatedly throughout the remainder of the text. Here he offers up additional commentary on the controversial nature of the Federalist legislative program, noting Jefferson's admonishment of the opposition in his 8th Virginia Resolution, in which he states "[L]et the honest advocate of confidence [in government]read the alien and sedition acts, and say if the Constitution has not been wise in fixing limits to the government it created, and whether we should be wise in destroying those limits (196).

Thus, in Danzer we find a considerably more robust account of the politics of the period, particularly when the author turns his attention to the *Alien and Sedition Acts* and the Republican reaction to efforts by leading Federalists to subdue political dissent in the

face of an increasingly tense international environment. That said, what is notably lacking in Danzer's account is a vivid rendition of the partisan tensions which formed the backdrop of the 1796 election cycle and, more importantly, a spotlighting of the most overtly partisan feature of the Sedition Act—the sunset provision which would cause the act to quietly expire once the Federalists had successfully secured the presidency following the 1800 election. That neither the Appleby nor Danzer text points out this controversial provision suggests a reluctance to provide an honest and less flattering portrayal of the politics of the founding era.

Of the three popular texts reviewed here, only the Kennedy text provides a faithful glimpse of the highly partisan campaign of 1796. Noting that "political passions ran feverishly high" as Washington's moderating influence receded from view, Kennedy quotes Federalist Fisher Ames, who referred to the Democratic-Republicans as "fire-eating salamanders, poison-sucking toads," and reveals that tensions ran so high that party men "even drank their ale in separate taverns" (193-94). The author even reprints the well-known satirical cartoon showing Congressmen Lyon (Republican) and Griswold (Federalist) squaring off on the floor of Congress brandishing sticks and fire irons (197).

Turning to the outcome, Kennedy has little to say about the dysfunctional partnership between Adams and Jefferson, other than referring to "an inharmonious two-party combination" that would be barred in the future by passage of the 12$^{th}$ Amendment. Unlike the other texts, however, Kennedy devotes a sizeable paragraph to the challenges faced by Adams upon assuming the presidency—namely, a conspiratorial Hamilton who "even secretly plotted with certain members of the cabinet against the president," the long shadow cast by his predecessor, and an increasingly "violent quarrel with France" (194).

Kennedy's treatment of the XYZ Affair does a respectable job illuminating the partisan implications of revelations surrounding the mistreatment of the American envoys. After referencing the oft cited quote "Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute," the author makes it clear that the affair became a political bonanza for a beleaguered John Adams and his Federalist supporters. In an effort to highlight the geopolitical fallout from the affair, the text also reprints a popular cartoon from the period which portrays "an innocent young America [being] plundered by Frenchmen as John Bull looks on in amusement from across the English Channel" (194).

Kennedy also provides the reader with a clear sense of how the Federalists mobilized American resources to prepare for war with France, including the expansion of the navy—documented by an illustration of the Frigate *Philadelphia* under construction in dry dock—reestablishment of the Marine Corps, along with the formation of a standing army as reported in the other texts. He also credits Adams with demonstrating extraordinary restraint in his persistent pursuit of peace with France following the XYZ Affair, diplomacy which is conducted in the face of withering criticism leveled by warmongering Federalists and which culminated in the Convention of 1800. In fact, according to Kennedy, the president "should indeed rank high among the forgotten purchasers of [Louisiana]. If America had drifted into a full-blown war with France in 1800, Napoleon would not have sold [this vast domain] to Jefferson on any terms in 1803" (196).

This rather benevolent portrait of Adams endures throughout a lengthy section on the Alien and Sedition Acts. Here, like the other texts surveyed, Kennedy assigns responsibility for these draconian laws to unnamed Federalist congressmen, absolving

Adams of any responsibility—including, presumably, signing the acts into law. However, the author pulls few punches in describing the malevolent constitutional and political impact of this "sheaf of laws designed to muffle or minimize" the political opposition (196). Far more than the other texts, Kennedy provides his young readers with a clear picture of the malicious intent of the Alien Laws, which targeted "undesirable immigrants" viewed as "dregs" by aristocratic Federalists and which represented "an arbitrary grant of executive power contrary to American tradition and to the spirit of the Constitution" (196). Similarly, the "lockjaw" Sedition Act, described as the "last measure of the Federalist clampdown," is deemed "a direct slap at two priceless freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution by the Bill of Rights—freedom of speech and freedom of the press" (196).

The author also demonstrates the impact of these laws by highlighting specific individuals who were successfully prosecuted and penalized, including Republican Congressmen Matthew Lyon and Republican hatchet man James Callender, whose published excerpt that landed him in jail is reprinted in a text box near the end of the section.

Finally, unlike the other texts reviewed here, only Kennedy explains the most overtly partisan provision of the Sedition Act—the sunset clause keyed to the 1800 election cycle. According to the author, the "Federalists intentionally wrote the law to expire in 1801, so that it could not be used against them if they lost the next election" (197). Kennedy even goes as far as to weigh the political impact of this provision, arguing that while this "attempt by the Federalists to crush free speech and silence the opposition party, high-handed as it was, undoubtedly made many converts for the

Jeffersonians" it also enabled the Federalists to score "the most sweeping victory of their entire history" in the congressional elections of 1798-1799 (197). Far more than the other texts, Kennedy's *The American Pageant* provides young readers with an honest and vivid portrayal of the partisan strife that characterized the early republic and the degree to which the founding generation was willing to sacrifice fundamental liberties in order to preserve their hold on political power.

None of the texts reviewed here, however, measure up to the Founding Brothers video series when it comes to laying bare the partisan intrigue on display during the election of 1796 and early months of the Adams administration. Coverage begins with the introduction to the second DVD in the series, with narrator Roger Mudd setting the stage by noting that in 1776 the founding generation "stood together against the British. Twenty years later American's founding brothers were standing against each other in an ideological struggle for the hearts and minds of Americans. The partisan bitterness threatened to tear the country apart". The initial section, entitled "Revolutionary Successors," reminds viewers of the strong bonds of friendship formed between Adams and Jefferson during the revolutionary period. Historian David McCulloch comments on the origins and strength of this attachment, and several primary accounts are read by the cast of narrators in which each man speaks to the sterling revolutionary credentials and personal virtues of the other. The overall effect here is to amplify the magnitude of the tragic break that would ultimately occur as a consequence of the election—one that would leave the former friends alienated for nearly the remainder of their lives. The series also spends considerable time helping viewers to better understand 18th century presidential campaign norms, which prescribed the open solicitation of votes and drove

the campaign underground and into the hands of “particular friends” who were aligned with the major contenders for office.

The series then reports on the election outcome, noting that “Jefferson’s second place finish did not mean that he would remain retired from public life. As prescribed by the constitution, he would serve as John Adams’ vice president”. Unlike popular textbook accounts, the video series reports directly upon the toxic political implications of this arrangement, with noted scholar Joseph Ellis pointing out that Jefferson would represent “a kind of Trojan horse in the midst of the Adams administration”.

The series also uniquely delves into the delicate, and ultimately fruitless, negotiations initiated by Adams to draw Jefferson into a bipartisan power sharing arrangement, noting that with “the hotly contested election now behind them, Adams saw an opportunity to extend an olive branch to his new vice president”. According to Ellis, “Adams essentially writes to Jefferson with an offer: Why don’t we create a kind of bipartisan administration in which I give you as vice president powers as kind of co-president with regard to foreign policy,” an arrangement which Jefferson rejects after consultation with Madison. Historian Gordon Wood then appears to report that, “Jefferson toys with the idea that maybe this is a good thing. Madison stops him [and says] look, you can’t do this. The party division is too strong, you can’t compromise what we have done”. According to the series, the final break between the two men occurs at a farewell dinner hosted by the outgoing president, and Ellis appears onscreen to punctuate the moment by observing that “Adams and Jefferson are really close friends and the rejection of the offer is really poignant because he [Jefferson] is really choosing partisan politics over friendship”. Thus concludes the Founding Brothers segment on the election

of 1796, with the series offering viewers a detailed portrait of the intense partisan atmosphere that characterized our nation's first competitive presidential election cycle—a synthesis which captures the cross currents of personal and party loyalties, the evolving nature of political campaigns, and the increasing role of the party press in shaping public opinion and voter habits.

The series then turns to the early months of Adams' presidency, noting the formidable challenges the second president would face upon assuming the executive chair. Consistent with the partisan theme established earlier, the series focuses on the political machinations of both Jefferson and Hamilton, with the intraparty squabble between Adams and the former Treasury Secretary receiving considerable attention. The segment begins with an observation from William Fowler, Director of the Massachusetts Historical Society, who notes that:

> Adams becomes the first president to have to live through intense political intrigue at a time when political parties are coming into formation. There really was no organized opposition against Washington but there is organized opposition against John Adams and that opposition organizes around Thomas Jefferson. . .and here is the greatest irony of all—Thomas Jefferson is John Adams' vice president.

Despite this, the series does little to illuminate well documented actions that Jefferson took as vice president that directly undercut Adams' ability to steer the nation through stormy international and domestic seas. Thus, while the series is to be commended for highlighting the potential political dysfunction resulting from Jefferson's

second place finish and installment as vice president, it forces the viewer to speculate on what form Jefferson's "opposition" would take over the next four years.

Founding Brothers does, however, present a detailed portrait of the emerging battle among Federalists that would perhaps prove even more damaging to Adams' political fortunes. First, the series recounts Adams decision to retain Washington's cabinet, citing a primary account in which the president acknowledges the potential political danger of replacing those who had served alongside the revered Virginian. The narrator next reveals that "unbeknownst to the president, his cabinet now took most of their marching orders from his arch political rival Alexander Hamilton," who William Fowler tells us was seen by Adams as "a conspirator who was working behind the scenes, successfully one might add, to undermine John Adams authority as president of the United States".

To support this claim the series again consults the primary record, serving up a frequently cited quote by Adams in which he calls Hamilton "the most restless, impatient, artful, indefatigable and unprincipled intriguer in the United States, if not in the world". However, while the series hints at the nature of the disagreement between Hamilton and Adams, it provides insufficient background as to the nature of the split—making it appear to be primarily personal, rather than ideological. The series also does not explain why Adams' cabinet would be following Hamilton's orders, particularly since we are told that the former Treasury Secretary had since retired to private life. As will be seen, while the scholarly and primary records confirm that Hamilton did indeed exercise considerable influence over Adams' cabinet from his offices in New York, young viewers could be

forgiven for not understanding how this might be the case and why Hamilton would work to undermine a president who is, at least nominally, a member of his own political party.

Finally, the Founding Brothers series should be commended for going well beyond popular textbooks and other educational videos—with the notable exception of the American Experience biographical profile entitled Alexander Hamilton—in recounting the way in which members of the founding generation used their knowledge of Hamilton's affair with Mariah Reynolds to orchestrate a political attack on the influential Federalist leader —one whose contours are arguably similar to the kind of steamy sex scandals that have plagued Washington throughout the modern era. Here the series provides the kind of detail absent in the prior section, including the Republican use of muckraking journalist James T. Callender to spread the sordid tale and an effort by the opposition, referenced by historian Richard Brookheiser, to link Hamilton to "corruption" and "insider trading" that went well beyond his personal indiscretions. The series even cites Hamilton's lengthy published defense, in which he acknowledges the affair and attempts to beat back any effort to impugn his public conduct. While it is not surprising that the Founding Brothers series includes reference to our nation's first sex scandal, it is heartening that this is not simply a gratuitous reference. Rather, the series should be commended for exploring how members of the founding generation used news of the affair to score political points in an increasingly high stakes game of partisan advantage that (sadly) echoes modern political conduct.

The American Experience biography Alexander Hamilton takes a similar approach, providing extensive coverage of the affair and the way in which the emerging party press would be used as a cudgel to destroy the Federalist's hold on political power.

For example, during the second of three segments dedicated to the Reynolds affair, the narrator informs the viewer that:

> For their part, Jefferson and the Republicans are watching Hamilton warily. They fear his continuing power in the Federalist Party and see him as a possible presidential candidate. Hamilton stands for everything they hate. They determine to crush his future political ambitions. They hold a series of incriminating letters detailing his past affair with Maria Reynolds. Republicans leak these papers to a muckraking journalist in their pay. . . It is a classic smear campaign. While his political enemies know very well that Hamilton was only paying blackmail money to Maria Reynolds' husband, they use the letters to claim that Hamilton was speculating with money from the Treasury.

When it comes to exploring the political implications—as well as the sordid details—of Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds, the American Experience biography therefore exceeds that offered by Founding Brothers, and therefore represents a useful resource for secondary educators wishing to explore how personal transgressions were often seized upon by an emerging party press to score political points during this turbulent era.

The Founding Brothers series next turns its attention to the diplomatic mission that precipitated the XYZ Affair. After a brief summary of events, Historian William Fowler outlines the rough treatment of the American diplomats at the hands of their French counterparts. The series narrator then describes the political fallout as follows:

> Back in the United States news of the so called XYZ Affair ignited national outrage and a backlash of anti-French sentiment. Soon the phrase "Millions for

> Defense but not one cent for tribute" echoed throughout the country. President Adams stood firm recalling his peace delegation and demanding that America beef up its coastal defenses for a possible war with France. The ensuing standoff, known as the Quasi War, would cast a pall over the rest of John Adams presidency.

The series then provides viewers with a fairly thorough political analysis, noting that "the Quasi War proved to be a public relations disaster for the French leaning Republicans and a political blessing for the Federalists". Joyce Appleby then appears on screen to elaborate, observing that there was "a public swing against the French revolution in all the newspapers [and] a congressional election [which] the Federalists win. . .and John Adams is actually popular for the first time in his life". As for the Republicans, the narrator informs us that "Adams vice president did not fare so well. In newspapers and taverns across American Thomas Jefferson was blasted as unpatriotic for his continued support for the French." The series even cites what is thought to have been a popular refrain heard in local drinking establishments in the aftermath of the crisis, which is enthusiastically read as follows: "John Adams, may he like Sampson slay thousands of Frenchmen with the jawbone of Jefferson".

The American public, now thoroughly enraged by the accounts of the American envoys which had been gleefully printed in Federalist-leaning papers, began to turn on Francophiles such as Jefferson and Madison, whose revolutionary credentials provided surprisingly little political cover. Accordingly, the narrator informs viewers that as "the conflict escalated, rumors about French spies and traitors within the government spread

like wildfire. There was even talk of Thomas Jefferson conspiring with a French invasion force that planned to land upon American shores".

Here the series begins to descend into a less scholarly analysis, noting that Hamilton and the Federalists leveraged popular anger over the XYZ Affair to create a standing army intended to crush the domestic political opposition by staging a military coup d'état. Historian William Fowler appears on screen in support of this proposition by stating that:

> The army that Hamilton wanted to raise was not to defend us against the French. How could the French ever get here across three thousand miles of ocean when the Royal Navy controlled the sea lanes? It was impossible. The evidence seems very persuasive that Alexander Hamilton had in mind to raise an army, to command an army and to take control of America.

This assertion is breathtakingly absurd, and undermines what until this point had been a balanced and fairly detailed treatment of the political ramifications of the XYZ Affair and Quasi War. While Hamilton's support for a large standing army has been well documented, there is no evidence in the primary or scholarly record that he envisioned it as a force to be used to overthrow the regime. Adding insult to injury, the narrator then tells us that for his part:

> Adams resisted the creation of a large army for some time, fearing that it would be used as a tool for tyranny. But as the drumbeats of war sounded ever louder, the President relented and called for the creation of a fifteen thousand man force, to be led by the sixty seven year old George Washington. Much to Adams chagrin, Washington named Alexander Hamilton as his second in command. The

aging Washington ceded control of the army to Hamilton and John Adams once again found himself caught in a precarious situation. On one side lay the French sympathizer Thomas Jefferson and his Republican colleagues. While on the other there was Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists.

Unsurprisingly, the series never revisits the claim that Hamilton intended the army to smash the opposition and crush republicanism. As a result, the viewer may be left wondering why, once in command, Hamilton fails to establish a military dictatorship.

The series regains its footing when it turns to the Alien and Sedition Acts. Here the viewer receives a fairly straightforward account which differs from the popular textbooks reviewed here by assigning a slightly larger measure of blame to the president as opposed to his Federalist colleagues in the Congress. Seguing from a brief segment on Abigail Adams' vital role as counselor to the president during the darkest days of his administration, Joseph Ellis tells us that "[M]ost of the time Abigail Adams gives her husband excellent advice. She supports and encourages his attempt to avoid war with France. But on one issue I think she advises him poorly and that's the Alien and Sedition Acts". The narrator then provides viewers with an overview of the legislation while the camera pans the actual text before Ellis returns to set the stage for the political analysis to follow by pointing out that once "Adams signs the Alien and Sedition Acts there will forever be a stigma attached to his administration".

The series narrator then observes that the "uproar over the Alien and Sedition Acts was immediate and furious. Republicans proclaimed the acts were a blatant violation of the constitutional right to free speech"—a synthesis which is supported by a rarely seen quote by James Madison, who urges "every intelligent friend to the liberties

of his country [to ask] whether the power exercised in such an act if made perpetual and enforced with rigor would not in time destroy our free system of government". The narrator then illustrates the heightened state of political duress by noting that "[B]y 1799 fourteen reporters and writers had been arrested, including muckraker James Callender, then on Thomas Jefferson's payroll. As a result, Jefferson himself omitted his signature from correspondence with Callender fearing spies in the Post Office would lead to his own arrest". Historian Joseph Ellis then provides Adams and the Federalists with some political cover, noting that the:

> Alien and Sedition Acts is our one brush in our early republic with some form of totalitarianism they think or some form of despotic state power. I think that is not quite fair to Adams. At the moment of the Alien and Sedition Acts nothing like our modern definition of freedom of the press existed and there was a Quasi War going on at that time with France. And so the need to have some control over the press—not complete control by any stretch—was real.

It is interesting to note that Ellis departs from the mainstream critique offered in popular textbooks by emphasizing the wartime rationale for the Alien and Sedition Acts. In fact, he clearly distances himself from the view that these laws bordered on absolutism by inserting "they" into his reference to totalitarianism and despotism. Thus, while the series makes it clear that the Alien and Sedition Acts violated free speech protections, it also infers that such wartime suppressions of civil liberties are occasionally necessary and do not represent a long term threat to republican institutions.

Finally, the video turns to the Republican response to the Alien and Sedition Acts, informing viewers that Thomas Jefferson and James Madison met secretly to

anonymously pen the *Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions*, which "argued that the states had the right to reject any federal laws they deemed unconstitutional" and laying the foundation for the great military struggle to come by noting that "Jefferson even threatened to lead Virginians to secede from the Union, but thanks to Madison's moderating influence, changed to a somewhat less militant tone". Jefferson then (accurately) predicts his own rise to power by observing that "[W]e shall see the reign of witches pass over their spells dissolved and the people recovering their true sight restoring their government to its true principles". The series then concludes the segment by noting how the acts "greatly damaged the credibility of John Adams," who continued to receive the support of George Washington, who wrote from Mount Vernon that the Republican "party hangs upon the wheels of government as a dead weight opposing every measure that is calculated for defense and self-preservation, preferring the interests of France to the welfare of their own country".

In the final analysis, the Founding Brothers series does an excellent job highlighting the political tension and guerilla warfare tactics evidenced during the 1796 presidential election cycle, as well as capturing the rapidly shifting political winds that gusted savagely during the XYZ imbroglio. Unlike the popular textbooks reviewed here, Founding Brothers pulls few punches in characterizing the often brutally personal and thoroughly self-serving political conduct of the founding generation, particularly with regard to the orchestrated attacks on President Adams launched by Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton. The series only real failing is to spare Adams by taking a rather benign view of the Alien and Sedition Acts—one which rightly assigns a measure of responsibility to Adams for their enactment, but which characterizes them as a reluctant

wartime necessity while skipping altogether the sunset provision which would allow young viewers to appreciate the more overtly political purpose of these laws.

Sadly, A&E's Thomas Jefferson: Philosopher of Freedom offers such limited coverage of these seminal events that the narration can be quoted in its entirety:

> John Adams was running for president to succeed Washington. At the request of the Republicans, a reluctant Jefferson entered the race, though he did not actively campaign. According to the original constitution, which made no allowances for political parties, Jefferson, by placing second, became Vice President. Among many of their disagreements during Adams' administration, the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, severely restricting freedom of speech, deeply angered Jefferson and strengthened his resolve.

One wonders what the producers of this series expected the audience to take away from this grossly inadequate treatment of this pivotal era. The series leaves the impression that there was no political campaign to succeed Washington in 1796 and that the deeply dysfunctional electoral outcome led only to "many disagreements" which "angered" Jefferson. Since no context is provided and no explanation of the *Alien and Sedition Acts* is offered, the viewer is left with no idea why Jefferson would be upset and to what ends he would act with his newly strengthened "resolve."

The History Channel's The Presidents adopts a highly reverential tone throughout its discussion of the Adams administration. Sadly, the series makes no mention of the 1796 campaign, picking up its profile of Adams with his inauguration. When the attention is turned to the XYZ Affair, the series commends Adams for not being swept up in the popular uproar, noting that "instead of acting impulsively, Adams kept his cool and

sent a second peace delegation to Paris. For this the war mongers in Congress vilified him". Historian William Fowler then appears on screen to laud Adams for having the courage to stand "against most of the men in his own (Federalist) party. . .he was firm and adamant in seeking a peaceful solution" to the crisis".

The series then pivots to the Alien and Sedition Acts, but even here there seems to be little stomach for sustained criticism. Acknowledging that signing the legislation was "the worst decision of his presidency," the narrator explains that the president, who was "[A]cutely sensitive to criticism. . .decided that the verbal attacks were seditious and dangerous to national security. . .and signed the Alien and Sedition Acts, making it a crime to falsely speak out or write against certain federal office holders, including the president". Here again, Adams' support of the legislation is not addressed. However, Fowler does opine that this chapter "stands out as the single greatest blemish in his otherwise extraordinary career. It fed into this image of Adams as the aristocrat, as Adams having this tinge of royalty, of arrogance. The Alien and Sedition Acts simply underscored what his enemies were already saying about this man". Note that Fowler's criticism is blunted to some degree by his reference to Adams' "otherwise extraordinary career" as well as his suggestion that Adams' aristocratic leanings were, in part, unfair characterizations by his partisan foes. Finally, the series concludes its discussion with Fowler bemoaning that the "Alien and Sedition Acts overshadowed the treaty with France. But the importance of his diplomacy cannot be forgotten. For had we not made peace with France, had Adams succumbed to the pressure to go to war, the history of America would have been very different".

Finally, the American Experience biography entitled Alexander Hamilton provides very limited coverage of these events. While the series does a respectable job describing the emergence of the party press during Washington's second term, there is no coverage of the 1796 election which might help students to better understand how these papers would help to shape electoral politics. In addition, while the series describes the split between Jefferson and Hamilton over the war between England and France, there is no reference to the foreign policy that Adams would pursue once he took over from Washington in 1797 or of the XYZ affair and political uproar that followed. Despite this, Alexander Hamilton does provide the viewer with a fairly detailed look at the split between Adams and Hamilton over the creation of a standing army to counter what many Federalist viewed as a hostile French republic.

Here the video begins with Hamilton's observation "that only with a regular army can American survive in a hostile world". The video then explores the violent disagreement and personal animosity between Adams and Hamilton precipitated by the authorization to build a 15,000 man army to be commanded by George Washington. It would be the old general's appointment of Hamilton as his second in command that would provoke a violent split between the two men and a fracturing of the Federalist party. Thus, the video sets the stage for its discussion of the election of 1800, where Hamilton would play a key role in securing Adams defeat. Unfortunately, the video fails to even mention the Alien and Sedition Acts in the run up to this monumental electoral contest.

In sum, popular videos and educational resources provide an uneven portrait of national politics during the Adams presidency. Generally speaking, coverage of the

political intrigue which dominated the 1796 election cycle is either weak or absent, with the notable exception of the Kennedy text and the Founding Brothers video series. The latter is particularly strong in explaining the political implications of Jefferson serving as Adams' vice president, as well as Adams' decision to leave Washington's cabinet in place.

With regard to the XYZ Affair, several sources reviewed here—particularly the Founding Brothers series—do a respectable job highlighting the political rancor generated by this diplomatic crisis. However, even this popular documentary is marred by historian William Fowler's exaggerated view of Hamilton's plans for the army.

With regard to the corresponding Alien and Sedition Acts, none of the materials reviewed here provide sufficient emphasis on the sunset provision written into the laws that would protect Federalists from Republican scrutiny should they find themselves on the losing end following the 1800 election. Further, these materials tend to downplay Adams' support for the legislation, attributing their origins primarily to nameless Federalists in Congress. Taken together, these omissions tend to minimize the overtly political objectives realized by the Federalists on the eve of Adams' reelection campaign, leaving secondary students with a less accurate portrayal of our second president and the partisan tactics employed by his surrogates.

In their treatment of the 1796 election cycle, scholarly and primary source materials provide an interesting contrast to the educational resources reviewed above. It should be noted at the outset that contemporary scholars have been inconsistent in describing the nature and role of formal parties during the 1796 contest. Popular historians of the early republic such as Joanne Freeman have tended to focus on the

highly personal and often shifting alliances that formed the "theater of national politics," deemphasizing the organizational structures and institutional behaviors that would mark the birth of the first party system (20). For example, in characterizing the 1796 contest, Freeman writes:

> A politics of friendships and enmities was fluid, unpredictable, and difficult to manage. Under two umbrellas of principle known as Federalism and Republicanism lay a mass of shifting loyalties, no one figure ever entirely predictable in his actions or allegiances. At various points in their political careers, even men of seemingly ironclad principles like Jefferson and Hamilton were rumored to have abandoned their supporters to join with former foes…More than anything else, however, [the election of 1796] had taught politicians about the frailty of national partisan bonds in the face of conflicting [personal] loyalties (214).

Recently, however, several scholars have argued that "the rush to dispense with parties in writing about 1790s is a mistake born of excessive focus on what seems to interest twenty-first-century publishers and popular readers about early American political history—the personal interactions of famous personalities" (Pasley, *The First* 10). According to this view, first espoused by historians like Nobel E. Cunningham and William Nisbet Chambers in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the 1796 contest was important in establishing geographical and ideological rivalries while emergent parties significantly aided the "construction [of] coherent images of the two candidates that connected clearly to the policy issues and cultural tensions of the day" (Pasley, *The First* 11). As a result, historians of the former stripe tend to portray the politics of the founding

generation as a highly personal and often vicious battle among the elites that largely played out in the press, while the latter tend to emphasize the organizational behaviors of party surrogates acting within the emergent institutional realm to secure political power. Most of the educational materials reviewed here tend to split the difference between these views, treating parties as rather fully formed entities and emphasizing their role in orchestrating campaigns in the press to vilify the opposition.

However, taken together, these scholarly resources provide much greater insight into the politics of the early republic than popular educational materials, shedding crucial light on the way in which presidential elections were conducted in an era of transition and tremendous uncertainty. What emerges is a vivid picture of an electoral contest that dramatically shaped the contours of our modern two-party system and laid the groundwork for the political crisis that would produce the "Revolution of 1800."

Noted Historian Gordon Wood provides a clear picture of how quickly the electoral process, as envisioned by the framers and embodied in the constitution, became distorted by the formation of political parties leading up to the 1796 contest. Wood notes that in the absence of political parties, the framers of the constitution fully expected that multiple regional candidates would unsuccessfully vie for a constitutionally mandated electoral majority. As a result, the framers anticipated that the Electoral College would come to act as a "nominating body," sending the names of the top five vote earners to the House of Representatives, which would then select the president. However, the emergence of parties "undermined these expectations" by allowing a single candidate to secure a majority of the electoral vote. This altered the calculus of the principle actors then dominating the political stage, leading to the birth of political campaigns

orchestrated by partisan surrogates (210-11). With the era's political titans now arrayed against each other for control of the nation's destiny, political behavior turned nasty, calculating and personal (Freeman, *Affairs* 218-20).

Hamilton led the way, advising that "all personal and partial considerations…be discarded [in support of] the great object of excluding Jefferson" (Wood 211). Several prominent Federalists, such as Oliver Wolcott, anticipated the electoral outcome, predicting that Jefferson in the vice presidency, "would become the rallying point of faction and French influence [where] without any responsibility, he would…divide, and undermine, and finally subvert the rival [Federalist] administration" (Wood 211).

As a result, a number of Federalists began promoting the candidacy of Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina, hoping that his vote totals and those accrued by Adams would block the Virginian's rise to an executive station. Upon hearing of this stratagem, Adams, believing that he was the heir apparent, fumed that to "see such…an unknown being as Pinckney, brought in over my head, and trampling on the bellies of hundreds of other men infinitely his superior in talents, services, and reputation, filled me with apprehensions for the safety of us all" (Wood 211). Many Federalists felt Pinckney's candidacy was enhanced by his relative obscurity since his overseas service had allowed him to avoid much of the political tempest that defined the latter stages of Washington's presidency (Freeman, *Affairs* 216-17). Hamilton's so-called "Pinckney Plot" would unravel as a consequence of nationwide ignorance about how the electoral system operated and poor communication that similarly bedeviled efforts to develop highly organized party networks (Pasley, *The First* 380). The Federalists also tried (and then

abandoned efforts) to cultivate the candidacy of Patrick Henry, Jefferson's home state rival (Meacham 297).

On the Republican side, early maneuvering included an effort by Jefferson to patch up his longstanding quarrel with the revered Washington. Writing in the summer of 1796, Jefferson tried to reassure the aging president that he had nothing to do with the leaking of unflattering documents related to the neutrality proclamation which had recently appeared in the Republican-leaning *Aurora*. Washington's reply, which "absolved Jefferson of responsibility for the Aurora matter," also contained a pointed rebuke of Jefferson for his continued backstage criticism of the administration he had served before resigning in early 1794 (Meacham 297). That criticism is perhaps best exemplified in Jefferson's April 24, 1796 letter to his friend Philip Mazzei, which could only be interpreted as a direct assault on the sitting president and a declaration of partisan warfare on the eve of the 1796 contest. In his correspondence Jefferson warns his friend that "[I]t would give you a fever were I to name to you the apostates who have gone over to these heresies, men who were Samsons in the field & Solomons in the council, but who have had their heads shorn by the harlot England" (Ellis, *American Sphinx* 190).

Meanwhile, James Madison, who was quietly assuming the role of Jefferson's campaign manager, began to organize Republican forces for the coming electoral struggle. His first task was to convince Jefferson to assume the presidency if the necessary votes could be marshaled. After a playful exchange between the two Republican leaders in which each man promoted the candidacy of the other, Jefferson acceded to his role as party standard-bearer, but only after providing a wide ranging dissertation on his preference for the vice presidency should his name be put forward

(Koch 163-65). This dissembling was symptomatic of the culture of electoral politics in the early republic—candidates went to great lengths to appear disinterested in political power lest they be viewed as overly ambitious or covetous of political authority (Elkins and McKitrick 515).

Ultimately, however, the election outcome would depend upon the actions of 136 presidential electors who were selected through a variety of means among the sixteen states that then comprised the union. Here electioneering took on a variety of forms according to the manner in which each state chose its slate of electors. In states such as Pennsylvania, where the electors were selected by popular vote and male suffrage was widespread, mass appeals emerged as a vital tool to produce votes for favored candidates (Cunningham 105-06). Here John Beckley, a close associate of James Madison, "organized the election's most ambitious campaign, distributing handbills and ballots with the names of the Republican electors already written in; he ultimately distributed 30,000 ballots (handwritten by family members in order to circumvent Federalist-sponsored election laws banning the use of pre-printed ballots) of Republican politicians in a state where only 24,420 people voted" (Freeman, *Affairs* 220). Though ultimately unsuccessful, this demonstration of political organizing power and grassroots action would prove to be a precursor to the more elaborate partisan tactics that would follow in the 1800 campaign (Chambers 117-18). On the other side of the aisle, a small clique of leading Federalists used their political muscle to influence the outcome in states like New Jersey where the electors were chosen by the legislative assembly. Writing to fellow Massachusetts Federalist Theodore Sedgewick, Jonathan Dayton of New Jersey confided

"that I think it possible for you & me with a little aid from a few others to effect [the outcome]" (Freeman, *Affairs* 220).

The jockeying for the presidency, which had started early with intense battles for the control of legislatures in key states, began in earnest on a national level with the publication of Washington's "Farewell Address" in September of 1796. The Republican press quickly tried to seize the initiative with personal attacks on Adams, calling him the "champion of kings, ranks, and titles" who would preside over the nation as "His Rotundity" and usher in a hereditary monarchy that would lead to the ascendance of son John Quincy (McCullough 462). Using the party press to agitate the local populace on wedge issues like the Jay Treaty and Hamiltonian program, Madison and his followers fell just short of their objective in swinging several key states into the Republican column (Elkins and McKitrick 519-23). Federalists quickly countered, reprising an accusation from the revolutionary era that Jefferson had demonstrated cowardice in the face of the enemy when he fled Monticello due to the threat of a British cavalry assault during the 1781 invasion of Virginia. The Federalist papers also called Jefferson an "atheist" and a "Jacobin"—both highly charged accusations in an age of fairly uniform religious practices and a menacing radicalism that was spreading across Europe (McCullough 462-63).

In addition to waging political warfare in the press, active partisans "attempted to secure electoral votes through a combination of promises, threats, and appeals to principle. Weapons of combat included social calls as well as pamphlets, newspaper essays, and personal letters, often hand delivered by local politicians with national connections" (Freeman, *Affairs* 221). For example, an assemblage of Philadelphia

Republicans printed a series of circulars—that were often hand delivered in order to "avoid the prying eyes of Federalist postmasters"—outlining the voting process and attacking Adams' candidacy (Pasley, *The First* 357). The third in the series read as follows:

> Thomas Jefferson is a firm REPUBLICAN,—John Adams is an avowed MONARCHIST….*Thomas Jefferson* first drew the declaration of American independence,—he first framed the sacred political sentence, that all men are *born* equal. *John Adams* says this is all a farce and a falsehood….Which of those, freeman of Pennsylvania, will you have for your President? (Pasley, *The First* 354).

The Pennsylvania circulars featured the names of each of the fifteen pro-Republican electors so that citizens could accurately transcribe them onto their handwritten ballots, thereby satisfying laws drafted by Federalists which were designed to suppress the vote from Republican-leaning rural parts of the state where citizens might be unfamiliar with the full slate of electors or misspell the names of these statewide officials when producing their ballots (Elkins and McKitrick 519-23).

Throughout the nation, but particularly in competitive states where the outcome was in doubt or the populous had significant voice in the outcome, the Election Day scene was filled with partisan intensity and drama. In Pennsylvania, mobs had formed leading to the arrest and detention of over sixty rioters. Republican partisans were active in the streets of Philadelphia, brazenly flying the French tricolor and, in some instances, preventing those without French cockades from voting (Pasley, *The First* 361). Outraged Federalists deplored an open letter by the French minister which threatened war unless

American foreign policy abruptly changed as a result of the election—it was alleged that "Philadelphia's rich, but pacifist, Quakers had been frightened away from their usual establishment allegiances by the[se] implicit threats" (Pasley, *The First* 364).

In New England, the electoral contest began to take on ominous sectional and religious overtones in response to the unprecedented level of foreign influence in America's domestic affairs. New Englanders began to see the "godless French" as a distinct threat to established churches and amplified their attacks on Jefferson's religious views (Pasley, *The First* 368-71). In Connecticut, horrified Federalists openly discussed the possibility of disunion, foreshadowing the 1814 Hartford Convention which formalized the movement among northern states to separate from a union that appeared to be dominated by southern and Republican interests. The *Hartford Connecticut Courant* suggested that "the moral and political sentiments and habits of the citizens of the southern states" were so alien to those of New England that the nation had "already approached near to the era, WHEN THEY MUST BE DIVIDED". Of particular concern was the Three-Fifths Compromise, which the northern states complained was both morally repugnant and politically prejudicial (Pasley, *The First* 376).

Contemporary scholarship provides a detailed picture of Adams' fateful decision to preserve Washington's cabinet, as well as the political implications of Jefferson's service as Vice President. Adams' decision to retain Washington's cabinet was "one of the most fateful steps of his presidency"—one driven by his overwhelming desire to "preserve Federalist harmony." The president elect confided that "Washington had appointed them and I knew it would turn the world upside down if I removed any one of them" (McCullough 471). Adams had the misfortune of being the first presidential

successor and therefore could not rely upon precedent in making his decision. However, what Adams failed to appreciate was the degree to which these officials took their marching orders from his rival Alexander Hamilton and shared the New Yorker's "High Federalist" leanings. Adams naively passed up an opportunity to install his own confidents in key leadership positions when his cabinet responded to his announced intentions to send James Madison on a peace errand to France by offering their resignations (McCullough 538-39). According to one noted historian, the "Madison proposal would have been a great, subtle stratagem for easing the old cabinet out, except that it was not a stratagem. Adams dropped the Madison idea, and kept on every one of the old secretaries" (Pasley, *The First* 411). From this point forward Adams had to contend with Hamilton's influence and the prospect of internal dissent inspired by the right wing of his own party (McCullough 494).

Intraparty opposition alone had the potential to derail his presidency, but Adams also faced a steady stream of criticism and intrigue from the Republican left. After some initial signs of statesmanship that signaled the potential for a bipartisan accord, things quickly turned sour between Adams and Jefferson (McCullough 473-74). Part of the blame for the inability of the two great leaders to mend fences following the election lay with the party press organs that had propelled the two candidates to first and second place finishes. Though Adams had delivered an inaugural speech that "was by far the most conciliatory statement the opposition had heard from the executive branch since Washington's reelection" and Jefferson had made a similarly gracious statement in support of the new president, the press could not seem to countenance a partisan cease fire (Pasley, *The First* 411). Accordingly, when a correspondent [from Boston's

*Columbian Centinel*] compared the brawl between Jefferson and Adams to a "medieval dynastic squabble" that could be easily patched up "with a marriage between the two families," the editor Ben Russell responded:

> The correspondent who so sanguinely expects the union of '*the roses red and white*,' by the election of Messrs. ADAMS AND JEFFERSON, to the Executive chairs, will assuredly be disappointed. Fire and frost are not more opposite in their natures than those characters are; and the prosperity, honor, and dignity of the United States, depend on an administration *perfectly* federal. That those gentlemen differ essentially on the leading principles of government is certain (Pasley, *The First* 412).

Many of Jefferson's Republican colleagues were equally unwilling to give up the fight. One remarked that Jefferson's "first act in the Senate was to make a *damned time-serving, trimming speech* in which he declared that it was a great pleasure to him to have an opportunity of serving his country under such a tried patriot as John Adams, which was saying to his friends—I am in; kiss my—and go to H-ll" (Meacham 305).

In any event, hope for collaboration and conciliation between the two revolutionary leaders was utterly dashed when Adams revealed that his cabinet was ardently opposed to the president's idea of sending James Madison to Paris in a last ditch effort to patch up relations—this despite the fact that Jefferson had already told the recently inaugurated president that Madison had declined the invitation. From this point forward, wrote Jefferson, the president "never…consulted me as to any measures of the government" and "returned to his former party views" (Meacham 306). As a consequence, Jefferson retreated to the "second office" of government, which he

considered “honorable and easy,” and quietly led the opposition against Adams, confident that “all [his] motions at Philadelphia, here, and everywhere, are watched and recorded” (Meacham 305-15).

With respect to the XYZ Affair and onset of the Quasi War with France, the scholarly record closely corresponds with the portrait embodied in popular educational materials. Whatever differences do exist are largely attributable to the greater abundance of detail found within the scholarly realm, rather than substantial deviations in tone and interpretation. However, two exceptions are worth considering, since they point directly to the way in which American foreign policy helped foster the formation of parties and how parties sought to use the diplomatic crisis to further their partisan ends.

First, the scholarly and primary record provides a more vivid portrayal of the backstage political maneuvering that Adams confronted in manning his delegation to France. Once it became clear that Adams was determined to make one last effort to avoid war by sending a peace mission to Paris, his political opponents began to weigh in on the composition of the commissioners. While the nominations of General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and Virginia Federalist John Marshall stirred little resistance, a number of prominent Federalists were vehemently opposed Adams final choice: former Massachusetts congressmen Elbridge Gerry. Gerry, a nominal Federalist who somehow managed to remain largely above the partisan fray throughout his political career, was viewed with great suspicion by Adams’ cabinet and their sponsor, Alexander Hamilton (Elkins and McKitrick 555-56). However, Adams knew and trusted Gerry far more than the others and his presence would lend the delegation a bipartisan element that would help to appease his Republican critics (McCullough 485-86). Ultimately, Adams

prevailed in his efforts to have Gerry join the peace mission, but his intransigence further eroded his support among the Federalists.

In addition, recent scholarship demonstrates how the publication of the commissioner's dispatches, which highlighted French mistreatment of the American envoys, was a consequence of intense Congressional partisanship that nearly drove the nation to war. Elkins and McKitrick provide the most compelling narrative, which began with set of resolutions, proposed in the House of Representatives, designed to reign in Adams authority to arm merchant vessels in the face of peace negotiations that had evidently failed. In the ensuing debate, Republicans concluded that the Adams administration was withholding the remaining dispatches in order to thwart passage of the measure. Convinced that the dispatches would reveal the continued potential for fruitful negotiation with the French Directory, the Republicans persuaded a large majority of the House to vote for the release of both the dispatches and the envoys' instructions. Adams complied with the House decree and, despite a covering message that the materials be "considered in confidence until members could deliberate on the consequences of their publication," they were quickly leaked to the press and "were being read all over the country" (Elkins and McKitrick 587-88). This episode illustrates the degree to which the nascent party organizations were willing to seize upon the volatile international scene to bolster their popularity among the American electorate. In this instance, Republican efforts to embarrass the president backfired, with tragic consequences for both the party and the nation as America and France drifted toward war.

Finally, recent scholarship provides some additional perspective on the partisan warfare that produced the *Alien and Sedition Acts*. With regard to the origins of the

legislation, recent scholarship mirrors the educational resources reviewed above by resisting an outright condemnation of John Adams for his role in producing this blatantly xenophobic and unconstitutional legislation. For example, David McCullough strikes a familiar tone by stating that:

> the Federalist majority in Congress passed into law extreme measures that Adams had not asked for or encouraged. But then neither did he oppose them, and their passage and his signature on them were to be rightly judged by history as the most reprehensible acts of his presidency (504).

Similarly, Chernow reports that "John Adams always tried to sidestep responsibility for the Alien and Sedition Acts, the biggest blunder of his presidency. He did not shepherd these punitive laws through Congress, but they were passed by a Federalist-dominated Congress during his tenure and with his tacit approval" (571). Interestingly, Chernow notes that in 1807 Adams even stooped to blame Hamilton, who had been shot dead three years earlier, for his tragic error in political judgment, claiming that he had received a memo from the slain Federalist recommending legislation directed against alien inhabitants and hostile newspapermen (571).

However, unlike the educational resources reviewed here—the Founding Brothers video series being the notable exception—scholars shift some of the blame to an overly protective Abigail Adams, who, in an oft cited letter to her friend Mary Cranch, expressed the belief that newspaper editors like Benjamin Bache of the Republican *Aurora* were engaged in conduct that was "so criminal" they ought to be tried in court. Going further, she vented that "daringly do the vile incendiaries keep up in Bache's paper the most wicked and base, violent and culminating abuse [that] nothing will have effect

until Congress passes a Sedition Bill" (McCullough 506). Elkins and McKitrick also cite Abigail's support for a sedition bill, claiming that it "may be suspected that in 1798 John Adams, no less than the protective Abigail, took relish in the thought of Bache and other opposition musketeers being punished for their abusive utterances" (590).

However, while Adams role in the passage of this legislation remains somewhat murky, it seems quite clear that both he and leading Federalists in Congress intended the laws as a multipronged attack on the political opposition leading up to the presidential election. Equally clear from the scholarly record is the willingness of Adams' supporters to defend the laws as wartime necessities. As is typically the case, the truth lay somewhere in the middle. Historian William Nisbet Chambers effectively captures the broader political and strategic imperative which lurked behind what he terms the Federalist "Spirit of 'Ninety-eight," explaining that the legislative agenda during the spring and summer of that year "was prompted by calculations of political advantage, in part by fear of revolutionary France and democratic ideas, in part by a desire to fence off the troubled and troubling world from American confines—which would then become, presumably, peaceful and Federalist" (135). Thus, while there is no question that Federalist lawmakers sought to protect the nation from real and perceived enemies, a close look at the legislative package approved during the session reveals an equivalent, or perhaps even stronger desire, to secure political advantage over rival Republicans.

Beginning with the *Naturalization Act*, it seems clear that Federalists were determined to deny citizenship and, more pointedly suffrage, to an increasingly diverse and vocal group of residents who were outraged by the administration's support for England. These included a large number of Frenchmen—refugees of the terror as well as

those who had supported the colonial struggle for independence and chose to remain in the United States after the war. The law also targeted Irish émigrés whose hatred of England was rooted in centuries of oppression and violence against their island nation (Wood 247). Interestingly, the politics of the *Naturalization Act* would represent a role reversal for both parties, demonstrating the degree to which the desire for partisan advantage could upend longstanding policy preferences in the early republic. According to Gordon Wood, it was:

> ironic that the Federalists should have become frightened by the new immigrants of the 1790s. At the beginning of the decade it was the Federalists, especially Federalists land speculators, who had most encouraged foreign immigration. By contrast, the Jeffersonian Republicans had tended to be more cautious about mass immigration. Since the Republicans believed in a more active hands-on role for people in politics than did the Federalists, they had worried that immigrants might lack the necessary qualifications to sustain liberty and self-government (247-48).

Despite these early disagreements over mass immigration, under Washington's leadership and in the face of instability brought about by the French Revolution, a less partisan Congress agreed to tighten restrictions slightly with an earlier *Naturalization Act* (1795) that extended residency requirements from two to five years, required aliens seeking citizenship to renounce any title of nobility as well as prove they were of "good moral character" and devoted to the Constitution (Wood 248). However, the increasingly volatile international and domestic political environment would bring this short-lived period of bipartisan immigration policy to an end, and with it—at least temporarily—America's unique role in providing a haven for the downtrodden and dispossessed. In

fact, upon the passage of the *Naturalization Act* in June of 1798, one Federalist exclaimed "let us no longer pray that America may become an asylum to all nations" (Wood 249).

The 1798 law not only nearly tripled the residency requirements from five to fourteen years (at a time when, according to census data, life expectancy for United States males hovered around 35 years), but it also required all new immigrants to register with designated officials within 48 hours of their arrival upon American shores. It also "forbade all aliens who were citizens or subjects of a nation with which the United States was at war from becoming American citizens" (Wood 249). In a measure of how partisan the immigration issue had become, the *Naturalization Act* passed by only a single vote in each legislative chamber. Interestingly, proposals that would have prevented all foreign-born persons from voting or holding elective office, while soundly defeated by a two-to-one margin, demonstrate the degree to which many in Congress had turned against non-native born Americans despite the fact that many prominent among them were not very far from their immigrant roots (Elkins and McKitrick 590). With the *Naturalization Act*, the Federalists clearly aimed to discourage further immigration to the United States, particularly among those were likely to affiliate with the Republican opposition, as well as prevent those who had already arrived from earning citizenship and the right to vote for a prolonged period of time.

While the *Naturalization* Act was intended to discourage further immigration of "hordes of wild Irishmen"—as Massachusetts congressmen Harrison Gray Otis would refer to these newcomers—the Federalists also passed a pair of laws to clamp down on foreigners already residing in the United States. The *Alien Act* (or *Alien Friends Act*) and the *Alien Enemies Act*, which were passed in late June and early July of 1798

respectively, gave the executive extraordinary powers to retain and deport foreign subjects judged "dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States." While the *Alien Enemies Act* targeted those who hailed from nations with which the United States was at war and could thus be reasonably considered part of a package of emergency national security measures, the *Alien Act* presented an even greater threat to fundamental liberties by allowing authorities to detain and deport those deemed suspicious during times of peace. Together, the two acts covered a vast array of contingencies and brazenly expanded the power of the Federalist-controlled executive to threaten, incarcerate and, if necessary, deport foreign nationals without due process. These laws sent a chilling message to the large émigré community, but had virtually no tangible effect since war with France was never declared (thus nullifying the enforcement mechanism of the *Alien Enemies Act*) and the president never invoked the *Alien Act* before it expired two years hence. However, as Elkins and McKitrick point out, the original idea:

> was simply to get rid of as many aliens as possible through isolation and wholesale deportation, because the most numerous among them—the "wild Irish"—were of a naturally subversive temper, had pro-French sympathies, and were drawn into Republican politics in America, and because the presence of large numbers of aliens of any sort tended on general principles to threaten the purity of the national character (591).

In response to passage of the *Alien* legislation, "more than a dozen shiploads [of Frenchmen] sailed for France or Saint-Domingue" (Wood 260). In fact, the voluntary exodus was so great that there were never any forced deportations recorded under the provisions of the act (Wood 260).

It is disappointing that none of the educational materials reviewed here materially explore the divisive ethnic politics embodied in the *Naturalization* and twin *Alien Acts.* With twenty-first century America bitterly divided over immigration policy and the establishment of a vast security apparatus designed to protect us from "the enemy within" following the September 11 attacks, secondary students would undoubtedly see connections between the events of 1798 and today. Interestingly, while it is clear that the Federalists intended to silence domestic opposition under the cover of a national emergency (like the *Sedition Act,* the *Alien Act,* which applied in peacetime was set to expire just prior to the election of 1800), the *Alien Enemies Act* remains on the books, providing further opportunities for contemporary students to engage in a meaningful discussion about what constitutes reasonable suppression of civil liberties when the nation is at war.

Understandably, both educational resources and scholarly efforts focus disproportionate attention on the *Sedition Act,* which was the final piece of emergency legislation passed by the Federalist Congress during the French crisis on July 14, 1798. This is likely due to the fact that the legislation presented the first serious challenge to civil liberties protections that had only recently been codified in the Bill of Rights as well as the obvious impact the law had on republican institutions that were still in the formative stages of development. In addition, the *Sedition Act* produced significantly greater controversy because it targeted native-born Americans and other citizens, as opposed to the new and aspiring immigrants who felt the brunt of the earlier measures, but who had minimal political and social standing within the new nation. As noted historian Gordon Wood observes in summarizing the Republican response to the *Sedition*

law, it "was one thing to repress aliens; it was quite another to repress the country's own citizens" (259).

While the number of prosecutions under the *Sedition Act* were relatively few, the political repercussions were vast, impacting both the 1798 Congressional and, more importantly, 1800 presidential contests. Historian Bernard Weisberger observes that:

> [A]mong the many things that made the election of 1800 a crucial moment of national definition, there was one towering circumstance that set it apart from the three that preceded it and the fifty that followed in the next two centuries. It was the only election conducted while there was a law on the books that could and did put men in jail for criticizing the sitting president, who was one of the candidates (200).

Similarly, Susan Dunn observes that:

> [T]he ostensible target of the Sedition Act was newspapers, but its *real* target was the opposition Republican party—for newspapers were the crucial organs of parties, their voice boxes and lungs…A newspaper provides people with the means to carry out together their plans; it is the point of contact among disparate citizens, the means through which they can meet and become unified (104).

In addition, those arrested, tried and punished were some of the most prominent members and supports of the political opposition, including Matthew Lyon, a Republican congressmen from Vermont and Benjamin Franklin Bache, who served as editor of the *Aurora*, perhaps the most prominent Republican newspaper at the time (Wood 262).

Leading Federalists were remarkably aggressive in their pursuit of those deemed traitorous under the broadly worded legislation. In fact, in at least one instance the federal

government acted even before the Sedition law had come into effect, arresting Bache on accusations of seditious libel weeks before the law received President Adams' signature. In all, twenty five prominent Republicans were arrested and ten were convicted—all facing substantial fines and imprisonment (Wood 260-61).

While these prosecutions initially had a chilling effect upon the political opposition, they also galvanized the Republican cause which had been languishing since the publication of the XYZ dispatches. According to Gordon Wood:

> Republican editors were not cowed; indeed, the number of new Republican editors increased dramatically between 1798 and 1800. Just as printers came to see themselves as political professionals, making a living out of politics, so did many Federalists reluctantly come to realize that seditious libel made a very poor political weapon for putting down faction in the kind of democratic society America, at least in its Northern parts, was rapidly becoming (262).

The leaders of the Republican cause to some degree relished the Federalist overreach. James Madison was quick to declare the *Sedition Act* a "palpable and alarming infraction of the constitution" that would incite those who cherished liberty (Dunn 167). In a letter to confidante John Taylor, Jefferson took the long view, urging his Republican friends to remain patient and predicting that "[W]e shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolve, and the people, recovering their true sight, restore their government to its true principles" (Wilentz, *The Rise* 78).

And while scholars uniformly concede both the threat represented by foreign interference in America's domestic affairs and the rise of international tensions following the XYZ Affair, most conclude that Adams and the Federalists had crossed the line by

pointedly excluding the vice president (Jefferson) from the protections afforded by the *Sedition Act* (Wood 259). Similarly, scholars cite the inclusion of a "sunset" provision which would prevent the victorious Republicans from retaliating against their rivals following the 1800 presidential contest as additional evidence of the partisanship embodied in the *Sedition Act*, since a fixed expiration date could not be justified considering the uncertain duration of the foreign threat upon which the law was to have been based (Meacham 313).

In fact, the overwhelming body of evidence suggests that in crafting the *Alien and Sedition Acts*, the Federalist's primary concern was maintaining control over the government, rather than protecting the nation from foreign aggression. One only need to look to Adams' final days in office to see the desperation of Federalist plans as the "lame duck" Congress expanded the size and scope of the judiciary so that the departing president could create a residual Federalist stronghold by populating it with loyal partisans, including the immensely influential John Marshall (Ferling 198-99).

And while Republican leaders and newspaper editors focused their energies on the obvious political hurdles created by the *Alien and Sedition Acts*, Jefferson and Madison initiated a legal and constitutional challenge which would have a far reaching impact on national unity in the years to follow. In drafting the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions the two leaders sought to confer upon states the ability to roll back (or "nullify") federal legislation that was deemed unconstitutional. This doctrine of nullification would emerge throughout the remainder of the 19$^{th}$ century as a principle means of challenging what many—mostly southerners—viewed as a federal regime

intent on expanding its role beyond those powers delegated by the states during the Philadelphia Convention of 1787.

James Madison presciently observed that:

> the management of foreign relations appears to be the most susceptible of abuse of all the trusts committed to a Government, because they can be concealed or disclosed in such parts and at such times as will best suit particular views…Perhaps it is a universal truth that the loss of liberty at home is to be charged to provisions against danger real or pretended from abroad (Meacham 313-14).

War among the European powers, which threatened to engulf the young nation in a war it could ill afford to fight, would provide Federalist leaders with the necessary pretext for an unprecedented attack upon an emerging Republican opposition during one of the most pivotal elections in the history of our nation. While it is true that the nation was able to endure this challenge to the constitution and conduct a peaceful transfer of power among rival parties, this outcome was only one of several that might have transpired during the dark days of 1798-1800. A review of primary materials from this era reveals tremendous uncertainty and outright fear, with many predicting anarchy, civil war or military despotism as likely outcomes of the crisis. In fact, a review of the scholarship leaves one wondering how, in fact, the nation was able to avoid such a fate given the toxic mix of partisan intrigue and international tensions. What emerges clearly, however, is that political leaders who are often lionized in popular educational materials appear willing to allow their quest for partisan advantage to trump principles which had

been firmly grounded in the constitution only a few years earlier—even if that meant dissolution of the very nation they had worked so tirelessly to construct.

Overall, popular textbooks and educational videos provide an uneven portrait of political life during the Adams administration. Only the Founding Brothers series and Kennedy text present a realistic portrayal of the brutal election politics witnessed in 1796, and of these, only the former provides meaningful insight into the political dysfunction and intra-party conflict that defined the Adams era. Treatment of the XYZ Affair is similarly spotty—with the notable exception of the Founding Brothers series, which falters when describing Federalist plans for the new standing army. Finally, with regard to the *Alien and Sedition Acts,* the Kennedy text stands alone in its willingness to explore the political consequences of the Alien Acts, and only this text and the Founding Brothers series provide adequate insight into the political theater which produced the *Sedition Act*. Few secondary students will emerge from their studies of the Adams era with a candid and realistic portrayal of the way in which electoral politics nearly destroyed the young nation. Rather, many will emerge from their survey texts and videos both confused and unable to generate meaningful questions about the nature of political life in early America. As we shall see, things do not improve much when textbook authors and producers of educational videos turn their attention to the climactic election of 1800.

# Chapter 5

## CASE STUDY #3: ELECTION OF 1800

As we have seen, recent textbooks and popular classroom videos gloss over the political fireworks generated during the tumultuous presidency of John Adams. While the Founding Brothers video series and Kennedy texts do explore some of the darker aspects of American political life during this era—namely the violent character of the 1796 election cycle and Federalist efforts to smash the Republican opposition with the Alien and Sedition Acts—the remainder of the sources reviewed here offer tepid banalities that fail to capture the tone and substance of political behavior during one of the most treacherous and volatile periods in American history. When contrasted with recent scholarship and the wealth of available primary source materials, these materials must be approached with caution by secondary educators charged with helping students to form a realistic portrayal of the politics of the early republic.

The election of 1800 was one of the most consequential in American history. When George Washington exited the political stage following his second term in office, he left behind a nation increasingly divided and facing significant domestic and foreign challenges. John Adams had enormous shoes to fill in taking the helm in March 1797, and he had neither the reputation nor the temperament to successfully navigate the politics of the age (McCulloch 467-70). Adams first term had been fraught with peril and his popularity ebbed as he found himself under attack from both a rising Republican organization headed by Thomas Jefferson, (who happened to be the sitting Vice President) and dissatisfied Federalists, lead by their standard bearer, Alexander Hamilton (McCulloch 520-22).

As we have already seen, the war between France and England represented a grave threat to American national security, as the European powers preyed upon American shipping that was vital to the economy of the young nation. French resentment fueled by America's failure to honor the 1778 treaty that made her independence possible lay at the heart of growing tensions between the two former allies, and French warships and privateers began routinely seizing American sailors and cargo on the high seas (Wood 189-92). With many Federalists clamoring for war, Adams, instead, sent a delegation across the Atlantic charged with preserving peace and securing American maritime rights. The French envoys responded by refusing to see the Americans without first receiving a public apology, an intergovernmental loan commitment of approximately $12 million, and payment of a bribe totaling the equivalent of $250,000 (Weisberger 181-82). Outraged, the American team sailed for home where news of the "XYZ Affair" would force Adams hand and lead to the outbreak of a "Quasi War" that would rage for the remainder of his only term in office. From the standpoint of his detractors, Adams' failure to faithfully preserve Washington's neutrality proclamation left him isolated and exposed to a withering partisan attack (Gordon 246-47).

On the domestic front, Adams had to contend with the emergence of an organized opposition—or "faction" as they were then called—that threatened not only his ability to govern, but the structural and sectional integrity of the young nation. While Jefferson and Madison had waged a quiet campaign to thwart Hamilton's initiatives during the Washington administration, their feud with the Federalists now became a full-throated public spectacle with increasingly sectional overtones. Political discourse during the run up to the election became increasingly bitter, personal, and vindictive. Sadly, Adams

could not even rely upon the support of his Federalist colleagues during the dark hours of the campaign. His break with Hamilton over how to deal with the French was complete, and his cabinet, filled with holdovers from Washington's second term, handpicked by Hamilton, provided scant comfort. Hamilton had even published a lengthy pamphlet attacking Adams on the election eve, though his outrageous accusations did more to cripple his own legacy than that of the sitting president (Chernow, *Hamilton* 622-25).

The election of 1800 would feature a rematch between Adams and Jefferson and promised to be one of the ugliest campaigns in American history. Though neither man openly campaigned for the position, surrogates waged a brutal campaign in the emerging party presses and through vast personal networks and nascent party organizations that formed the basis of these early party systems (Freeman, *Affairs* 227-35). Adams was deemed a "monarchist" whose thirst for power would only be satisfied by the establishment of a British-style administrative state designed to lord over the young republic, squashing personal freedoms and all political opposition. Jefferson was cast as an atheistic revolutionary agitator who threatened to enmesh the United States in the ongoing, dangerous European war. Both sides hurled vulgar insults, spreading scandalous rumors in an effort to undermine electoral support. In a sad commentary on the times, both men—former brothers in arms and leading patriots who joined forces to author and secure passage of the Declaration of Independence in 1776—failed to either stop or disavow these personal attacks, leaving a residual bitterness that would last until nearly the end of their long lives (McCulloch 462-66).

Popular educational materials differ significantly from scholarly sources and the primary record when describing the vicious 1800 campaign. Generally speaking, while

the educational materials acknowledge the campaign as both hotly contested and bitterly partisan, these resources fail to capture the lurid darkness and nearly catastrophic divisiveness of American politics during this era. In addition, several prominent scholastic publications fail to provide a balanced perspective that fairly distributes blame for the horrid state of political affairs.

Joyce Appleby's *The American Journey* provides comparatively little coverage of the 1800 campaign, focusing primarily on how the role of the candidates differed from what is common today. She does call the campaign "bitter," pointing out that many Federalists accused Jefferson of being "godless" while Republicans "warned that the Federalists favored the wealthy and would bring back monarchy" (277). The only mention of campaign tactics is a reference to the entirely respectable "letter-writing" campaign carried out by supporters of both sides. This summary of events characterizes the campaign as purely ordinary by historical and contemporary standards, completely glossing over any uncomfortable details that would expose the political character of the founding generation as they battled throughout the 1800 election cycle.

Gerald Danzer's *The Americans* also offers an abysmal treatment of the 1800 campaign, dedicating only one brief paragraph to this absolutely crucial election. In it, Danzer describes the contest as a "hard-fought struggle," suggesting a politics that was both respectable and commensurate with our reverential view of the founding generation. Though Danzer does acknowledge that during the campaign "[E]ach party hurled wild charges at the other," he explains away the ruthless campaign tactics and toxic rhetoric as "probably inevitable" given the fact that the "government was only 12 years old" and "Americans were not accustomed to the peaceful transfer of power from one political

group to another." The author blithely concludes that "both sides limited their fighting to votes, not guns" (184). Thus, the Danzer text fails on multiple counts to provide a realistic portrayal of the 1800 election campaign. His treatment is far too brief to establish any meaningful context that would allow students to grasp the importance of the campaign and, though he apportions blame equally to both parties for some of the nasty behavior, he whitewashes the campaign tactics and public discourse to make it appear to young readers that the founding generation preserved a respectful dignity throughout this sordid episode in American political life.

David Kennedy's *American Pageant* dedicates a relatively substantial three pages of text and visuals to this election. Under the subheading "Federalist and Republican Mudslingers," the text acknowledges the Federalist inspired "whispering campaigns" against Jefferson, citing sources which accused Jefferson of "having robbed a widow and her children of a trust fund and of having fathered numerous mulatto children by his own slave women" (202). The text also references recent DNA testing establishing a genetic link between Jefferson and Sally Hemmings, whose relationship is detailed in a special section entitled "Examining the Evidence" located on the following page (203).

Kennedy also features a primary source excerpt chronicling the overblown fears of influential clergymen like Yale President Rev. Timothy Dwight, who direly predicted that should Jefferson triumph, "the Bible would be cast into a bonfire, our holy worship changed into a dance of [French] Jacobin phrensy [sic], our wives and daughters dishonored, and our sons converted into the disciples of Voltaire and the dragoons of Marat" (202). Finally, *The American Pageant* includes a reproduction of an 1807 political

cartoon linking Jefferson with French Revolutionary despotism, unfavorably comparing his leadership with that of Washington (203).

It is worth noting that while *The American Pageant* does provide the reader with a fairly detailed and candid view of the intense partisan warfare and sordid presidential campaign ethics evident in the early years of the republic, the text does not present a balanced perspective. The authors of this popular text leave the impression that the "mudslinging" was carried out only by Federalists intent on thwarting Jefferson's rise to power. The attacks on Adams are attributed to disgruntled members of his own faction, not Jeffersonian operatives who, it will be shown, conducted an elaborate smear campaign against the sitting president. The paucity of criticism against Adams attributed to his Republican foes relates to the excessive cost of naval forces that Adams had ordered bolstered in the face of the French seaborne menace (202). Thus, as Kennedy would have it, the Federalists trashed Jefferson *personally* while Republican criticisms took the high road by focusing on *policy* differences between the two emerging parties.

Several popular educational videos provide a more realistic view of the ethical transgressions and bare-knuckle politics displayed during the 1800 campaign. Unsurprisingly, the most detailed portrait comes from the Founding Brothers in which celebrated author David McCullough begins the sequence by proclaiming that the "election of 1800 was as vicious as any in our history". Later, noted author Joseph J. Ellis observes that:

> [B]oth sides are saying some unbelievably libelous things. They make fun of Jefferson. . .as a pointed headed intellectual. Meanwhile the press is accusing Adams of being a monarchist. They claim that if Adams is reelected he plans to

> bring a stable of prostitutes from England and bring them into the new White House in order to set up…a ring of prostitution there.

The video also recounts the way in which both Federalists and Republicans used the press to carry out character assassination in an effort to sway the electorate. Here, unlike the Kennedy text, the video focuses on the Republicans' recruitment of newspaperman James T. Callender to slander the sitting president. In one broadside featured in the video, Callender writes "[T]his federal gem is not only a repulsive pendant, a gross hypocrite and an unprincipled oppressor but in private life one of the most egregious fools upon the continent". Later, according to the film, a jilted Callender will emerge in front of the White House to warn Jefferson (and confirm his connection to the press attacks on Adams) "[S]ir, you know that by lying I made you president and I'll be damned if I don't unmake you by telling the truth". The History Channel series also cites Hamilton's final break with Adams—scanning the cover page of Hamilton's aforementioned published attack—as a means of highlighting divisive the intraparty warfare that dominated this election cycle.

In addition, while The Presidents reports only that the election was "highly contentious," the narrator of the biographical Jefferson: Philosopher of Freedom states that "[I]n terms of negative advertising even today's political campaigns have not surpassed that of 1800. Jefferson was attacked for his views on religion, education, democracy and culture". This is followed by a reprise of the quote attributed to the Rev. Timothy Dwight found in the Kennedy text. The video then closes its treatment of the election campaign with two additional quotes from the Federalist press ringing the alarm bell about the dangers of Jefferson assuming the executive office.

Finally, the American Experience biography Alexander Hamilton provides limited information about the 1800 campaign, focusing exclusively on the pamphlet Hamilton wrote attacking Adams in the weeks leading up to the balloting. As the narrator of the video explains, "[I]t is 1800. John Adams is up for re-election. Hamilton is determined to stop him and promote another Federalist candidate. His weapon—a vicious fifty-page pamphlet directed against the leader of his own party. All of his experience as a writer, and his skills as a lawyer, are now put to the task of destroying the president's reputation". The camera then turns to an actor portraying Hamilton who reads an excerpt from the tract which describes Adams as someone with a "disgusting egotism, vanity without bounds, an uncontrolled jealousy, which colors his every eccentric judgment. His ill humors have divided and distracted the supporters of the government". While limited in scope, this segment does provide a clear sense of the intraparty feud that likely cost Adams the election as well as provides the viewer with a vivid look at the hardball tactics employed by members of the founding generation.

While popular educational materials generally supply a brief, sanitized and/or unbalanced rendering of the 1800 campaign, scholarly sources and the primary record reveal a much darker portrait of the politics of the founding era. These differences cannot be attributed simply to the need for brevity in popular survey texts used in secondary schools throughout the nation. Rather, it would appear that authors and publishers have made a conscious decision to present the politics of the early republic in a way that fails to capture the kind of rough and tumble theatrics that might dim student perceptions of the founding generation. By contrast, a number of recent scholarly works provide ample

coverage of the 1800 campaign and paint a portrait of political affairs greatly at odds with standard high school texts and, to a lesser degree, popular educational videos.

For example, Freeman begins her analysis before the 1800 campaign even gets underway with efforts by Hamilton to ensure that the pivotal state of New York would fall squarely into the Federalist column. In 1800 most presidential electors were chosen by state legislatures, essentially giving these bodies decisive control over the election outcome in each state. Hamilton, concerned that Republicans were on the verge of securing a strong majority that would elevate Jefferson to the presidency, urged that the outgoing legislature be called into session so that the method of choosing electors could be changed to popular voting by district. Hamilton acknowledged that:

> there are weighty objections to the measure [however] scruples of delicacy and propriety…ought to yield to the extraordinary nature of the crisis. They ought not to hinder the taking of a *legal* and *constitutional* step, to prevent an *Atheist* in Religion and a *Fanatic* in politics from getting possession of the helm of the State (233 emphasis in original).

Here we see a principle architect of the constitution trying to manipulate the outcome of the presidential election by calling on a lame duck legislature to subvert the popular will and retroactively alter the state constitution. As Freeman rightly observes, "these politicians justified their actions by declaring them high-minded during a time of crisis; rather than abandoning their republican morals, they were clinging to them as justification for their political sins" (234).

John Ferling also discusses Federalist machinations to retain hold over the executive machinery, citing a bill introduced almost a full year before any ballots were

cast by Pennsylvania Senator James Ross, that would have established a "Grand Committee" consisting of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (a staunch Federalist) and five members of (the Federalist controlled) Congress to "adjudicate any disputes in the election of the president" (135). Ferling demonstrates that, unlike 1796, this election cycle would begin early, with key political players warily bracing for both a contentious campaign and a potentially disputed outcome. Ferling then turns his attention to events also featured in the Founding Brothers video series—Jefferson's hiring of James Callender to carry out a smear campaign against Federalist luminaries, including George Washington. According to Ferling, "Jefferson visited Callender in his lodging and agreed to underwrite additional malicious squibs. Soon other Republicans with deep pockets came forward, likely at the behest of Jefferson, to bankroll the journalist" (136). Note that by placing Jefferson in Callender's lodgings Ferling directly links the author of the Declaration of Independence and presidential aspirant with the nation's first political smear campaign, whereas the Founding Brothers series, routinely used in high school classrooms, goes no further than attributing Callender's hiring to unnamed Republican operatives.

Marcus Daniel's *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* picks up where Ferling's discussion of the party press leaves off, providing detailed biographical portraits of the party press pioneers who would shape the voting preferences of 1800 electorate. According to Daniel, popular opinion during the 1800 campaign hinged largely on public anger over the Alien and Sedition Acts and fears that the Federalists intended to formally establish the Presbyterian Church. It was upon these two themes that the Republican press would focus their attacks in the months leading up

to the vote. For Republican press operatives targeting the religious issue, the goal "was to show that Federalists were determined to establish a national church and religious uniformity in the United States" (272). This line of attack was so successful that after the election Adams would confide to Benjamin Rush that:

> A general suspicion prevailed that the Presbyterian Church was ambitious and aimed at an establishment as a national church. I was represented [in the Republican press] as a Presbyterian and at the head of this political and ecclesiastical project. The secret whisper ran through all the sects, 'Let us have Jefferson, Madison, Burr, anybody, whether they be philosophers, Deists, or even atheists, rather than a Presbyterian President (Daniel 273).

Interestingly, none of the textbooks surveyed nor any of the educational videos widely used in American classrooms mention this line of Republican attack. Instead, discussion of the role of religion in the 1800 contest is limited to questions about Jefferson's faith that are raised in the both the Kennedy text and the Founding Brothers video series.

Edward Larson's *A Magnificent Catastrophe* provides the most detailed portrait of the 1800 campaign to be found in recent scholarly works. By spotlighting the salient features of the 1800 campaign, Larson lays bare the varied shortcomings of popular educational materials. According to Larson, the 1800 campaign featured several developments that were unique to presidential politics of the age. First, the campaign featured a shift away from personal networks supporting regional "favorite sons" and toward more coherent national party organizations that were often sustained by local political operatives. This trend toward truly national campaign would bring about a number of changes, perhaps the most notable, actual campaigning by the candidates

themselves. As evidence Larson recounts a first-of-its-kind campaign swing through the pivotal states of Pennsylvania and Maryland by John Adams in the summer of 1800 (141-42). A second and related feature highlighted by Larson is the first intraparty split which occurred when Hamilton and his followers (known as the "High Federalists") jilted mainstream Federalists, who continued to support John Adams (Larson 146-48). While these first two observations are occasionally found in scholastic materials, Larson offers several additional observations which bring clarity or new insights to the politics of the early republic, not known to the average secondary student.

Among these is Larson's contention that 1800 was the first presidential election in which the religious views of the candidates, and how these were portrayed in the press, played an important role in the outcome. Here Larson connects the dots in a way that other sources, both scholarly and scholastic, fall short. In Larson's view, efforts by leading Federalists to paint Jefferson as a godless atheist would backfire. According to this interpretation, Adams' failure to condemn the attacks or throttle the pro-administration press "left [him] open to charges of complacency in promoting state religion, which played into the hands of the Republicans…By their deft handling of religious issues during the campaign, Republicans not only defended Jefferson. They also put their opponents on the defensive by linking Adams's popular support of civil religion to popular concerns over the authoritarian tendencies of Federalists generally" (177-78). Thus, instead of highlighting *either* Federalist attacks on Jefferson's religious views *or* Republican demagoguery about Federalist plans to establish Presbyterianism as the national religion, Larson paints a more interesting and familiar portrait of party

organizations looking to exploit social cleavages in an effort to turn the vote in their favor.

In addition, Larson devotes an entire chapter to the impact that Gabriel Prosser's attempted slave rebellion in Virginia would have on the tenor and substance of the 1800 campaign. Prosser's revolt, which was inspired by the success of Toussaint Louverture's 1793 takeover of Saint-Domingue, presented both challenges and opportunities for the two parties as word of the conspiracy spread in the months leading up to the 1800 vote. The Federalists would quickly seize the initiative by linking Prosser's actions to Republican egalitarian rhetoric and support for the French Jacobins. For example, one Federalist paper opined "[T]ruly Mr. J., should the business end in massacre, you and your disciples are the men who are the cause of it, and for every outrage and murder the Negroes may commit, you stand accountable" (195).

In addition, several Federalists observers cited the well documented role of white French co-conspirators to turn back criticism of the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts. According to Larson, Federalist newspapers "latched on to this testimony and published it along with accusations that the revolutionary rhetoric of domestic Republicans inspired the slaves to revolt. Anything linking French Jacobins to domestic instability helped to justify the Federalists' Alien Act and counter Republican criticism of it" (196).

The Federalists also sought to raise fears that Republican governance would be hamstrung in the face of this and potential future uprisings. For example, Federalist printer William Cobbett suggested that "The late revolt…amongst the Negroes of Virginia…will make Jefferson and his party very cautious how they do any act which

may stir the sleeping embers of that alarming fire which, were it once rekindled, would probably make all the southern states what Hispaniola now is" (Larson 195).

For Jefferson and the Republicans, "how to handle the conspirators was more than simply a moral or an ethical question. From a political standpoint, Virginia Republicans needed to display sufficient toughness to assure frightened citizens (particularly in key southern states) that a Jefferson administration would keep the peace and suppress leveling insurrections. At the same time, however, showing excessive harshness could alienate voters opposed to slavery or sympathetic to those caught up in the aborted insurrection" (Larson 194). According to Larson, Pennsylvania presented an immediate challenge, since it was a "hotbed of radical republicanism and a center for America's growing abolition movement [and would] hold its state legislative election in four weeks—with fifteen electoral votes hanging in the balance" (194).

Ultimately, Republican strategy focused on denying the link between their campaign rhetoric and the actions of Prosser and his associates, launching a series of countercharges, including the suggestion that the initiation of trade talks between the Adams administration and the Saint-Domingue rebel leader had "contributed more to the unrest than anything the Republicans said or did" (Larson 196). According to this view, the Federalists had enhanced the legitimacy of the rebels by engaging in trade discussions—a prospect that could only enhance the aspirations of those who would throw off the shackles of slavery and claim political autonomy. The Republicans also denied, contrary to undisputed trial testimony, that Prosser was aided by any outside actors, calling the conspiracy a purely domestic affair in an effort to undercut any resurgent support for the Alien and Sedition Acts. According to Larson, Governor James

Monroe even went as far as suppressing or destroying evidence of white participation and pressuring Virginia law enforcement officials to refrain from filing charges against any white men in the case (197).

Prosser was finally captured and hanged with several co-conspirators on October 10, 1800, just as the first round of voting in the fall state elections was getting underway. Yet despite the efforts of both parties to capitalize on this surge of violence directed at the heart of the American slave system, Larson reveals that:

> neither the Federalists nor the Republicans spoke substantively to the underlying issue of slavery. Even though most northern states had abolished slavery by 1800, it remained deeply entrenched in the South. Neither party could hope to win the presidency if it took a strong stand on slavery, so they both equivocated on what was already emerging as the most divisive topic in American politics (199).

Though the Prosser conspiracy provides a useful lens through which to view the shape and substance of the 1800 campaign, none of the popular educational materials reviewed here even refer to the event in the context of the election cycle. However, to do so would allow youngsters to better see how our political leaders, electoral system and the news media have changed very little when it comes to handling controversial issues which emerge in the heat of an electoral contest.

Several recently published biographies also present a less reverential picture of the 1800 campaign than is typically found in leading scholastic materials. David McCulloch's *John Adams* provides further confirmation of the biased portrayal found in Kennedy's *The American Pageant*. Rather than cast Adams as the sole purveyor of caustic campaign tactics, McCulloch rightly attributes equal share of the ugliness to

Jefferson and his associates. For example, McCulloch devotes considerable attention to the link between Jefferson and Callender, unearthing a published diatribe aimed squarely at Adams masculinity in which the president is called a "hideous hermaphroditical character which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman" (537). Clearly, these Republican-inspired attacks upon Adams were not confined to policy disputes, as they are characterized by Kennedy. Rather, as McCulloch and the primary record confirm, these were mean spirited attacks of a very personal nature carried out by unscrupulous journalists like Callender—acting at the behest of Jefferson himself—which had the effect of demeaning and poisoning the political process.

Chernow provides another detailed view of the intraparty toxicity of the 1800 campaign by citing large sections of Hamilton's published attack upon the president which precipitated a full fledged schism in the nascent Federalist organization. Chernow correctly points out that Hamilton's aim was to both elevate the possibility of Charles C. Pinckney's selection as president and "increase the probability of excluding a third candidate [i.e. Burr] of whose unfitness all sincere Federalists are convinced"—a strategy that the Founding Brothers video fails to consider (623). However, Hamilton's "Letter Concerning John Adams" moved well beyond policy differences—it was deeply personal, calling into question the president's character, intellect and even his sanity. For most observers Hamilton had gone off the deep end, allowing his own pride and vanity to cloud his usually sharp political acumen (Chernow, *Hamilton* 622-25). But such were the politics of 1800—personal, vindictive, petty and devoid of a seriousness that one would expect from the men of the founding generation. From the perspective of a need for

historical objectivity, little of this bad behavior is chronicled in the textbooks and videos that are widely used in American classrooms.

While it is clear that popular educational resources fail to convey a vivid, honest and balanced portrait of the 1800 election campaign, textbooks and other producers of these materials miss the boat entirely when it comes to the disputed outcome and selection of the new president by the House of Representatives in early 1801.

The bitter campaign had finally come to an end as votes were cast for the nation's highest office in the autumn of 1800. The balloting was extremely close, with Burr's home state of New York, as predicted, barely tipping the balance in favor of the Republicans. However, through a flaw in our early voting methods that would later be corrected by the 12th Amendment, Jefferson ended up in a tie with his running mate Aaron Burr.

Few were surprised when Aaron Burr refused to decline the presidency and so the vote was thrown into the House of Representatives, which was controlled by the "lame duck" Federalists. The House remained deadlocked for a week, precipitating an unprecedented constitutional and political crisis. As the nation stood on the precipice, the contest was finally decided on the 36th round of voting, when Federalist Representative James Bayard of Delaware submitted a blank ballot elevating Jefferson to the presidency (Freeman, *Affairs* 250-53).

What contributed to the outcome of the balloting in the House of Representatives has been a source of speculation since the election itself. It is widely acknowledged in both scholarly and educational materials that Alexander Hamilton used his considerable influence among the Federalist dominated legislature to secure victory for Jefferson. That

Hamilton would conspire to elevate Jefferson to the presidency is surprising indeed; the two men failed to see eye to eye on nearly every significant political issue facing the young nation. That Hamilton would work so diligently to persuade his Federalist colleagues in the House of Representatives to support Jefferson provides us with a vivid reminder of the degree to which Hamilton personally loathed and detested Burr and thought him a dangerous man to place in the nation's highest office (Chernow, *Hamilton* 632-35). However, scholarly sources and the primary record reveal another motive which may explain the actions of Hamilton and other leading Federalists—an agreement struck with the Jefferson camp to protect key Federalist programs and officeholders once the new Republican administration took charge. It is this rationale which scholastic resources fail to present.

Three popular textbooks fail completely in relating the tension, drama and back room horse trading that characterized the outcome of the vote in the House of Representatives. Joyce Appleby's *American Journey* reports that when confronted with the deadlock the "Federalists saw a chance to prevent the election of Jefferson" and supported Burr until finally, "at Alexander Hamilton's urging, one Federalist decided not to vote for Burr" allowing Jefferson to assume the presidency (277). Appleby's rendition not only fails to speculate on a potential deal between the Federalists and the candidates, but also gives no reason for Hamilton's decision to side with Jefferson. This oversight can only leave students confused by Hamilton's actions, since a previous chapter gives considerable attention to the personal antagonisms and ideological differences between the two men that would give birth to our nation's first political parties.

Danzer does a better, though still inadequate job, of recounting the election outcome. Though only a paragraph in length, Danzer at least tries to capture the drama of the House proceedings, referring to them as "six feverish days" of balloting. He also reports that Hamilton finally "intervened [and] persuaded enough Federalists to cast blank votes to give Jefferson a majority of two votes" and, unlike Appleby, explains that although "Hamilton opposed Jefferson's philosophy of government, he regarded Jefferson as much more qualified for the presidency than Burr was" (184-85).

Though more revealing than Appleby's account, the reader of the Danzer text is left with the distinct impression that Hamilton's actions were based entirely on the rational calculation of each candidate's "qualifications" for the office and not on any personal bias that Hamilton might have held. Nor does it allude to a possible deal that the Federalists may have struck with the Jefferson camp that swung the election outcome against Burr.

Kennedy's *The American Pageant* gives scant treatment to the pivotal voting in the lower chamber, dedicating only one paragraph to the deadlock and eventual selection of Jefferson by a body that "moved slowly to a climax, as exhausted representatives snored in their seats" (204). Not only does Kennedy downplay the drama in the House and the widespread fear among the American people that the contest would be decided by hostilities, but he claims that the "agonizing deadlock was broken at last when a few Federalists, despairing of electing Burr and hoping for moderation from Jefferson, refrained from voting" allowing the election to go "to the rightful candidate" (204). Kennedy's textbook thus leaves the reader with the impression that it was simply fatigue that led the Federalist lawmakers to choose Jefferson over Burr, not strongly held views

about the character of each man or the ability of the Federalists to extract favorable concessions from one of the candidates.

Neither The Presidents nor Thomas Jefferson: Philosopher of Freedom mentions the deadlocked election. Founding Brothers covers the election outcome and actually alludes to the possibility of a deal, reporting that when "the House cast its first votes on Feb 11, 1801 neither Jefferson nor Burr received the necessary 2/3 majority. The tally remained unchanged for six days as arguments and *deal making* raged in Congressional back rooms". However, the video reports Hamilton's preference for Jefferson as a consequence of personal animosities between the Federalist leader and Burr. Accordingly, the narrator tells us that "an unlikely champion came to Jefferson's rescue—Alexander Hamilton" upon which we hear the following quote from a letter Hamilton penned professing "[T]he public good is to be preferred to private consideration and therefore Jefferson is to be preferred. As to Burr, there is nothing in his favor. He is bankrupt beyond redemption except by the plunder of his country".

The interpretation offered here is that Hamilton was principally motivated by his distrust and hatred of Burr and this conclusion is reinforced by commentary subsequently offered by noted historian Carol Berkin, who observes that:

> Hamilton dislikes Burr viscerally and throws all his weight—cashes in all his chits to get Jefferson elected. People are amazed. And he says Jefferson is a man of honor. He is not running for the presidency for his own personal gain. Burr, on the other hand, is a loose cannon. He's not interested in the country's welfare. He's a sleaze. And he's dangerous.

Finally, the video reports that "in the 36th round of voting, Federalist Congressmen James Bayard of Delaware *inexplicably* changed his vote and broke the deadlock. Thomas Jefferson would be the third president of the United States". Here the video leaves the viewer with no understanding as to why Bayard may have changed his vote, thus neglecting a possible deal between Jefferson forces and key Federalists.

Unlike Founding Brothers, the American Experience biography Alexander Hamilton dedicates minimal airtime to the 1800 election outcome. The trust of its coverage, however, parallels other sources which conclude that Hamilton's intervention on behalf of Jefferson had more to do with personalities than policies. As the narrator informs the viewer, Hamilton "sees both men, not as statesmen, but as contemptible politicians—pandering to the populace by telling voters what they want to hear. Hamilton must now choose the lesser of two evils". Despite this interpretive approach, the video does hint at more practical reasons for siding with Jefferson by cutting away to an actor portraying Hamilton who notes that "Jefferson has a tincture of fanaticism, it's true. . .but, he's as likely as any man I know to compromise". Finally, this biographical profile completely sidesteps the possibility of a deal by noting that in "a flurry of letters, Hamilton urges one congressman to switch his vote. The tie is broken. Thomas Jefferson becomes the third president of the United States". Unfortunately, despite setting the stage for an examination of a potential deal, the American Experience producers fail to explain what may have motivated the unnamed congressmen to cast his vote for Jefferson.

A high school student who relied upon popular educational materials could be forgiven for coming away with little appreciation of the dramatic intensity of the election outcome or of the lengths to which the founding generation would go to cut deals to

secure the nation's highest office. As for the textbooks, coverage of this crucial series of events is extremely limited and none of the texts even hint at political behavior that might cast a negative light on the politics practiced by founding generation during the election of 1800. In addition, only the Founding Brothers video provides significant coverage of these events, yet offers an interpretation which places too much emphasis on personal relationships and assessments of character at the expense of policy differences and patronage considerations that the primary record indicates were at the heart of the decision. As an examination of scholarly materials and the primary record will reveal, this election was decided not only because of personal animosities and petty jealousies, but more importantly by politically savvy Federalists who approached the disputed outcome as a golden opportunity to cut a favorable deal to preserve political appointees and key programs that the electorate had narrowly rejected in selecting the Republican ticket in 1800.

The scholarship and voluminous trail of primary materials relating to the decisive vote in the House of Representatives confirms that Jefferson's elevation to the presidency hinged upon the perception among Federalists that he was better prepared to lead the nation, was possessed of character superior to his running mate-turned-rival, and was more willing to consider (and would more likely honor) terms offered by leading Federalists in exchange for their support (Freeman, *Affairs* 242-44; Chernow, *Hamilton* 632-35; Ferling 178-81).

The record confirms that throughout the electoral crisis Hamilton used his considerable influence over Federalists in the Congress to thwart Burr, whom he did not trust with the reins of power, and elevate his rival Jefferson to the presidency. Hamilton

thought Burr was “bankrupt beyond redemption” and “will be content with nothing short of permanent power in his own hands” (Chernow, *Hamilton* 625). In a lengthy attachment to a January 4, 1801 letter to Federalist colleague John Rutledge, Jr., Hamilton presented a nine point indictment of Burr’s character, which included the following charges:

> 1. He is in every sense a profligate; a voluptuary in the extreme, with uncommon habits of expense;…suspected on strong grounds of having *corruptly* served the views of the Holland Company, in the capacity of a member of our legislature; and understood to have been guilty of several breaches of probity in his pecuniary transactions. His very friends do not insist upon his integrity.
>
> 6. No mortal can tell what his political principles are. He has talked *all around the compass*…The truth seems to be that he has no plan but that of *getting* power by *any* means and *keeping* it by all means.
>
> 8. He knows well the weak sides of human nature, and takes care to play in with the passions of all with whom he has intercourse…Cold and collected by nature and habit, he never loses sight of his object and scruples no means of accomplishing it. He is artful and intriguing to an inconceivable degree. In short all his conduct indicates that he has in view nothing less than the establishment of Supreme Power in his own person (Freeman, *Writings* 975-76).

Hamilton was not alone in his personal hatred of Burr. Many among the founding generation found his character wanting and modern scholars have echoed their sentiments (Ellis, *Founding Brothers* 20-47). According to Gordon Wood:

> when his efforts to become vice-president in 1796 did not pan out, he lost his interest in his Senate seat; he stopped attending the sessions and devoted his attention to making money through speculation. Because there were more opportunities for money-making in the state legislature than in the Congress, he entered the New York assembly in the hope of aiding his business associates and restoring his personal fortune. He pushed for. . .any scheme in which he and his friends had an interest (282).

Thus, both scholarly and scholastic materials tend to agree that questions about Burr's character and personal animosities between Hamilton and his fellow New Yorker would ultimately contribute to Federalist support for Jefferson. However, popular secondary textbooks and videos diverge from scholarly efforts in their failure to explore the back room dealings between the Federalists and the two Republican candidates, which undoubtedly played a pivotal role in deciding the vote in the House of Representatives. And it is here that the student of history is denied crucial evidence of the kind of "horse trading" that is more typically associated with the modern politics but not members of the founding generation.

Rumors of a possible deal to decide the presidency were rampant, in fact, long before the election was thrown into the House of Representatives. According to Nancy Isenberg, rumors circulating among political insiders put Burr at the center of a backroom deal which held that:

> Adams was to be kept in office by a group of moderates from both parties, with the understanding that Jefferson would succeed him after four years, fully supported by that same collection of moderates. In preparation for the transition,

> Adams would appoint to his cabinet men whom Jefferson approved. One such rumor put Burr in the middle, brokering the deal (203).

Scholars continue to debate whether Burr actively schemed for the presidency. Most, such as Larson, Freeman and Weisberger, condemn Burr for his failure to reject the office once a tie emerged in the Electoral College, but see little evidence that he pursued a deal. Others, however, find considerable evidence linking Burr to an attempted deal with the Federalists (Baker 553-98). However, despite the lack of a "smoking gun," there seems to be little debate among recent scholars over whether Jefferson entered into an arrangement with his Federalist adversaries to secure the nation's highest office.

The scholarly evidence of a deal between Jefferson and the Federalists is quite compelling. For example, Wood's treatment of the deadlock reports that "Senator James Bayard, a moderate Federalist from Delaware, received from General Samuel Smith, a Republican from Maryland, what Bayard took to be firm assurances from Jefferson that he would preserve the Federalist financial program, maintain the navy, and refrain from dismissing subordinate Federalist officeholders except for cause" (285) Similarly, Freeman reports Federalist efforts to deal with both candidates as follows:

> As Bayard himself later explained it, after weeks of balloting, he made a last attempt to 'obtain terms of capitulation' from one of the candidates. Unable to speak directly with them without appearing to scheme, he intimated his intentions to Edward Livingston, Burr's friend and supposed agent, and John Nicholas, Jefferson's 'particular friend'. Livingston denied having any influence with Burr, leading Bayard to give up on the New Yorker. Nicholas, however, was willing to discuss Federalist terms and, having heard them, declared them reasonable (250).

Hamilton's role in crafting a deal with the Jefferson camp is covered extensively by Chernow. The author portrays Hamilton as a man of declining influence, who nevertheless, made serious efforts to deny Burr the presidential office. Consistent with the scholastic resources, Chernow reports Hamilton's distrust of Burr as the main reason that Jefferson was to be preferred. However, he also suggests that the outlines of a deal appeared in a letter from Hamilton to Federalist colleague Gouverneur Morris penned on December 24. In it, Hamilton makes it clear that he "could support Jefferson with a clear conscience *if* the latter provided 'assurances on certain points: the maintenance of the present system, especially on the cardinal articles of public credit, a *navy*, *neutrality*'" (italics his and in the original). He then closes by instructing Morris to make "any discreet use you think fit of this letter" (636).

An examination of the historic record would appear to support the conclusions of Chernow and other scholars. The evidence shows that throughout the period of deadlock, Hamilton fired off a string of letters to influential Federalists in Congress urging them to cut a deal with Jefferson's surrogates. For example, in a December 23, 1800 letter from Hamilton to Massachusetts representative Harrison Otis Gray, the Federalist leader instructs Gray to:

> make it a ground of exploration with Mr. Jefferson or his confidential friends and the means of obtaining from him some assurances of his future conduct. The three essential points for us to secure is.[sic] 1 The continuance of the neutral plan *bone fide* towards the belligerent powers 2 The preservation of the present System of public credit—3 The maintenance & *gradual* increase of our navy. Other matters may be left to take their chance…(Davis 282).

Chernow comments on the perceived propriety of this type of deal-making by the founding generation. He states that "recent scholarship has tended to exonerate Burr from charges that he did anything untoward, and he certainly did not bargain outright" (637). Jefferson, on the other hand, is viewed as having concocted a "serviceable fiction that he had refused to negotiate with the Federalists." According to this author the situation was "tailor-made for Jefferson, who specialized in subtle, round-about action" and that he undoubtedly "believed his own version" and did not tend to "lie to others so much as to himself" (637). Thus, we have in Chernow's rendering the outline of an offer from Hamilton to a willing partner in Jefferson.

According to Chernow, in the end, Federalist representative James Bayard broke the deadlock in Jefferson's favor after "huddling with two friends of Jefferson…and set[ting] forth some Federalist prerequisites for supporting Jefferson: he would have to preserve Hamilton's financial system, maintain the navy, and retain Federalist bureaucrats below cabinet level" (638). Jefferson quietly let it be known through his intermediaries that on these points the Federalists would have no cause for worry and Bayard, satisfied that a deal had been tacitly struck, submitted a blank ballot clearing the path for Jefferson to the presidency. Later, prominent Federalist Timothy Pickering would charge that some members of Congress had "*sold* their votes to Mr. Jefferson and *received their pay* in appointment to public offices" (638).

If Chernow's account is to be relied upon, one would be hard pressed to find a more blatant case of political deal making and cronyism in today's Congress. For those who voted for Jefferson had expected him to usher in an era of Republican rule that would stand in stark contrast with the Federalist policies of the previous decade. Instead,

despite Jefferson's protestations that he "would not receive the government on capitulation, that I would not go into it with my hands tied," the new president would pursue moderation rather than dismantle Federalist programs against which he had campaigned so arduously (Chernow 637).

Several scholars tend to diminish the role of the "Little Lion of Federalism" by overstating the degree to which Hamilton had lost control of the reins of the Federalists (Weisberger 265). While Hamilton's published screed against Adams during the campaign had led some to question his judgment, he remained the paramount leader of the party and retained the strategic and tactical brilliance which had served him so well during his years in government. He was also indefatigable, and his efforts to influence the outcome of the vote in the House of Representatives demonstrated that he had lost little if any of the zeal with which he overwhelmed his opponents throughout his political life (Freeman, *Affairs* 231-34).

Finally, several scholars appear to overstate the degree to which Bayard acted independently in casting the winning ballot as well as the notion that he was acting out of fear of a Burr presidency rather than from concessions that had been extracted from the Jefferson camp. Clearly Bayard was merely a vehicle for Federalist ambitions and was approached because of his delegate-at-large status from tiny Delaware. To negotiate a deal with the entire delegation of one of the larger states would have allowed too many cooks to spoil the broth and hindered efforts to retain secrecy and protect the reputation of the conspirators, the new president among them (Freeman, *Affairs* 245-46). It seems clear that Bayard, a moderate Federalist from a state in the geographical center of the

nation, was cast perfectly to play the role of political broker in what was one of the most consequential elections in American history.

Recent scholarship and the primary record make it clear that the election outcome hinged on vicious personal antagonisms, legitimate questions of character and the willingness of the two finalists to deal with their Federalist opponents. What likely turned the tables in Jefferson's favor was his willingness to bargain and the belief among Federalists that only he could be relied upon to uphold the terms of a deal (Freeman, *Affairs* 251). A variety of sources demonstrate how little Hamilton and the Federalists trusted Burr to follow through on any deal that might be struck. For example, in one letter Hamilton cautions Gray that "No compact, that he [Burr] should make with any passion in his breast except Ambition, could be relied upon by himself.—How then should we be able to rely upon our agreement with him?" (Davis 232). Larson draws a similar conclusion, contending that the Federalists went with Jefferson only because dealing with Burr was fraught with risk (189). Thus, it is quite clear that in the winter of 1801, when faced with the certain loss of the executive machinery, the Federalists were able to parlay their control of the lame duck legislature into significant concessions that would preserve key elements of their program and key patronage assignments.

A review of the scholarly literature and primary record confirms that popular educational resources fail the typical high school student when it comes to reporting on the election campaign and disputed outcome. While coverage of the campaign in secondary texts and popular videos does generally portray the founding generation in an unflattering light, the tendency to gloss over widely available and credible evidence of the deal making that preceded Jefferson's selection by the House of Representatives

presents secondary students with an unrealistic portrayal of how politics was often practiced by the founding generation. This sanitized view of electoral politics does not square with what occurred over two hundred years ago and may leave students of history with the impression that horse trading and deal making are contemporary constructs and that the founding generation practiced a higher form of politics than was actually the case. That most Americans retain a reverential respect for the founders must in part be attributed to the failure of our textbook authors and publishers, as well as the makers of documentary videos, to take on their reputation by exploring some of the more unseemly conduct of our early politicians. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests a reluctance to challenge our conceptions of the founding era and the political leaders who shaped the destiny of the republic.

# Chapter 6

# CONCLUSION

In the late 1980s, advocates of traditional history instruction achieved a milestone victory over those who promoted a more present-oriented, problem-centered social studies approach to the secondary curriculum. However, as my dissertation research has shown, this victory opened the door to a divisive struggle over whose version of history would be told in American classrooms. The early success of those who sought a critical perspective that included the contributions (and struggles) of women and minorities was met by an impassioned and organized conservative backlash that rejected this "nihilistic" historiography in favor of a narrative that extolled America's greatness and "exceptional" qualities. As my research has established, conflict between these warring camps derailed efforts to craft national (and often state) history standards and as a result, the textbook became the *defacto* curriculum in many secondary schools across the nation. These developments—along with inconsistent certification standards for secondary history teachers and uneven teacher preparation programs—have unfortunately led to an increased reliance upon the text in many high school classrooms. Paradoxically, all this has occurred despite a technological explosion that has made a greater variety of source materials more accessible to increasing numbers of American students.

Furthermore, my research has shown that consolidation and the pursuit of profit have led publishers to craft textbooks for a small number of large markets such as Florida, Texas and California, whose purchases dominate the marketplace and whose preferences, therefore, strongly influence the content of these materials. As a result, textbooks too often shy away from controversial or less complimentary views of our past

in an effort to avoid antagonizing purchasing agents for larger school systems, state education officials and highly organized parent and political groups.

In addition, conservative groups have in some cases successfully taken over school boards, which have then lobbied hard to ensure that textbook publishers highlight positive national qualities that they hope will increase patriotism. Similarly, critics on the left have successfully fought to ensure that a wide array of minority groups and women appear in modern texts. As a result, textbook publishers find themselves in the difficult position of trying to satisfy vocal constituencies with conflicting agendas. As the case studies within this dissertation have revealed, textbooks have become increasingly bland, with fewer words saying little of consequence. This, combined with a relative increase in social history that represents the legacy of earlier historiography in scholarly circles, has further diminished coverage of the political behavior of the founding generation. As my research has demonstrated, the delivery of an instructional unit focused on the Federalist era that relies extensively on the use of one of several popular textbooks is bound to leave students disinterested, ill-informed and oblivious to many of the controversies and crucial developments of this period.

In addition, the information age and digitization of American life has also led to significant changes in the style and substance of popular textbooks. Increasingly, vivid graphics have taken the place of text, driving down word counts and treatment of the politics of the founding age. Large publishers seeking an edge in an increasingly competitive market have also sought endorsement deals from the likes of National Geographic, which highlight the web of business ties that lay behind the façade of the previously staid publishing industry. It is unclear whether these affiliations have

positively impacted the content of textbooks or simply enhanced their marketability, though the case studies conducted here would seem to suggest the latter.

Furthermore, with the notable exception of the History Channel's Founding Brothers, my research has shown that the producers of recent documentary films and educational videos have also demonstrated a reluctance to critically examine the origins of American political life. This is true despite the fact that many of the commentators seen on these videos have written scholarly works that differ in tone and substance from the films in which they appear. Many of the videos that are featured in my research simply gloss over the political behavior of the founders or provide reverential biographical summaries that immortalize their political conduct and personal character. As has been demonstrated here, these videos are often used in conjunction with textbooks that are similarly devoid of critical commentary, further contributing the almost mythical status of the American founders and a sanitized view of political life in the early republic.

Unfortunately, despite the obvious shortcomings of many of the videos reviewed in this research, an electronic survey of New Jersey high school teachers and administrators indicates that they are frequently used to supplement instruction on the Federalist era. The results of the survey—which received a total of 47 responses from 26 of the 443 (17%) secondary institutions —indicate five titles that are popular among history teachers across the state of New Jersey. Of these, four were chosen for inclusion in this research (Thomas Jefferson: Philosopher of Freedom: A&E, Founding Brothers: History Channel, Alexander Hamilton: American Experience and The Presidents: History Channel), while one (John Adams: HBO), was rejected because it was produced primarily for entertainment, rather than educational purposes.

While battles over the content of American secondary textbooks are not new, the stakes remain extremely high. As Pulitzer Prize-winning author James M. McPherson reveals, at the turn of the last century a zealous campaign among Confederate war veterans and groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) successfully promoted a version of the American Civil War that expunged chattel slavery as the cause of the conflict and championed instead a noble crusade among patriotic southerners dedicated to liberty, freedom and state sovereignty. Throughout the two decades bracketing 1900, these groups memorialized this "Lost Cause" with public monuments, parades and various other forms of public celebration with the express purpose of ensuring that the generation of white southerners who were too young to remember the war obtained a particular understanding of its cause and the reason for the Confederate defeat.

Most importantly, these groups successfully resisted the introduction and use of classroom textbooks which were published in the north and which, as one United Confederate Veterans (UCV) member put it, contained a string of "long-legged Yankee lies" (McPherson 97). Groups like the UCV and UDC successfully blocked northern-produced texts, aided the establishment of southern publishing houses and lobbied state legislatures to ban the use of textbooks which contained information that was considered "partial or partisan or unfair or untrue" and which levied fines of up to $500 against teachers who used such texts. It is perhaps unsurprising that states like Florida, North Carolina and Texas led the way in banning texts that failed to embrace a sympathetic view of the Confederacy (McPherson 99). In fact, it was during this battle over the content of textbooks that many states throughout the south "created textbook

commissions to prescribe texts for all public schools instead of leaving the choice up to local school systems, as most Northern states did...” (McPherson 100). Because of changes in the publishing industry that have been documented in this research, a century later these textbook commissions would become the driving force behind the content of textbooks used throughout the nation and, as a result of pedagogical techniques that have failed to evolve into the digital age, the main source of information secondary students receive about the politics of the early republic.

The extraordinary efforts of southerners to incorporate a sanitized version of the causes of secession and civil war into classroom texts are not entirely a thing of the past. As recently as 2010, the Virginia Department of Education approved a classroom text that claimed “thousands” of African-Americans shouldered arms for the Confederacy, including “two black battalions under the command of Stonewall Jackson”. As Sam Wineberg noted in a recent blog, when a newspaper reporter asked the publisher to verify this claim, they responded by providing links to a website run by the Sons of Confederate Veterans, an organization whose mission statement mirrors that of the UCV and UDC of yore.

The battle over how the Civil War was portrayed in American high school texts illustrates the inherent dangers of relying too heavily on a single resource for information about America’s past. If one of the principle causes—if not *the* principle cause—of the Civil War can be swept aside in favor of a narrative that extols the virtues of the Confederacy and her political leaders, one is hard pressed to imagine what other misrepresentations can be written into textbooks that will be read by a national audience of impressionable minds.

The case studies that represent the bulk of this research endeavor vividly demonstrate the limitations of popularly used texts when teaching about the politics of the early republic. For example, coverage of Alexander Hamilton's financial program is largely superficial, crediting the nation's first Treasury Secretary with successfully establishing a sound fiscal and monetary system for the young republic, but failing to report on profitable speculation by Congressmen and members of the wealthy elite at the expense of those of lesser means who supported the revolution at great personal cost. Neither do popular textbooks reveal the degree to which Hamilton used his position as head of a rapidly expanding federal agency to broaden support for the nascent Federalist Party organization using patronage and coercion.

Similarly, a second case study reveals that most popular textbooks offer almost no coverage at all of the pivotal and tumultuous election of 1796, and what little treatment is afforded this event is almost uniformly focused on the transition of power from the hands of an ageing George Washington. However, this research has clearly demonstrated that the nation's first competitive presidential election was a highly contentious affair that revealed much about emerging political institutions and practices in the young United States. For example, scholarly texts reveal that the development of party organizations during this time fundamentally altered the presidential selection method that was envisioned by the founders during the Philadelphia Convention, expanding the role of the Electoral College and a number of large states at the expense of legislators serving in the House of Representatives. In addition, this case study also reveals the capacity of our nation's founders to use hardball campaign tactics and the emerging newspaper media to eviscerate the character of those who would block their path to power—including their

former revolutionary brothers-in-arms. Finally, this dissertation has shown that the 1796 campaign clearly set the stage for the national crisis that emerged four years later, with grass-roots party activists skirting local election laws and dire talk of secession among those who refused to honor the electoral outcome because of allegations of fraud and underhandedness.

Moreover, this same case study has demonstrated that most popular textbooks limit their criticism of the Alien and Sedition Acts to concerns about the suppression of civil liberties which, while clearly central to any narrative about implementation of the new constitution, minimizes the political impact these laws had on the coming electoral contest in which the Federalists would stop at nothing to deny Jefferson the executive office. It is also noteworthy that not a single educational resource reviewed as part of this research mentions the fact that the acts excluded Vice President Jefferson from its protections and were embodied with a "sunset clause" that caused them to expire upon the conclusion of the 1800 presidential election cycle—historical facts that routinely appear in contemporary scholarship.

The final case study contained within this dissertation reveals that while most educational resources do a credible job describing the ugly partisanship and scorched earth campaign tactics which dominated the 1800 election campaign, none report upon the backroom deal-making that likely allowed Jefferson to triumph over his running mate Aaron Burr. Instead, most resources focus upon the animosity between Burr and Hamilton and the perception that Jefferson offered the "lesser of two evils" as a complete explanation of Jefferson's triumph. Neither do the textbooks and videos examined here make important connections between the campaign and related events like Gabriel

Prosser's slave rebellion, which had a significant impact on the campaign strategies adopted by both sides in the contest, according to a number of scholarly works.

Needless to say, it is vitally important that the educational materials used in American classrooms present an intellectually engaging and historically accurate picture of the founding era. Coming in the wake of the constitutional settlement, the last decade of the 18th century defined the political institutions and practices that would largely shape the contours of American republicanism and democratic capitalism through the present day. Participatory democracy requires that an educated populace acquire a firm understanding of these political origins during their formal schooling, particularly at the secondary level, where advanced intellectual and emotional maturity allow youngsters to engage in a searching appraisal of our political leadership during these tumultuous times. Students who receive a sanitized or positively biased view of our nation's past are ripe for future disappointment and potential manipulation by demagogues, organized political groups, or media outlets seeking partisan gain, positive ratings, or personal power.

In this dissertation I have sought to prove that teachers who rely upon popular textbooks as their primary instructional resource for teaching the founding era—and, by extension, the whole of American history—are committing a form of educational malpractice. I have also tried to show that the same can be said of many popular documentary videos which are routinely used in secondary classrooms as supplementary resources. These case studies clearly demonstrate that popular textbooks and widely used documentary videos are deeply flawed instructional resources that fail to capture the political tension, intrigue and behavior of our nation's founding era. As a result, students whose exposure is limited to these (and other similar) resources are obtaining an

incomplete picture of the past—one which, through omission and mischaracterization, present an unrealistically positive profile of the politics of the age.

Unfortunately, current political and economic realities suggest that the trend toward textbooks with bold graphics and innocuous text will persist. As of this writing, whether paper textbooks are replaced by electronic versions is immaterial, since both versions embrace the same diminished historiographical standards. Therefore, in the absence of quality textbooks that challenge students to think critically about political life in the early republic, new pedagogical techniques and instructional resources must be utilized, with textbooks (and most videos) consigned to supporting roles. If educators are genuinely determined to prepare the next generation of American citizens for self-government, they will need to help their students dig deeper into our nation's past in order to expose the controversies that make the subject more interesting and meaningful.

The expanded use of primary sources in teaching about this period should be the first order of business. A "constructivist" approach using carefully selected primary materials offers the ability to bypass or supplement textbooks and videos that present an incomplete and seriously flawed perspective on the past and opens the door to meaningful intellectual work that can enhance our collective understanding of the past and better prepare students for thoughtful participation in American civic life. The good news is that the application of digital technology to historical and educational endeavors has produced an array of materials that are now available to teachers willing to step outside the assigned text and allow students to generate a more sophisticated understanding of the past.

For example, the digital revolution has created easy access to a primary record that was once limited primarily to scholars and academics. Organizations like the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, the Smithsonian Institution, National Archives and Library of Congress have digitized the primary record and made it easily searchable online. More importantly, these and similar organizations such as the Stanford History Education Group now offer a wide range of professional development programs and instructional resources to help teachers make the transition to a constructivist approach that would lessen dependence on contemporary survey textbooks.

Through its free online resources and expansive "Affiliated Schools Program," the Gilder Lehrman Institute is working to train the next generation of American history teachers, providing them with the tools and insight to bring the primary record to life for secondary students. The organization, which uses the New York Historical Society as a base of operations, offers an extensive website that is easily navigable by both students and classroom instructors. Organized by historical era, each segment provides students with a narrative summary written by a leading scholar of the time period—obviating the need for a survey text. This overview is flanked by a series of related multimedia presentations and additional targeted essays that focus on key topics, personalities and events within that era. Significantly, all of the written text features embedded links to Gilder Lehrman's vast collection of primary documents, where students are able to see images of the original alongside the transcribed text.

Teachers looking to explore the politics of the founding age through the Gilder Lehrman website will find within the era entitled "The Early Republic" an essay by noted historian Joanne B. Freeman of Yale University, along with links to a wide range of

primary sources—including well-known documents such as George Washington's Farewell Address and obscure letters like the one Washington penned to painter Jonathan Trumbull explaining his decision not to seek a third term of office. Students interested in exploring the politics which contributed to the electoral crisis of 1800 will find a July 15 letter from Alexander Hamilton to an unnamed judge exploring the potential political benefits of initiating a libel suit against the Republican newspaper *Aurora*, as well as a July 31 letter from James McHenry to fellow Federalist Charles C. Pinckney bemoaning the potentially disastrous impact of intraparty factionalism during the lead up to the vote. Teachers whose districts belong to the "Affiliated Schools Program" are also eligible for a wide range of free professional development experiences aimed at maximizing the instructional benefits of the organization's vast primary source collection and related web-based content.

Similarly, the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) has developed a burgeoning web-based catalogue of free, ready-made lesson plans that are designed to promote critical reasoning and historiographical inquiry. One feature, entitled "Historical Thinking Matters", provides training for teachers and online activities for secondary students that are designed to help them read and analyze the wide range of primary documents featured in their pre-packaged lesson plans. Teachers who wish to explore the political differences between Federalists and Republicans, or the emerging personal animosity evidenced by Jefferson and Hamilton near the end of their service in Washington's cabinet, can simply click on the related headings and use or adapt the featured lesson plans, bypassing the textbook to take a more in depth look at political developments of the period. Finally, the SHEG website features a "Recasting the

Textbook" project which is designed to explore "the integration of primary source documents with interactive devices in digital history education [providing] touch-based technology for engaging historical sources . . . to see if such technology can increase students' personal identification with history and decrease reliance on the textbook". Groups like these are creating an expanding array of resources designed to help classroom teachers dig deeper than they could otherwise go with a standard survey text.

Another venue for teachers who want to decrease reliance upon the textbook is The Choices Program based at Brown University, which now provides a wide range of problem-centered lesson and unit plans that ask students to grapple with both contemporary and historical events using a wide range of source materials. While as of this writing none of the Choices curriculum modules address the politics of the founding era, units on American Independence and the War of 1812 bracket the period and provide additional context for teachers and students interested in using the primary record to debate some of the most critical issues of the day.

Additionally, the Avalon Project at Yale University, the National Humanities Center and a myriad of other state and local organizations have posted troves of documents online (often searchable) which are available for free to teachers and students who wish to bypass or supplement popular textbook accounts of key historical events. Many of these sites include source materials that offer the unique insights of Americans from all walks of life, bringing a greater variety of voices into the interpretive mix and challenging students to consider multiple perspectives as they construct a more comprehensive understanding of the past.

Perhaps the most comprehensive of the digital storehouses is the Avalon Project, which organizes the primary record by century and includes sources related to both world and American history. The eighteenth century collection includes a vast array of documents related to the politics of the founding era, including the opinions of Hamilton and Jefferson on the constitutionality of the national bank, George Washington's Farewell Address, the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Jay Treaty and several associated documents, the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Washington's proclamation regarding the Whiskey Rebellion, as well as a fairly comprehensive selection of documents from the papers of Thomas Jefferson. While the documents in the Avalon collection are unedited and appear without supporting materials or information, the sheer volume of available material and the utility of the search function provide both teachers and students with a ready resource for the exploration of political life in the early republic.

Between the Avalon Project and the enormous searchable collections available through the National Archives and Library of Congress, teachers and students of the founding era have at their fingertips a treasure trove of illuminating source materials that, when placed in the capable hands of an experienced teacher, could serve as useful alternatives to popular textbook accounts of the politics of the Federalist era.

For example, teachers who want to explore the role of money in politics and examples of influence peddling during the establishment of Hamilton's financial program could examine a January 24, 1790 letter James Madison penned to Thomas Jefferson lamenting the speculative excesses attributable to the announcement of Hamilton's funding plan. For teachers looking to make connections between modern and founding

era political behavior, Madison's letter might then be juxtaposed with news accounts of the 2008 bailout of large financial and insurance firms whose creditors were made whole through the enormous outlay of government tax dollars. Similarly, students might debate the moral and ethical issues raised by Hamilton's funding plan by comparing the perspectives of James Jackson and Elias Boudinot, congressmen from Georgia and New Jersey respectively, whose letters reveal quite opposite reactions to the rampant speculation in government securities seen among their legislative colleagues. Here again any number of contemporary news accounts of the lucrative revolving door between government service and private enterprise might be used to show how little has changed over the past 200 plus years.

Alternatively, if teachers wanted to expose students to both the political and constitutional arguments surrounding Hamilton's proposed national bank, they could have the students contrast the written opinions developed by Jefferson and Hamilton on this subject—an endeavor that would expand their thinking beyond the typical textbook focus on "strict" versus "loose" interpretations of the constitution and toward a more complete understanding which includes an appreciation of the impact the bank would have upon social class stratification, sectional rivalry and republican institutions. Again, an enterprising teacher would only need to share contemporary news accounts about the role of the Federal Reserve in propping up the financial markets with interest rate policies that have eroded the savings of the elderly and other Americans who are not members of the investor class. A classroom debate organized around these contrasting sources would reveal the sweeping impact of Hamilton's proposal and help students to better understand

why it raised a storm of controversy in the early 1790s and how approval of the bank established the pattern of federal fiscal and monetary policy until the present day.

An instructor who wished to focus on the emergence of the party press and the role it played in the presidential contest of 1796 could examine the caustic personal attack on Adams which ran in the Aurora on October 29, 1796 and assess whether the Federalists were any less ruthless by looking at the series of newspaper essays published by South Carolina Federalist William Loughton Smith, which featured equally appalling slights on the author of the Declaration of Independence. Each of these sources reveal an emerging style of highly personalized attacks on the character, personal habits and physical appearance of leading political figures during the height of the 1796 presidential campaign. Teachers might then assign a project in which students worked collaboratively to generate the front page of a modern online newspaper with coverage of the upcoming presidential contest but which employed the partisan style of the press organs which dominated the founding period. Part of their research could include the location of contemporary news articles about the candidates which focused on their personal qualities, rather than substantive positions on the issues of the day.

Teachers interested in exploring the political motives of John Adams and his Federalist congressional colleague in passing the Alien and Sedition Acts might examine the letter Abigail Adams penned to her friend Mary Cranch, in which she urges congressional passage of the "Sedition Bill" then under active consideration by the legislature. Additionally, a look at the debates which produced the package of laws reflecting the highly partisan "Spirit of 'Ninety-eight" might also provide students with a

more comprehensive view of the political considerations that resulted in some of the most regressive laws ever passed by the United States Congress.

Of course, a competent teacher might draw parallels between the Alien and Naturalization laws and the current debate over immigration policy and the fate of those who entered the country illegally over the past several decades. Certainly, students might gain an enhanced understanding of the issues at hand by debating passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, exploring the constitutional, social, economic, national security and political dimensions of these Federalist-inspired bills. Or students might apply the language of the Sedition Act to an attack on Adams featured in Benjamin Franklin Bache's *Aurora* and judge whether it indeed violated the spirit and letter of the law.

Regardless of approach, teachers would certainly want students to read Jefferson's reaction to passage of these laws embodied in his "reign of witches" letter to fellow Republican John Taylor, in which he correctly predicts that the public reaction to the Alien and Sedition Acts would ultimately lead to the death of the Federalist political machine. And despite the fact that most credible textbooks report upon the threat to civil liberties embodied in these acts, these constitutional issues could be explored in greater depth through an examination of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which are widely available online.

Finally, students might be interested in the backstage maneuvering that led to Jefferson's elevation to the presidency in 1800 by looking at the letters exchanged between Hamilton and other key Federalists during the election deadlock which occurred during the winter of 1800-1801. Hamilton's December 23, 1800 correspondence with Federalist Congressmen Harrison Gray Otis, and a similar letter the following day to

Gouverneur Morris, show the author's strong emotional response to the electoral outcome as well as his calculating efforts to extract critical concessions from Jefferson while the lame duck Congress was still dominated by the Federalists. Students would undoubtedly find it interesting to speculate upon the outlines of a deal by comparing these sources with Jefferson's policies upon assuming office in 1801.

Despite widespread dissatisfaction with available textbooks and an array of free resources to promote the use of documents in teaching American history, a number of challenges remain. Many teacher preparation programs and district-sponsored in-service training continue to promote the textbook as the main classroom teaching resource. Whether out of habit, tradition or the desire to simplify the planning process for new entrants into the profession, this will need to change if the textbook is to be relegated to an appropriate position in American high school classrooms. Further, classroom practitioners will still require resources that provide a basic narrative chronology to provide context for the document-based activities they wish to try with their students. While many of the activities provided by the organizations listed above incorporate some historical narrative to set the stage for in depth document analysis, a good quality text of some type is often needed to compliment source-based activities.

Another challenge in adopting a less text dependent approach is finding documents and other primary materials that most students can read and understand. While implementation of the Common Core State Standards promises to enhance student critical reading abilities, many high school students are often unable to decipher the kind of texts they might encounter in document-based lessons—particularly those which feature texts that have antiquated language or spelling. Poor reading skills (and often,

unfortunately, a lack of persistence among many struggling students) represent enormous challenges to this approach and are one reason teachers continue to rely upon increasingly simple textbooks to convey the curriculum. The concurrent application of close reading strategies, proper scaffolding of academic vocabulary, and the careful excerpting and modification of primary texts can go a long way toward increasing the viability of this approach with struggling readers and English Language Learners (ELLs). The good news is that organizations on the leading edge of this movement, such as the Stanford Education Group, are incorporating many of these strategies and features into their instructional materials. But much more needs to be done.

Another challenge is helping teachers to frame meaningful questions about the past around which students can conduct their inquiry and research. While many experienced teachers have sufficient command of the subject matter to generate worthwhile topics for student inquiry, many new teachers have simply not had enough time with the material to conduct this work. Unfortunately, it is the very same new entrants into the profession who are most likely to be open to dispensing with the text and working with students in a more open-ended fashion. This means that tradition and inertia may conspire to keep the textbook in the forefront, since many experienced professionals will be happy to continue teaching as they have done throughout their careers.

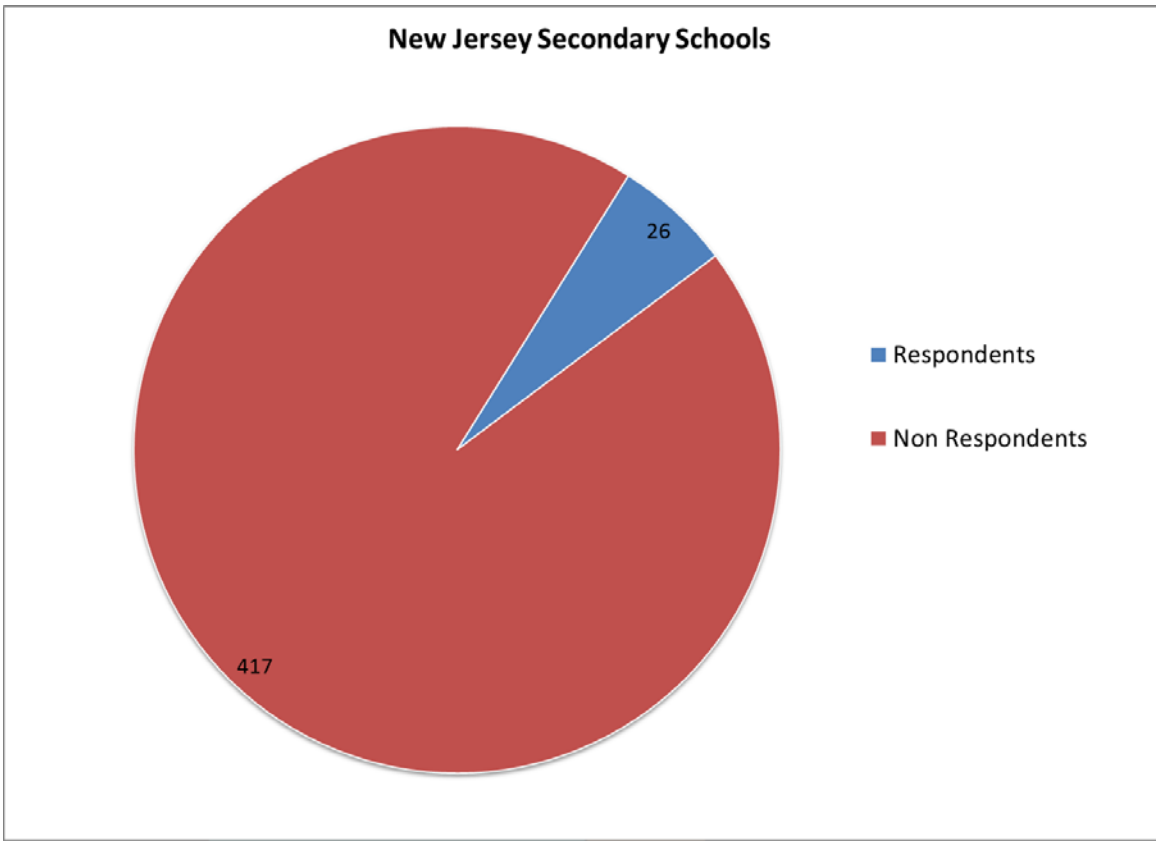
Still another challenge is the rise of challenging literacy and math standards—embodied in the Common Core—and the corresponding increase in standardized testing, that threaten to reduce instructional time dedicated to history and the other subject areas. While increased literacy will certainly aid the ability of students to grapple with difficult primary texts, history teachers must be afforded the gift of time if they are going to

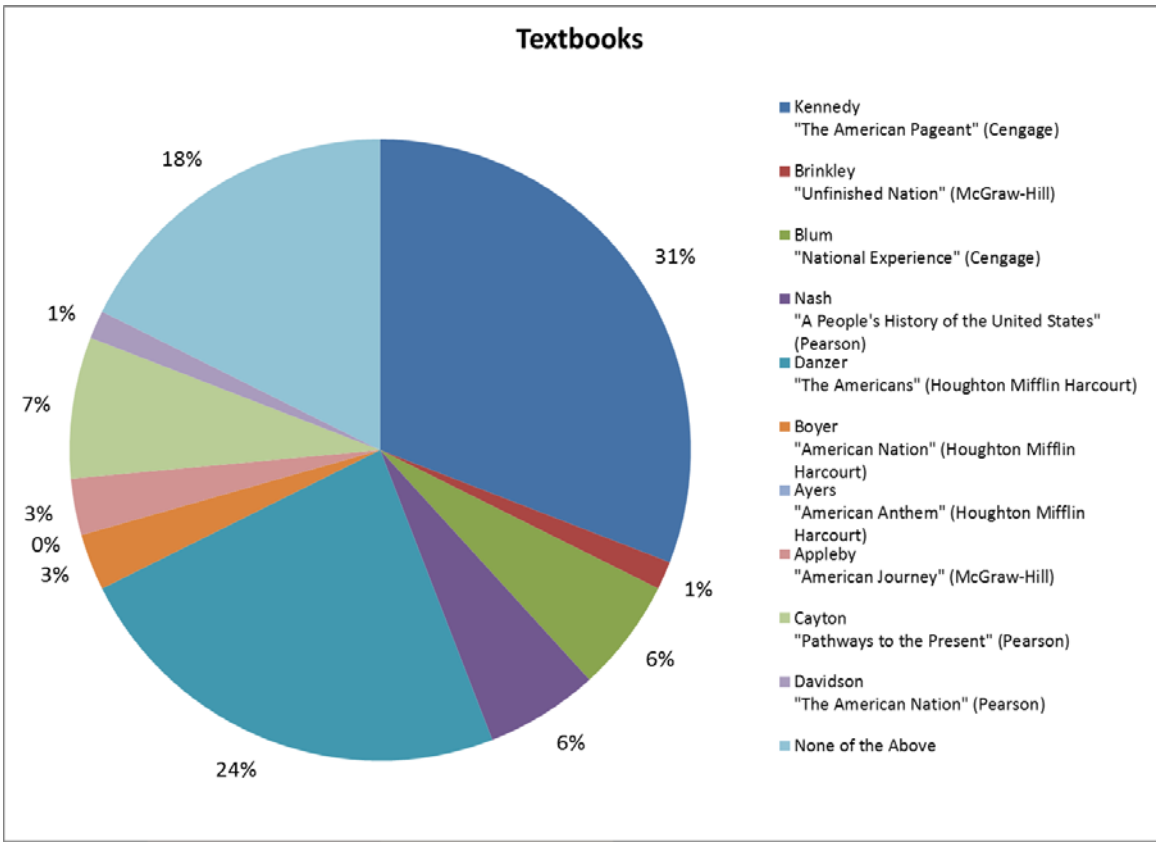
engage students in an instructional program that can deepen student interest and understanding in the subject. Further, even with the support of some of the online resources outlined above, planning for document-based instruction is infinitely more time consuming than traditional instructional methods that rely heavily on the textbook. Thus, if this approach is going to gain currency among secondary history teachers, schools will need to prioritize planning time to allow professionals to generate meaningful learning activities that envision a limited role for the text or, at a minimum, to access and apply some of the online resources cited above.

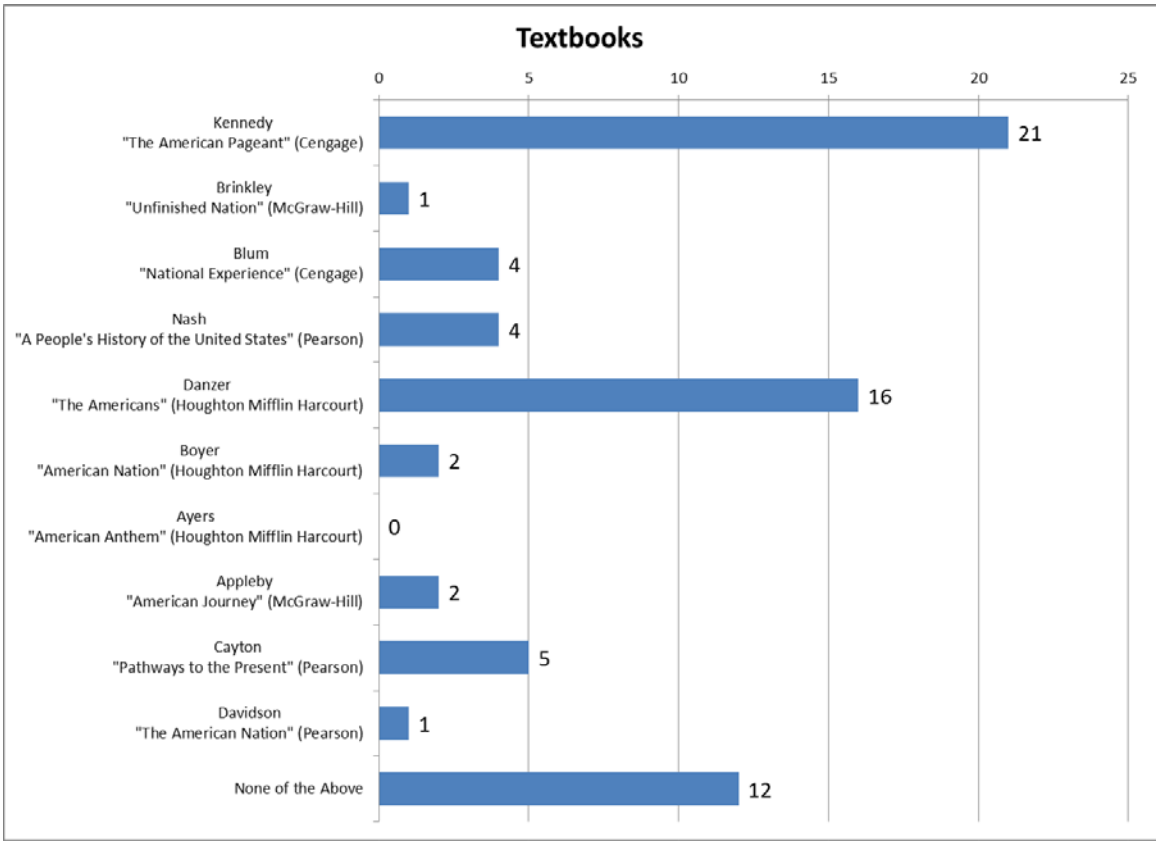
Despite these challenges, the fact remains that secondary students are not going to develop the kind of passion and proficiency for American history that a democratic society demands if teachers continue to rely upon innocuous, positively biased, and incomplete textbooks of the type reviewed in this research. Starting with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, politicians, educators and ordinary citizens have bemoaned the "crisis" in American schooling. For most, the crisis remains fixed upon the inability of our high school graduates to read, write and complete simple mathematical calculations. However, as this dissertation has demonstrated, we should all be equally concerned about the failure of our schools to graduate students who are both interested and sufficiently prepared to uphold their civic responsibilities, maintain our republican institutions, and live in a society characterized by social and cultural diversity. A sophisticated knowledge of our nation's formative years and the development of our political institutions are essential to this goal. However, unless our secondary curricula and pedagogy are adapted in ways that marginalize today's crop of deeply flawed texts and instructional videos, we may

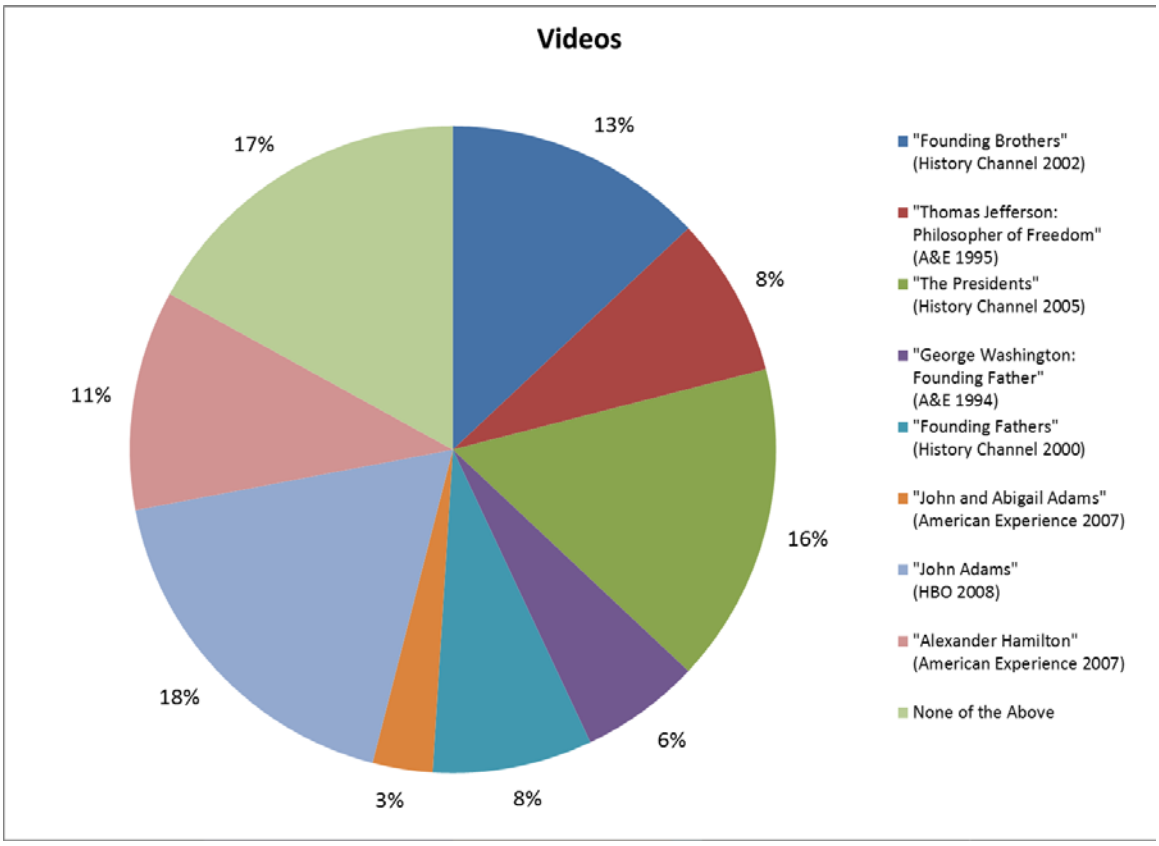
well see the next generation, though fluent in reading and math, unequipped to protect and preserve our most cherished political ideals.

# Appendix: Educational Resources Survey




Textbooks
31%
1%
6%
6%
24%
3%
0%
3%
7%
1%
18%
Kennedy "The American Pageant" (Cengage)
Brinkley "Unfinished Nation" (McGraw-Hill)
Blum "National Experience" (Cengage)
Nash "A People's History of the United States" (Pearson)
Danzer "The Americans" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
Boyer "American Nation" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
Ayers "American Anthem" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
Appleby "American Journey" (McGraw-Hill)
Cayton "Pathways to the Present" (Pearson)
Davidson "The American Nation" (Pearson)
None of the Above


Textbooks
0
5
10
15
20
25
Kennedy "The American Pageant" (Cengage)
21
Brinkley "Unfinished Nation" (McGraw-Hill)
1
Blum "National Experience" (Cengage)
4
Nash "A People's History of the United States" (Pearson)
4
Danzer "The Americans" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
16
Boyer "American Nation" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
2
Ayers "American Anthem" (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)
0
Appleby "American Journey" (McGraw-Hill)
2
Cayton "Pathways to the Present" (Pearson)
5
Davidson "The American Nation" (Pearson)
1
None of the Above
12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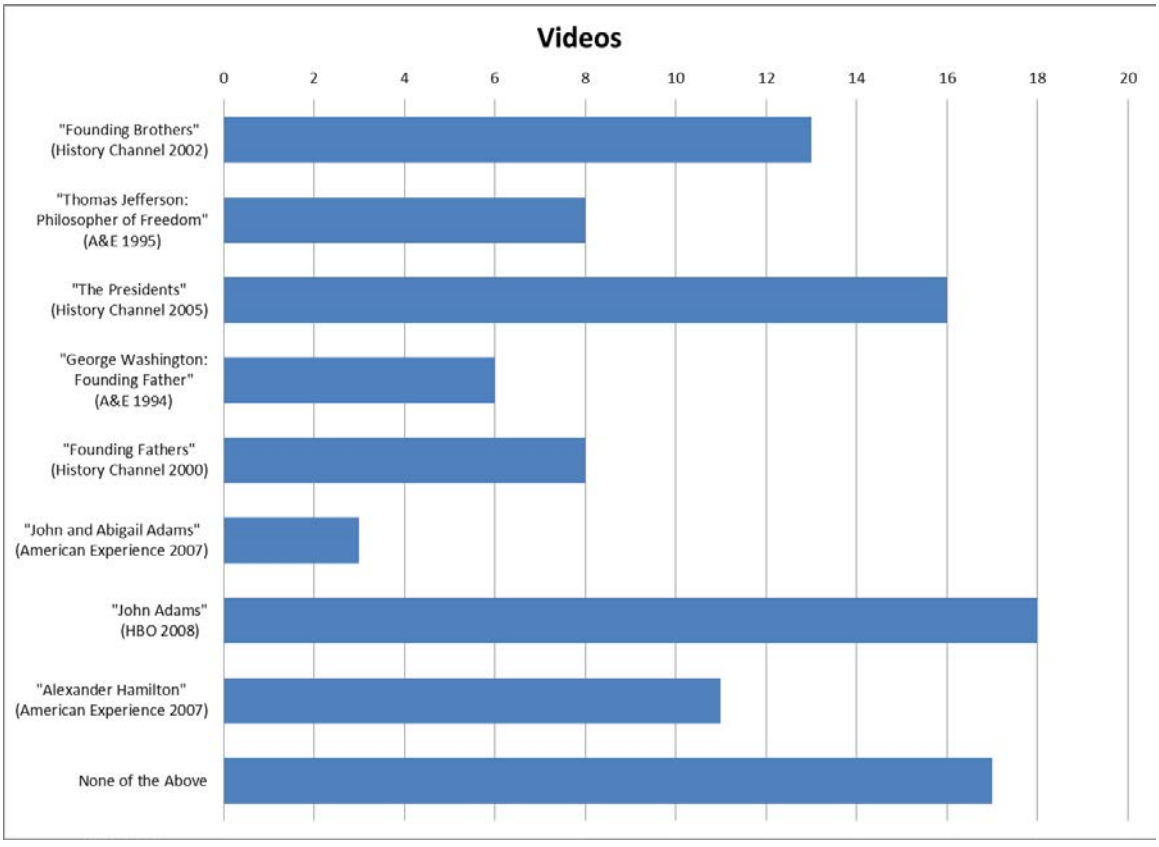
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