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REVOLUTIONARY-ERA REPUBLICANISM AS CHAMPIONED BY NATHANIEL
MACON AND JOHN RANDOLPH OF ROANOKE

A dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Mississippi

Barbara Hensley Shepard

March 2013

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ABSTRACT

This work concentrates on the formation of a uniquely American version of republicanism and two men who staunchly adhered to its tenets long after it had fallen out of fashion. Revolutionary-era republicanism provided a useful set of principles for the colonists of British North America as they moved toward independence, throughout the Revolutionary War and into the nineteenth century. This work attempts to show the roots of American republicanism and how during the first decades of the nineteenth century the concept was adopted and adapted by those in the government. Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina and the Virginian, John Randolph of Roanoke, were two of the staunchest supporters of Revolutionary-era republicanism, and they are used to show the waxing and waning of their principles. Both were chosen because they dedicated their entire political careers to Revolutionary-era republicanism and due to the lack of scholarship concerning Macon and the somewhat distorted view of Randolph. By concentrating on issues that are closely related to the early republican ideals, this work shows the rise and fall of its popularity and the continuity of support by Macon and Randolph. Perhaps the two dedicated statesmen will be viewed in a more positive and accurate light and the republicanism as a political concept can be seen as an ever changing and evolving set of ideals.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Otis Shepard,
my Daddy-O.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all of those who have assisted me in completing my dissertation. The forbearance and encouragement of my colleagues, friends, and family has been amazing. I am deeply indebted to the Shaw family in Linville, North Carolina, for providing me with a peaceful retreat in which to write. The greatest debt is owed to my husband for reading my many drafts with his exacting and critical eye and for never losing faith in my abilities even when I considered giving up.

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INTRODUCTION

In the mid-eighteenth century, Americans began to develop their own unique view of a just and equitable form of government. Subsequent generations have contested the origin and meanings of the colonists' ideology. Prior to the 1960s, the predominant historical interpretation of pre-Revolutionary political thought credited John Locke with providing the basis for Americans' ideas concerning the proper role of government in their lives. "Lockean liberalism" seemed a sensible way to explain the character of the American struggle for independence. Proponents, and there were many, of this interpretation claimed that the colonists in North America already exhibited many liberal ideals prior to their mid-eighteenth century difficulties with Britain. The colonists were ambitious, revealed a high degree of self-interest, and economically were moving steadily toward capitalism. Viewing the American Revolution through the spectrum of Locke's liberal ideals allowed Americans to see their war for independence as a rather moderate or tame revolution, without the terror and excesses of the French Revolution. This view centering on the importance of Lockean influences is often referred to as the Hartzian paradigm due to the influence of Louis Hartz. It was a popular and widely accepted interpretation that garnered broad support with Progressive historians in the

mid-twentieth century. Even as the liberal model gained credence, another, and even more all encompassing paradigm began to take shape.¹

In the late 1960s, Bernard Bailyn presented a rival to the liberal interpretation of the previous decade. In his research, Bailyn “discovered” what he believed to be the lynchpin of the changing philosophy of American colonists in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. According to Bailyn, republicanism was the overarching concept that disgruntled British subjects in North America fashioned and its tenets resonated with inhabitants in all thirteen colonies. Although Bailyn did not employ the term republicanism in *The Ideological Origins of the American Republic*, he presented ideas other than Locke’s. Bailyn concluded that the powerful rhetoric of the era, peppered with words such as liberty and power, greatly influenced the colonists who had begun to fear that Parliament was undermining their freedom and rights as English subjects. On the heels of Bailyn’s book came Gordon Woods’s *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1789*, further solidifying the newly emerging republican paradigm. With the publication of J.G.A. Pocock’s *Machiavellian Moment* in 1975, the elements of

¹ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955) 140; Hartz’s interpretation of the nature of American identity gained precedence over the earlier Beardian model and garnered currency with other mid-twentieth century historians. Daniel Boorstin, “American Liberalism,” *Commentary*, 20 (July 1955): 99-101. Boorstin concluded that Locke’s liberal ideas were already a very important part of the American social fabric during the pre-Revolutionary years; Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard and Parrington* (New York: Knopf, 1968), 446-8. Hofstadter maintained that Locke was indeed important to understanding the tempered character of the American Revolution.

republicanism were spelled out in even more detail and the importance of Locke further diminished.²

As republicanism became the dominant means of explaining the mindset of Revolutionary America, varying versions began to appear and historians began applying republican ideology to many different aspects of colonial and early American life. As the paradigm rapidly gained popularity, arguments concerning the origin and nature of republicanism emerged and grew. Was it born solely of the conservative tradition of British “Country versus Court” politics or did it include liberal ideas? Did the ancient republics of Greece and Rome provide a model for American republican ideas prior to the Revolution, or were the references to the ancient republics merely window dressing? These are all important questions; however, they are not the focus of this dissertation.

Instead, the purpose of this work will be two-fold. Initially, it will focus on the birth and career of American Revolutionary-era republicanism, beginning with the late colonial period and ending in the 1830s with retirement from public life and deaths of Nathaniel Macon and John

² Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Bernard Bailyn, “The Central Themes of the American Revolution: An Interpretation,” in Stephen G Kurtz and James H Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press), 1973; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1975. Bernard Bailyn, his student Gordon Wood, and J.G.A. Pocock, within in less than a decade, shifted the emphasis from John Locke and his liberal views to republicanism. Bailyn began the process by showing the influence of other pamphleteers and writings, particularly the seventeenth-century Country versus Court literature. He did not deny the influence of Locke in the pre-Revolutionary psyche; although, he did considered him a less important factor than the Progressives had. Wood further relegated Locke to the sidelines and Pocock excluded Locke’s impact on colonials in the pre-Revolutionary period. Even before publishing *Machiavellian Moment* in 1975, he had commented that “an effect of the recent research has been to display the Revolution less as the first political act of revolutionary enlightenment than as the last great act of the Renaissance.” J.G.A. Pocock, “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol.3 (1972): 121.

Randolph of Roanoke. Concentrating on the beginnings of America's unique variety of republicanism and its appeal to leaders throughout the colonies as well as the lifelong commitment of Macon and Randolph reveals that the Revolutionary-era republicanism continued to resonate within the American psyche. In short, the popularity of Revolutionary-era republican ideology that initially brought Americans together waxed and waned in the Early National period and after Jefferson's first term lived on in the actions of a small number of determined individuals. Secondly, this work will provide insight into the lives of two aforementioned statesmen, whom history has sorely neglected and/or maligned.

Macon, who served in the United States Congress for thirty-seven years, has only one somewhat inadequate biography written in 1908 by William Dodd, a professor at Randolph-Macon College. Primary sources available to Dodd were few and errors and inconsistencies plague Dodd's work. Unfortunately, because it is the only study of Macon's life, it has become the most used source on the man. Randolph has received more attention from historians; however, an early biography by Henry Adams, a great-grandson of John Adams and grandson of John Quincy Adams has tainted Randolph's reputation for generations. Adams's biography of Randolph was part of the *American Statesmen* series. John T. Morse, editor of the collection, when asked about his choice of Adams for the assignment replied that he had relied on Adams's sense of humor in writing the book.³ Morse's faith in Adams's ability to write an unbiased account was unfounded, and his vengeful portrayal of Randolph, who was not only a hereditary

³ James Truslow Adams, *Henry Adams* (New York: A & C Boni, Inc. 1933), 328-9.

foe but a political opposite, resulted in a most unsatisfactory account of Randolph's life.

Adams's work, simply entitled, *John Randolph*, describes Randolph as mad and grotesque, and states that he possessed irrational vanity and vaulting ambition. Adams often revealed his own prejudices against Virginians in general and John Randolph in particular. In one instance he wrote, "John Randolph was an eccentric type recognized and understood only by Virginians. To a New England man, on the contrary, the type was unintelligible and monstrous."⁴ Adams also noted Randolph's animosity toward John Adams and John Quincy Adams. "For thirty years he Never missed a chance to have his fling at both the Adamses, father and son; 'the cub,' he said, 'is a greater bear than the old one;' . . . the only persons against whom his strain of invective was at all seasons copious, continuous and vehement were the two New England Presidents."⁵ This biography is largely responsible for the public's view of an important Virginian and statesman as a bitter, mad man of no importance to history.

Twentieth century scholars have called Henry Adams to task for his biased characterization of Randolph. Historian Jack Hines claimed that Adams avenged his family's honor with the work. He noted some of Adams's obvious mistakes and gave factual evidence to refute some of Adams's most flagrant errors.⁶ Macon and Randolph devoted most of their adult lives to defending the republican principles of the Revolutionary era and deserve an accurate account of their actions. Unfortunately, even today both of their memories suffer from Adams's

⁴ Henry Adams, *John Randolph*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1899), 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

1882 biography. For instance, Macon, who Adams declared to be a disciple of Randolph and to have fallen under the spell of the young Virginian, has been incorrectly portrayed by historians who accepted Adams's erroneous representation of the North Carolinian.

This dissertation will refer to the ideology developed by American colonists as Revolutionary-era republicanism, which came about as a result of actions by British Parliament following the French and Indian War and includes ideas from late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century British opposition literature as well as John Locke and other Enlightenment *philosophes*. Colonists from diverse backgrounds embraced the utopian ideals of republicanism, which bound them together and justified their rebellion against the British government. The basic tenets of this early republican concept were quite lofty and included the following axioms: power was a corrupting force that ever threatened liberty; public or civic virtue was a necessity for a fair and equitable government, and a standing army in time of peace endangered freedom. In the decade leading up to the Revolutionary War through the early years under the Articles of Confederation, the republican ideals produced cohesiveness among disparate groups of Americans, which had not existed previously.

Early pages deal with differing historical interpretations concerning the development and life of the republican paradigm. Conflicting ideas about the roots of the concept as well as its nature will be outlined briefly. Americans who called themselves republicans adopted a wide range of ideals that consisted of concepts garnered from the classic republics of Greek and Rome

⁶ Jack Wendell Hines, "John Randolph and the growth of Federal Power: The Opinion of a States Righter on the Political Issues of His Time" Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1956), 7.

as well as the more modern beliefs of the enlightened minds of their era.⁷ Also, included will be some background into the career of Revolutionary-era republicanism and the men supporting it in the early National Period. Then, the intent of the following section shifts to show how republicanism, although often portrayed as a negative and divisive concept, drew the British colonists in North America together and allowed this diverse and quarrelsome lot to cooperate in the fight for independence from what they viewed as an oppressive government. Discontented colonists, throughout British North America, embraced the basic tenets of republicanism before the Revolutionary War and the language they employed not only produced a strong common bond, it also served as the means to justify their actions to themselves and the world. Revolutionary-era republicanism became the foundation of early state constitutions, and the central government under the Articles of Confederation reflected the continued commitment to the still popular ideals that had unified Americans through their earlier struggles. As years passed, and no common enemy caused Americans to minimize their sectional differences, the commitment to Revolutionary-era republicanism declined. Many Americans began to re-evaluate their ideas about the social and political concept that had bound them together for two decades. Although numerous people still clung to the appealing, high-minded rhetoric of the bygone age, interpretations changed to reflect shifting points-of-view.

⁷As the republican paradigm grew stronger and more pervasive and began to relegate the importance of liberal ideals to the far perimeters of colonial thought, historians began to question the validity of republicanism as the all-encompassing ideology of the Revolutionary and Early National eras. Gary B. Nash, "Radicalism in the American Revolution," *Reviews in American History*, I (1973) 75-8. Joyce Appleby, pushes aside the idea of classical republicanism as the driving force behind revolutionary thought and instead supports the idea that American were more influenced by "liberal republicanism," that was more based on self interest than self denial and a dependence of civic virtue. Joyce Appleby, "Liberalism and the American Revolution," *New England Quarterly*, 49, (1976): 25.

A sign that attitudes concerning a government based on republican ideals were diminishing appeared when the delegates, who met in Philadelphia in 1787, and were charged with amending the Articles of Confederation, immediately began work on a new Constitution. A large number of American leaders, including Patrick Henry, refused to participate in the convention, did not favor these changes, and clung to their Revolutionary-era republican standards. Later, Anti-Federalists used the tenets of republicanism to bolster their argument against ratification of the Constitution, and on several occasions, Federalists adapted certain aspects of the republican rhetoric in defense of the Constitution. The battle over creating a new, stronger national government was often bitter and acrimonious and in the end, the Anti-Federalists were unable to garner enough support to prevent the ratification of the Constitution; however, many proponents of Revolutionary-era republicanism continued their battles against a strong national government.

The next section revolves around the formation of a new government under the Constitution and the divisions that developed among national leaders. Federalists supported the attempts to create a stronger central government and Republicans opposed giving the national government greater powers. Even though many men referred to themselves as Federalists or Republicans, this does not signify that they ever considered themselves members of political parties. The idea of factions or partisan politics was anathema to the founding fathers and their contemporaries. They were simply men who had differing views on the preferred nature of the United States political system.

The true republican ideals of the Revolutionary era remained the same, although their popularity fluctuated greatly before falling out of fashion following the War of 1812. During the Washington and Adams administrations, those supporting the strengthening of the federal government gained the upper hand. The economic strategy of Alexander Hamilton and the policies of the Adams administration seemed to spark a revival of republicanism with Jefferson and Madison at the forefront of the resurgence of republican sentiment. They authored the Virginia and Kentucky Resolves in response to the Alien and Sedition Acts passed during Adams's presidential term. These closely reflected the "The Principles of '98" by reaffirming the ideals of those embracing the republican ideology of the Revolutionary era. Although the resolutions never gained the national support Jefferson and Madison had hoped for, the Principles of '98 became a rallying call among Republicans. Men who fostered the republican ideals of the Revolutionary era joined forces with Jefferson and Madison during the last two years of Adam's presidency and tried to hold the line against any further Federalist gains.

Instead of dealing with the many men who adhered to the tenets of Revolutionary -era republicanism, this dissertation focuses on two of the most faithful and staunchest supporters: Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph of Roanoke. Macon, a Revolutionary War veteran, from North Carolina, who was a member of the House of Representatives during the First Congress, fought diligently to curb the efforts of Federalists trying to strengthen the national government. In 1799, John Randolph of Roanoke, another faithful adherent of Revolutionary-era republican ideals, joined Macon in the House. Both men dedicated their entire political careers to the

defense of their version of republicanism.⁸ During Washington's two terms in office, Macon battled against all actions that contradicted the republican ideals that he had fought for during the war. After Randolph's election, he became the North Carolinian's ally in the battle to prevent the implementation of laws and policies that threatened their deeply held principles. The presidency of Adams and the implementation of Hamilton's financial plan led Macon and Randolph to fear that the republican ideal of the Revolutionary era would be destroyed; however, the defeat of Adams gave both men a more optimistic outlook.

Macon and Randolph both had high hopes for the government following Thomas Jefferson's election as president in 1800. The next section deals with the waxing and waning of Revolutionary-era republicanism during Jefferson's two terms and how Republicans worked diligently to reshape the government to fit into the republican mold. Historian Joyce Appleby claims that Jefferson's political discourse during John Adams's presidency showed Jefferson's devout belief in progress and the idea that "the future would be different from the past" rather than a commitment to republicanism. If Appleby's assertions are correct, the actions of men who still subscribed to the Revolutionary-era view of republicanism indicate that they did not grasp the true meaning of Jefferson's political statements.⁹ Most of Jefferson's first term

⁸John Randolph, after reaching his majority, began referring to himself as John Randolph of Roanoke (in reference to the location of his Charlotte County plantation on the Roanoke River in Southside Virginia) to differentiate himself and his ne'er-do-well cousin of the same name, who was often rather derisively called 'Possum John.'

⁹Joyce Appleby's explanation of Jefferson's political beliefs provides a viable reason for his actions during his second term when his zeal for the pure republican principles of the Revolutionary era seemed to waver. Joyce Appleby, "Republicanism in Old and New Contexts," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third series, Vol. 43, Issue 1, 25.

focused on “reform and retrenchment,” two goals that suited Macon and Randolph; however, they kept their guard up against the encroachment of any policies that did not fit into their stringent republican beliefs. For Macon and Randolph placed their hope not in men but in principles. Men might change or be corrupted by power; however, the ideals of Revolutionary-era republicanism remained constant. Following the ousting of John Adams, the Federalist president, Macon and Randolph found themselves in new positions within the House. Now, they most often voted with the majority and Macon served as Speaker of the House while Randolph was frequently the person presenting resolutions and speaking in favor of legislative measures. They were proud of the accomplishments made by themselves and like-minded men in the government. The period of “reform and retrenchment,” which resulted in lower taxes, reduction in the military, and commitment to an accelerated retirement of the national debt, created hope that the current Congress was constructing a true republican form of government.¹⁰ The sense of pride in being part of a government aimed at correcting earlier wrongs and maintaining a republican nature were somewhat short lived.

During Jefferson’s second term, Randolph and Macon often found they could not support a number of measures that the president and his cabinet put forth. Jefferson believed that it was his responsibility to guide Congress, though not openly. He found Randolph a useful ally when aiming to roll back the federalist advances of the past decade; however, the president soon learned that neither Randolph nor Macon could be convinced to support any plan or action that contradicted their republican ideals. Randolph broke openly with the Jefferson administration

¹⁰ Early in the Seventh Congress taxes on refined sugars, licenses to retailers, auction sales, carriages,

over a plan, which Randolph deemed highly unethical and reminiscent of the infamous XYZ Affair, to acquire West Florida. Also, during Jefferson's second term congressional records reveal that Macon often voted against measures backed by the president. Attempts by Jefferson and other cabinet members' (particularly the Secretary of State, James Madison) to influence Congress seemed a dangerous sign to adherents of Revolutionary-era republicanism because they believed that the separation of powers was the best means of insuring that the executive could not gain too great control over the government. Macon and Randolph preferred to limit the powers of the executive branch, even if those in control were republican. When it became evident to Jefferson that neither Macon nor Randolph would offer the influence he needed in the House, the president made overtures to other congressional members and sought to remove the influence of both men.

In the Tenth Congress, Macon for the first time since being elected to the House did not arrive on the opening day; therefore, his name could not be placed in contention for Speaker of the House. As a result of Macon no longer holding the Speakers seat, Randolph could not expect an appointment as Chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. Even with the support of Jefferson, Massachusetts's Representative, Joseph Varnum, who in the previous session had shown his willingness to support the administration on several occasions, barely won the Speaker's chair. Although the republican ideals of the Revolutionary era, mirrored in the "Principles of '98," were once again losing favor among politicians, a significant number of representatives exhibited concern that Macon and Randolph had lost their positions to men of

stamped vellum, parchment, paper, whiskey and stills were repealed.

lesser abilities. Macon's years as Speaker of the House gained him respect for his commitment to fairness and dedication to conducting all aspects of his position in a non-partisan manner.

Varnum, who won by a margin of only one vote, never gained the measure of respect that Macon commanded and the sarcastic appellation of "Sworn Interpreter of the Executive's Messages" followed him throughout his congressional career.¹¹ Varnum refused to name Randolph or any other former member to the Ways and Means Committee, thereby substantially limiting the influence of those who had shown their reluctance to be led by the wishes of the president in the previous session of Congress. Members of the House who remained faithful to the "Principles of '98" had lost their short-lived control of the legislative branch of the federal government and many became disillusioned with politics, in general, and the Jefferson administration, in particular.

The following years revealed that the republicans committed to their Revolutionary-era ideals continued to lose influence within the government. The majority of congressional representatives were identified as Republicans; however, there were serious ideological differences within this group. Men who closely followed the traditions of the bygone era referred to themselves as old Republicans. They did not represent some third party movement; old Republican simply meant any person who remained strongly attached to the republican tenets of the Revolutionary-era. More and more these men became known as oppositionists, as they

¹¹ John Randolph, when Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, called Varnum "the Sworn Interpreter of the Presidential Messages," after Varnum maintained that even though Jefferson had not requested two million dollars to acquire Florida that the president wanted the House to appropriate that amount. Benjamin Tallmadge to Manasseh Cutler, 19 February 1806, in William P. and Julia Cutler, eds., *Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Reverend Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.*, vol.2. (Cincinnati: Robert Clark & Company, 1888), 326.

voted against measures that contradicted their principles even when Jefferson favored these particular legislative actions.¹²

The election of James Madison brought about further reduction in the ranks of old Republicans and John Randolph's open and forceful opposition to all measures related to war with Great Britain resulted in his first and only political defeat at the hands of his Southside constituents.¹³ Macon, on the other hand, supported the war. He uncharacteristically voted in favor of measures to increase the size of the military and provided the funding for this by raising existing taxes and implementing additional ones. Although, Macon and Randolph were on different sides of the issue of war, they both buttressed their stands with republican discourse. The point on which they differed was the necessity of the war. Macon felt that the United States must defend itself: he viewed the possible outbreak of hostilities as a defensive war. Randolph, instead, saw it as a war to support the northern shipping trade. He also felt that it was a war the United States had little chance of winning. With Macon's support and Randolph's opposition, the nation fought the War of 1812. Because of his anti-war stance, Randolph suffered his only election defeat at the hands of Benjamin Epps, Thomas Jefferson's son-in-law.

¹² Norman Risjord claimed that the Old Republicans appeared following the War of 1812 in reaction to a surge of nationalism. These Old Republicans, according to Risjord, were a conservative branch of Jefferson's Republican Party. Noble Cunningham takes issue with the term Quid being used to describe a radical faction of the Republican party led by John Randolph. Instead, quid was a derisive term used by politicians to describe any group who opposed them. He unequivocally states "to consider Quid synonymous with Randolphite is to hopelessly confuse the political history of the Jeffersonian era. Cunningham suggests the term Old Republican should reply to those who began opposing some of Jefferson's actions during his second term. Norman Risjord, *The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1965, 1-6. Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., "Who Were the Quids?", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 50, No.2 (September, 1963): 252,263.

When the hostilities ended, Macon looked forward to a reduction of the military and taxes, and the freeholders of Randolph's district once again elected him to serve as their representative in the House. Matters would not proceed as either Macon or Randolph hoped. Macon quite unexpectedly received news that the North Carolina state legislature had selected him to fill a vacancy in the Senate, and in the House Randolph was left to do battle against the foes of Revolutionary-era republicanism without the support of his longtime friend and ally. For a short period, from December 8, 1825 through March 3 1827, Randolph joined his old friend in the Senate. The resignation of James Barbour prompted the Virginia state legislature to select Randolph to serve the remainder of his term. When the state failed to return Randolph to the Senate in 1827, he was re-elected to the House by the residents of Southside Virginia.

Madison's second annual address made it clear that he no longer supported the Revolutionary-era republican ideals. He recommended the maintenance of a standing army, suggested that a national bank was necessary, and urged the central government to become more involved in the building of canals and roadways. Randolph, whose distrust of and dislike for Madison was well known, used his oratorical skills to try to thwart the administration's wishes that Congress pass legislation to create a national bank, strengthen both the army and the navy, put import duties on foreign goods, and fund internal improvements. Macon, in the Senate, often stood alone or found himself voting with Federalists in opposition to Madison's nationalistic and non-republican policies. Both Randolph and Macon were unsuccessful in these endeavors;

¹³ Southside is the name given several counties in southern Virginia. They include Buckingham, Charlotte, Cumberland, and Prince Edward counties, which comprised Randolph's congressional district.

however, they remained enduring examples of the republicanism of a bygone era and their rhetoric continued to resonate in the hearts and minds of Americans.

The closing pages of the dissertation will look at the life of Macon after his resignation from the Senate in 1828 and Randolph's final years. Both men were successful businessmen who adhered to their Revolutionary-era republican ideals in their private and business matters. Randolph was a delegate to Virginia's convention to create a new constitution in 1829, and Macon presided over North Carolina's Constitutional Convention in 1935. Speeches at the state conventions by both men reveal the continuation of their steadfast support of their long-held beliefs. A brief glance at the settlement of the two men's estates will reveal that they were both astute farmers and businessmen who took a small inheritance (on Macon's part) and a heavily debt-encumbered one (on Randolph's part) and turned them into respectable and debt-free holdings. The death of Randolph in 1833 and Macon in 1837 spelled the end of an era. The two great sentinels of American Revolutionary-era republicanism were gone and although others often adopted and adapted specific republican concepts and used republican rhetoric to suit their political needs, the demands of strict adherence to the ideals forged by American colonists on the eve of the American Revolution was no more.

CHAPTER I
FORMULATION OF A UNIQUELY AMERICAN STRAIN OF REPUBLICANISM AND
PUTTING THOSE IDEALS INTO PRACTICE

During the last half of the eighteenth century, colonists in British North America began to formulate and express their opinions of what constituted a just civil government. Perceived mistreatment by the British Parliament gradually led Americans to question traditionally accepted theories of fair and honest governance. At this time, the differences between the British Parliament and the colonial governments became more pronounced, and from the period beginning with the end of the French and Indian War up until the commencement of the American Revolution colonists began to feel more and more alienated by the actions of the British government in London. Different ideas about what constituted a representative government made up part of the resentment toward Parliament. American colonists had come to support the idea of direct representation in their colonial assemblies and the British espoused the theory of virtual representation.

Throughout all the British colonies in North America, men began to write letters and pamphlets expressing their concerns and delineating concepts of a representative type of

government that would ensure the rights of all colonists. Preachers delivered and published sermons outlining new ideas relating to Christian duty toward governmental authority. Ministers no longer admonished their parishioners to blindly follow the dictates of their rulers; instead, the church leaders often encouraged their congregations to question and even defy government acts that offended the political and moral ideals that were rapidly gaining in popularity. Peter Oliver, a loyalist historian of the late colonial and Revolutionary era, wrote that Congregational ministers in Massachusetts took an active part in stirring up resistance against Great Britain. Understandably, Anglican ministers in the southern colonies, Virginia, in particular, did not advocate disobedience to the British crown; however, the increasing number of dissenters, mostly Presbyterians and Baptists, resulted in ministerial rhetoric against the actions of the British government.¹

Educated Americans were using their knowledge of Aristotelian political thought and Roman history, interlaced with the history of the English struggle for a balanced government dating back to the Magna Carta. Colonists referred to the British common law while intermingling seventeenth and eighteenth-century British opposition views, combining this with bits and pieces of contemporary thought, adding ideas of various Enlightenment philosophes, and applying these concepts to their distinctive situation to create a unique brand of republicanism. American Revolutionary-era republicanism cannot be identified as the classical republicanism of Greece, Rome, or Florence. The American variant has similarities to classical republicanism; however, important differences are quite evident. In England, Country versus Court politics in

¹ Douglas Adair, John A. Schutz, eds., *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Revolution: A Tory View*, Stanford University Press: San Marino, 1961, 41-42. Brett Tarter, "Church of England in Colonial America," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol.112, no. 4 (2004), 353-4.

the late 1600s and early 1700s pitted the country squires against members of the king's court whom they saw as corrupt. The country element of this dichotomy felt that people who attached themselves to the royal court were a self-seeking group who wallowed in patronage and cared nothing for the welfare of the British subjects. Two of the main objectives of the Country faction was to reduce the number of placemen in Parliament and to have more frequent elections. The Country faction was basically an oppositionist group that flourished when resisting another political entity while looking backward for what it conceived to be a better situation in the past. The Court portrayed the Country as a jealous group of troublemakers who only wanted to wield power for their own benefit. The Country ideology gained popularity in the British North American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. The writings of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon resonated freely in the newly emerging American political discourse. For example, Letter Fifty-nine includes the familiar sentiments "All men are born free," and "Liberty is a gift which they receive from God himself; nor can they alienate the same by consent, though possibly they may forfeit by crimes."²

By 1775, many Americans had fashioned and become dedicated to their distinct form of republican thought. Revolutionary American republicanism was a rather broad construct that allowed the disparate American colonies to find common ground for resisting the actions of the British government that colonists viewed as open attacks on their basic rights as Englishmen. The basic tenets of republicanism held by leaders from all thirteen colonies remained dominant

² John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters*, Ronald Hamoway, ed., Vol. 1, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995, 405.

in the young nation's persona as Americans fought a war for independence and later struggled to form a new government.

Following the Seven Years' War, British colonists in North America formed their own political ideology in opposition to a series of actions by the mother country. The relationship between the colonists and England deteriorated in the 1760s with many factors contributing to the breakdown of goodwill that had previously existed between the two. Historian, Bernard Bailyn, who in the 1960s brought forth the idea of Americans creating a unique ideology, republicanism, to deal with the troubling actions of Parliament, contends that at this time a large segment of the American public began to harbor strong suspicions that "an active conspiracy against liberty existed and involved the colonists directly." The source of this suspicion, according to Bailyn, came from the seventeenth-century English opposition literature. American colonists, viewing their situation in light of their understanding of historical tendencies, saw "the destruction of the English constitution, with all the rights and privileges embedded in it."³ Historian, Gordon Wood, Bailyn's former student, agrees with the idea that English political concepts, often referred to as Country ideology, greatly influenced the British American colonies prior to 1776. Instead of seeing this new political concept as backward looking, Wood contends that for all of its references to classical and even Greek and Roman ideas American Revolutionary-era republicanism was basically a modern construct.⁴

³ Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, 60-1; Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Interpretations of the American Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967, 45.

⁴ Gordon S Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969, viii.

The English gentry, many of whom embraced the country ideology, warned colonists that the British court was corrupt and provided a reason for Americans to oppose imperial policy. Americans easily adopted and adapted the language of Country ideology to suit their specific needs. The series of pamphlets written by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, from 1721 through 1723, using the pseudonym of Cato, in response to the South Sea Bubble scandal supported the Country point of view, while also incorporating many of John Locke's theories on natural law and natural rights. *Cato's Letters* first published in England during the 1720s influenced American colonists. Historian J. G. A. Pocock, another early proponent of American republicanism, traces the American republican ideal back even further than seventeenth-century Britain, in fact, he places the origins all the way back to Renaissance Italy and does not view it as a movement toward modernity.⁵ Also, the colonist's frequent use of Trenchard and Gordon's work and other enlightened language supports claims of historians, such as Joyce Appleby, that early American political thought was highly influenced by liberal ideals.⁶ Thus, the republicanism that developed in the North American colonies was never a "purely classical" form of republicanism because it incorporated the British Country traditional and contained aspects of Lockean liberalism.

All of these ideals, often seen as contradictory to modern minds, blended forming a uniquely American form of republicanism. Over the span of about one decade, events and

⁵ J. G. A. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and Atlantic Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, 14.

⁶ Appleby's work concerning the liberal aspect of American society and politics of the Revolutionary era include "Liberalism and the American Revolution," *New England Quarterly*, vol. 49 (1976) 3-26, "The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology," *Journal of American History*, vol. 66 (1978) 935-58, "The New Republican Synthesis and the Changing Political Ideals on John Adams," *American Quarterly*, vol. 25 (1973) 578-595.

actions of the British government prompted the creation of this uniquely American ideology. Republican ideals of the Revolutionary era held that for a republic to survive its inhabitants and public officials must be just, temperate, moderate, frugal and virtuous. Colonists embracing those ideals abhorred and feared power, which they believed could corrupt even a virtuous man. They believed that property ownership gave men the independence necessary to make political decisions without undue influence from others. The idea that yeoman farmers were the backbone of a successful republic resonated throughout their writings. Debt threatened independence and was to be avoided by individuals and the government. Standing armies were anathema to republicans. They thought that a standing army in time of peace could lead to a loss of liberty. Revolutionary-era republicans much preferred the idea of the militia, made up of volunteers. These ideas coalesced following the French and Indian War when the colonists began to feel that the British government was usurping their rights.

The Proclamation of 1763, the Sugar Act, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Acts, and numerous other actions by Parliament only served to reinforce the colonists' conspiratorial apprehensions, which, according to Bailyn, already existed throughout the colonies. News of the passage of each of these acts brought about angry responses within the American colonies. A pamphlet written by Stephen Hopkins, colonial governor of Rhode Island, reveals one such reaction to the Sugar Act of 1764, in which he extolled the virtues of liberty and lamented the "curse of slavery" in America.⁷ Hopkins began his work with praise for the British constitution

⁷ The Sugar Act of 1764 was actually a renewal of the Molasses Act that had been in place since 1733. The earlier law had never been strictly enforced in the colonies and was largely ignored. News of the Sugar Act of 1764 and the belief that the British government actually meant to strictly administer the new duties caused an immediate response from the New England colonies as well as from New York. Stephen Hopkins, "The Rights of Colonies Explained," in *American Political Writings during the Founding Era, 1760-1805*, vol. 1, Charles S. Hyneman and

in what seems to be an endorsement of Locke's contract theory of government. "This glorious Constitution" he said, "the best that ever existed among men, will be confessed by all to be founded by compact and established by consent of the people." According to Hopkins's pamphlet, "the adventurers who left England" to settle the wilds of North America did so with a written promise that "they were to receive protection and enjoy all the rights and privileges of freeborn Englishmen."⁸ Rhode Island's governor continued his argument in favor of the rights of colonists by referring to the colonization methods of the ancient Greeks. Hopkins labeled Thucydides "that grave and judicious historian," and quoted several of his remarks concerning the rights and obligations of the inhabitants of the Greek colonies. Thucydides described the privileges of Greek colonists, in general, when he wrote, "They were all sent out not to be slaves, but to be equals to those who remain behind," and more specifically, he noted, that they were under no obligation to do so. The responsibilities of the Greeks, who set up the new colonies, to the mother state were few. "'Tis true," Hopkins wrote, "they were fond to acknowledge their origin, and always confessed themselves under obligation to pay a kind of honorary respect to, and show a final dependence on the commonwealth from which they sprang."⁹ These sentiments, however, were voluntary, the product of affection, not force.

Donald Lutz, eds., *Independence: Liberty Fund*, 1983, 445-61. This pamphlet was written in 1764 and published in Providence, Rhode Island. At that time Hopkins was governor of Rhode Island, and his essay received the support of his state's legislative assembly. Hopkins's arguments used the New England colonies as examples of his specific complaints, but he declared his reasoning could just as easily apply to all British colonies.

⁸ Locke contended that the function of government was to protect the life, liberty, and property of its citizens and that if a government or ruler broke the contract all claim to their subject's loyalty was forfeited. Hopkins, "The Rights of Colonies Examined," 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-7.

The Romans, according to Hopkins, followed the Greeks in allowing their colonies full political rights. He maintained that Roman colonization took a different course than that of the Greeks, and Roman colonists did not become separate states and were not ruled by different laws. Instead, Hopkins's interpretation of Roman history maintained that Roman colonies "always remained a part of the mother state; and all that apply free of the colonies were also free of Rome, and the right to an equal suffrage in making all laws and appointing all officers for the government of the whole commonwealth." He also used the biblical story of Paul as a perfect example to bolster his argument stating, "For the truth of this we have the testimony of St. Paul, who although born at Tarsus, yet assures us he was born free of Rome." Hopkins relied on citing specific ancient examples and authorities to give support to his arguments about the rights of American colonists.¹⁰

Governor Hopkins was not alone in using the models of Greeks and Romans to support American grievances against England. Numerous colonial writings referred to these ancient republics in their criticism of the British government; however, those references were only a small part of the developing political perspective of the colonists. Bailyn argues convincingly that most allusions to the political history of the ancient world were sketchy and based on a superficial understanding of the classics, and "appear to have been dragged in as window dressing with which to ornament a page or a speech and increase the weight of an argument."¹¹ American political writers, even when they did not specifically mention the earliest republics, used Greek and Roman pseudonyms revealing their desire to identify with ancient governments.

¹⁰ Ibid., 47-8.

¹¹ Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 24.

One example of using the Roman Empire as a means of legitimizing political views of the colonial writers criticizing the British government appeared in a Boston paper in 1766. An essay, written under the pen name, Aequus, asked the question, “Whether the mother-country has a right of imposing local taxes on all her American colonies?”¹² Although generous sprinklings of Latin phrases and the use of a Roman pen name emphasized the importance of time honored Roman political ideals, the content of the essay supported ideas more closely associated with the Enlightenment and eighteenth-century political ideologies, particularly the Country versus Court dichotomy. A decade before the American Revolution, Aequus and countless others presented their ideas concerning liberty, justice, and the misuse of power that would become common currency within the next decade. The American brand of republicanism was forming and it needed the validation that association with ancient republics could provide; however, the political ideology that Americans created also contained the enlightenment ideals of Locke and never closely resembled that of Greece and Rome.

Republicanism, as it developed in the pre-Revolutionary period, grew stronger when it had something to oppose, and in the 1760s the British provided much for the colonists to contest. As the British government announced its imperial decisions, colonial leaders began voicing their objections. Some more closely reflected Locke’s view of government while others were quite similar to the Country philosophy popular in Great Britain several decades earlier. While discontented colonists became familiar with the enlightened ideas of Locke, and the oppositional

¹² Aequus, “From the Craftsman,” *Massachusetts and Boston Newsletter*, March 6, 1766.

language of the Country tradition, the English Parliament began passing a series of acts that sparked American anger.

Samuel Adams, cousin of John Adams and early proponent of American independence, attempted to explain the strong reaction of many Americans to the passage of the Stamp Act. In a letter to a friend in England, Adams wrote, “But there is another consideration which makes the Stamp Act obnoxious to our people here and that is, that it really annihilates, as they apprehend, their essential rights as Englishmen.” Adams’s letter clearly indicates that in 1765, he had no idea of advocating independence; he simply wanted to enjoy the liberties and rights due to all Englishmen. Adams, just as Hopkins, praised the British constitution and stated, “it admits of no more power over a subject than is necessary for the support of the government which was originally designed for the preservation of the inalienable rights of nature.” This statement, while definitely Lockean in origin, was followed by Adams’s guarantee that the concept of virtual representation would never be acceptable to the American public and explained that no American could be convinced that they were truly represented in a governmental body to which they sent no elected representative.¹³ The insistence on actual representation and liberty became a resounding note in the political rhetoric of colonial Americans.

Another Bostonian, the prominent Congregational minister, Jonathon Mayhew, explained his concept of liberty in a sermon denouncing the passage of the Stamp Act and rejoicing at its repeal in 1766. The language of his message paralleled the rapidly developing American republican vocabulary, which clearly included Lockean ideas concerning freedom and connected

¹³ Sam Adams, Letter to John Smith, 19 December 1765, in T. J. Stiles, ed., *In Their Own Words: Founding Fathers*, New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1999, 13-4.

the loss of liberty to the lack of civic virtue in the English government. Mayhew vividly described liberty and slavery when he spoke of his childhood and being raised to the “love of liberty, tho’ not licentiousness; which chaste and virtuous passion was still increased in me, as I advanced towards, and into manhood.” He referred to the passage of the Stamp Act by commenting, “I was, accordingly, penetrated by the most sensible grief, when, about the first of November last, the day of darkness, a day hardly to be numbered with the other days of the year, She seemed about to take her final departure from America, and to leave that ugly hag slavery, the deformed child of Satan, in her room.” In this sermon delivered after the act’s repeal, Mayhew rejoiced in the return of “Liberty.” He continued by praising America as a refuge for other Europeans seeking a safe haven from the “luxury, debauchery, venality, intestine quarrels, or other vices,” that plagued their society.¹⁴ Mayhew’s view of liberty and his statement concerning the corruption of Europe conformed to ideals of the republican discourse taking root in the colonies. Americans embracing republicanism believed that submitting to the what they perceived as unconstitutional taxation represented by the Stamp Act would result in a loss of liberty, which would render them slaves to the corrupt powers of the British government. Power, according to republicanism, was a malignant force that could sully even a just man or leader. Luxurious living represented by the lavish lifestyles of the members of royal families and their households and those who clung to the perimeters of European courts was seen as morally bankrupt. This element of the country faction, distaste for and fear of the consequences of a decadent lifestyle, was incorporated into the developing political discourse in colonial America.

¹⁴ Jonathon Mayhew, “The Snare Broken: A Thanksgiving Discourse,” 23 May 1776, in Elis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1998, 259.

These changing political views occurred in not only the New England colonies, but within their southern neighbors as well.

Richard Bland, a Virginia planter and member of an elite Chesapeake family, wrote a pamphlet entitled, “An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies.”¹⁵ Bland’s essay, originally published in March 1766, in pamphlet form and reprinted in the *Virginia Gazette* on May 30, 1766, and in London in 1769, responded to an earlier anonymous essay, entitled, “The Regulations Lately Made Concerning the Colonies and the Taxes Imposed upon Them Considered.” Bland argued against the concept of virtual representation and maintained that while Parliament might have the power to tax inhabitants of the British colonies; it had no right to do so. He contended that power and right are very different and accused the British Parliament of using power to impose a tax it had no right to enact. Bland stated, “I say that *Power* abstracted from *Right* cannot give a just title to dominion.”¹⁶ The deep distrust of power and loathing of taxes that Bland considered unjust was one of the lasting hallmarks of American republicanism, and adherents to these beliefs vigorously opposed governments or leaders who attempted to increase power at the expense of the people’s freedom.

“An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies” revealed Bland’s reliance on John Locke’s concept of the laws of nature and his deeply held conviction concerning the rights of propertied British subjects. Bland argued that “nine tenths of the people of Britain are deprived

¹⁵ Richard Bland was born in the colony of Virginia in 1710. He attended the College of William and Mary and served as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses for thirty-three years. He was the maternal great-uncle of John Randolph of Roanoke, who later became a prominent defender of the republican ideals that were evident in Bland’s 1766 pamphlet.

¹⁶ Richard Bland, “An Inquiry into the Rights of British Colonies,” Charles Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, , 67-87.

of the high privilege of being Electors.” He claimed that too much power, held by the British Parliament, corrupted the “present Constitution,” and concluded that “the Gangrene has taken too deep hold to be eradicated in these Days of Venality.”¹⁷ Bland’s pamphlet was one of the first written criticisms of the British government in the colonies; however, in the years to follow many more American colonists would echo his sentiments and go beyond his conclusions as they formulated an American political theory, Revolutionary-era Republicanism. In the same month that Bland’s pamphlet appeared in the *Virginia Gazette*, an untitled piece circulated in Boston published under the pen name, Britannus Americanus. This brief essay, written in response to the passage of the Stamp Act, attacked Parliament, arguing that this governmental party was trying to deprive legitimate subjects of their rights. The anonymous author reasoned that the inhabitants of British North America were loyal subjects to the king, but that the “parliament of England has no more lawful power to make an act which shall deprive people of *New England* of those rights than they have a right to deprive the people of *Old England* of the same rights...”¹⁸ Even though the author declared his and his fellow colonists’ loyalty to the crown, he contended that parliamentary acts created a definite distinction between the inhabitants of Old England and New England.

The idea that Parliament and the king’s advisors denied colonists their traditional and natural rights harkened back to the “Country versus Court” politics of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in Britain. The author’s pen name, Britannus Americanus revealed that he considered New England colonists a distinct category of Englishmen, but he also made it

¹⁷ Bland, “Inquiry,” 73-4.

¹⁸ Britannus Americanus, Untitled, *Boston Gazette*, 17 May 1766.

clear that they deserved the same rights and privileges due all subjects of the king. In condemning the Stamp Act, Britannus Americanus, maintained that New England consented to be subject to the king; however, he argued that “the people of England could have no more political connection with them or power of jurisdiction over them, than they now have over the people of Hanover who are also subjects of the same king.” The perceived corruption of parliament weighed heavily in his essay, and the writer clearly viewed this body as having been corrupted and trying to subvert the English constitution.¹⁹ The negative aspects of power, dominating, as they seemed to colonial minds, had a strong foil, and that was a virtuous citizenry.

Civic virtue, in republican thought, referred to a “particular role that a person might occupy, the role of citizen.” Occasionally, a citizen might be called upon to sacrifice his own interests in the name of civic virtue. Historian Shelly Burt provides a convincing definition by stating that civic virtue is “the disposition to further public over private good in action and deliberation.”²⁰ The republican concept of virtue had its basis in three fundamental elements: fear of corruption, fear of dependence, and the importance of liberty. Colonial American adherents of republican beliefs feared both the passive and active forms of corruption. The passive type resulted from the evils of luxurious living. Citizens who spent too much time in pursuit of personal pleasures often avoided participating in governmental affairs and performing their civic duties. An even more unfortunate variety was active corruption, which resulted when an

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Shelly Burt, “The Good Citizen’s Psyche: On Psychology of Civic Virtue,” *Polity* 23, Fall 1999, 24.

inhabitant used his position to subvert the common good. Wealthy, influential individuals who became greedy and exhibited a strong desire for power could eventually lead to tyranny. Virtuous citizens abhorred dependence because “the person who is completely dependent on another person may be ruled, but is surely in no position to rule.” Property ownership allowed one to avoid the dreadful state of dependency. As much as the early Americans despised dependency, they revered liberty. Freedom relied on virtuous citizens who possessed personal independence, exercised their rights, and when necessary sacrificed their welfare for the good of the community. The ideal citizen would embrace the idea of civic virtue and at the same time remain ever vigilant against the encroaching nature of power.²¹

An essay printed in the *South Carolina Gazette* on October 6, 1766, contended that “the security of freedom can only be in public virtue,” and that “luxury leads to Corruption.” Tribune, the pseudonym of the author of the piece, maintained that the members of the British Parliament had become venal and because of the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the English members of parliament, American colonists were “now groaning under an insupportable load of debts, taxes, pensions, sine-cures, and employments, with an universal spirit of rapine and combination, to supply the cravings of avarice, luxury, and prostitution.” The American colonies were likened to a workhorse whose master had “undertook to make his horse live without eating.” Growing disgust with the British Parliament, depicted in this essay as a group of corrupt men living opulently, promoted the idea that American colonists were the virtuous heirs of the true English way. The colonists began seeing themselves as sturdy agrarians who formed the

²¹ Richard Dagger, *Civic Virtues: Rights, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 14-5.

bedrock of English social and political tradition. Agrarianism and the importance of small yeoman farmers to public virtue was a vital element of the newly developing American brand of republicanism.²² Americans looked at the British members of parliament and found reason to believe they had turned from the acceptable agrarian model. Bernard Bailyn maintains that everyone agreed, “there was corruption in the adroit manipulation of parliament by a power-hungry ministry, and corruption generally in the self-indulgent, effeminizing luxury, and gluttonous pursuit of gain of a generation sunk in new and unaccustomed wealth.”²³ The idea that England had grown corrupt became more widespread throughout the colonies.

Benjamin Franklin, while serving as a colonial agent in England in the 1760s, developed a quite critical opinion not only the British government but also of the society and economy as well. He depicted the Mother Country as an old, too densely populated, and starkly inegalitarian society. Franklin looked to the French physiocrats for a clear understanding of economic politics in Europe, and more specifically, England. Franklin concluded that mercantilist countries such as Britain were “fond of their Manufactures beyond their real value.”²⁴ In an essay entitled “Remarks on Agriculture and Manufacturing,” Franklin offered the following condemnation of Britain’s political economy and praise for agriculture. He wrote, “ There seems to be but three Ways for a nation to acquire Wealth. The first is by *War* as the Romans did for plundering their conquered neighbors. This is *Robbery*. The second is by *Commerce* which is generally Cheating. The third is by *Agriculture* the only *honest Way*; wherein Man receives a real increase in the

²² The Tribune, Untitled, *South Carolina Gazette*, Charleston, South Carolina, 6 October 1766.

²³ Bailyn, 51.

²⁴ Benjamin Franklin to Caldwell Evans, 20 February 1768.

seed thrown into the ground, in a kind of contained Miracle wrought by the Hand of God in his favour, as a Reward for his innocent Life and virtuous Industry.²⁵ Franklin saw America in stark contrast to England, which according to him was and ‘aged society,’ in which “many men were forced to become dependent wage-laborers who worked for a master.” Because of the agricultural character of American society, Franklin believed that inhabitants there would remain relatively equal in wealth and power. The opportunity to own land allowed men to be independent. In an essay entitled, “The Interests of Great Britain Considered,” Franklin not only claims that in England there is “a multitude of poor without land” and that they “must work for others at low wages or starve,” he also stated that “no man who can have a piece of land of his own, sufficient by his labor to subsist his family in plenty is poor enough to be a manufacturer and work for a master.”²⁶ He believed the abundance of land would deliver Americans from ever being pushed into the evils of manufacturing.

John Adams respected the value of the farmer to Massachusetts and revealed this in an essay on agriculture published in the *Boston Gazette* in 1763. In this article, Adams stated, “Agriculture, the Nursing Mother of every Art, Science, Trade and Profession in civilized society, has been most ungratefully despised. It has been too much so in Europe, but infinitely more so in America, and perhaps not the least so in the Massachusetts Bay.”²⁷ Adams encouraged colonial Americans to consider the value of agriculture to the prosperity of the

²⁵ Benjamin Franklin, “Remarks on Agriculture and Manufacturing,” Leonard W. Larabee, et al., eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 18, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, 273-274.

²⁶ *Ibid*, vol. 9, 73-74.

²⁷ John Adams, “Essay on Agriculture,” *Boston Gazette*, 18 July 1763, in L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 1, 1755-1790, New York: Antheneum, 1961, 246.

colonies. He contended that it was through the efforts of farmers that the colony had survived and prospered. This essay, written in response to an earlier letter signed by Humphrey Ploughjogger, gave advice on the proper method of cultivating hemp and recommended that professionals, particularly lawyers and physicians, should become involved in raising the crop.²⁸ His essay warned professionals and those who had “greater intellectual Abilities than mankind in general, Consider, that nature intended them for Leaders of Industry.”²⁹ Adams believed that these successful lawyers, doctors, and other professionals should not turn their backs on the colonies’ agricultural origins. According to Adams, it would be too easy for men with too much leisure to fall into luxurious and evil habits. He echoed American republican theory by declaring that wealth and success could result in the downfall of its possessors. Adams praised the independence of small farmers and revealed a significant connection between the strong Puritan work ethic and the republican ideal of the importance of yeomanry. Events in 1765 turned Adams’s attention to more pressing matters.

The passage of the Stamp Act and Mutiny Acts in 1765 gave Adams much to consider. As the year was drawing to a close, he ruminated about the current state of affairs and made an entry into his diary that would in the early part of the coming year find its way into the *Boston Gazette* under the pseudonym Claredon. Adams described America in glowing terms. His narrative contained phrases that would later become common currency in republican rhetoric. In praise of American colonists he wrote, “If ever an infant Country deserved to be cherished it is

²⁸ Ibid., 250. The editor of Adams’s diary suggests that Adams also wrote the letter signed by Humphrey Ploughjogger and actually carried on a written dialogue with himself. Ploughjogger’s essay was written in a way that led readers to believe it had been penned by a poorly educated farmer asking his betters for some advice on the proper method of growing hemp.

²⁹ Ibid.

America, if ever People merited Honor and Happiness, they are her Inhabitants.” He, in the style of other colonial leaders of the time, compared Americans to the citizens of Rome. “They have the high sentiments of Romans in the most prosperous and virtuous Times of that Commonwealth. Yet they have the tenderest feeling of Humanity and the Noblest Benevolence of Christians. They have the habitual sense of Liberty, and the highest reverence for Virtue.”³⁰

Adams publicly praised his fellow colonists for their virtue; however, he also worried about the possibility that they might lose their rights and liberties. As the year 1765 drew to a close, Adams, on Christmas Day, recorded that he was at home and “thinking, reading, searching, concerning Taxation without Consent.”³¹ The recent actions of the British Parliament greatly troubled Adams and references to the evils of power and its ability to subvert liberty filled his writings. New Englanders, at least those in Adams’s circle, opposed recent actions of the British parliament and the concepts of liberty and virtue were becoming more popular than the earlier idea of obediently submitting to authority. The political atmosphere in Boston was often reflected in the religious rhetoric of the day. After attending church on the Sabbath, Adams scrutinized the sermon for what he called signs of a “Tory Sermon,” but found no overt support for the Stamp Act. To the contrary, Adams suspected that the minister had tailored his message to suit his anti-Stamp Act audience. Adams contended that this was becoming common practice among New England ministers, and referred to a sermon preached by Mr. Gay on Thanksgiving Day. “Mr. Gay admonished the people to submit to authority, particularly in reference to the Stamp Act; however, the sermon so inflamed members of his church that they accused him of

³⁰ John Adams, 272.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 273.

favoring the despised Stamp Act and actually leveled threats against him.”³² The following Sunday, he adjusted his stance to suit the demands of his congregation. “This sermon advocated, Honor, Reward, and Obedience to Good Rulers, and a Spirited Opposition to bad ones, interspersed with a good deal of animated Declamation upon Liberty and the Times.”³³ The tenets of Revolutionary-era republicanism, which included a fear of power and its corrupting force, began to grow more popular than ever, and ministers in New England realized the necessity of conforming to fashionable political ideals. Therefore, after altering his message concerning the Stamp Act, instead of being threatened by his congregation, Mr. Gay now found it praising him and considering having his sermon against the Stamp Act published.³⁴

Adams also questioned the character of the colonists who sought positions from the crown. He called these men seekers and openly held them in contempt. In a diary entry entitled “A Dissertation Upon Seekers of Elections, Of Commissions from the Governour, of Commissions from the Crown,” Adams warned, “These Seekers are actuated to be a more ravenous sort of Ambition and Avarice and merit a more aggravated Condemnation. These ought to be avoided and dreaded as the Plague, as the destroying Angels. Let no such man be trusted.”³⁵ No sense of civic virtue existed in these men, and in republican belief, virtue was the vital element to protect the liberty of all men.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 280.

³⁵ Ibid., 277.

Revolutionary-era Americans were well versed in the necessity of having virtuous leaders and citizens; however, they also realized that power could corrupt even virtuous men and that unscrupulous leaders might gain control of a standing army or even wrest power from a legitimate ruler. Fear of a standing army became one of the cornerstones of American republican thought. These ideas were not original to the colonies and examples of this dread of a strong military exist in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century British writings. Thomas Gordon, in a series of letters entitled “Considerations upon the Condition of an Absolute Prince,” forcefully condemned standing armies calling them a “curse in every country under the sun where they are more powerful than the people.” He claimed that any monarch who depended on an army could not truly rule because “he will find them armed against himself, as well as his people or his neighbors: and he cannot relieve his subjects if he would. As armies long kept, and grown part of the government will soon engross the whole government, and can never be disbanded; so liberty long lost, can never be fully recovered.” Gordon’s warning against standing armies asked the question, “Is not this an awful lesson to free states, to be vigilant against a dreadful condition, which has no remedy?”³⁶ Eighteenth-century Americans were well aware of the British “Country” view of standing armies and had their own fears and suspicions concerning maintaining armies in times of peace.

Adams’s diary contained notes for a speech he delivered at Braintree, Massachusetts, in the spring of 1772, in which Adams focused on the necessity of civic virtue and the dangers of a standing army in time of peace. In this oration, Adams presented his thoughts on the ideal form of government and warned his audience of the many dangers to liberty. People, according to

³⁶ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato’s Letters*, Ronald Hamowy, ed., vol.2, Indianapolis: Liberty

Adams, “must be on guard because they may be deceived, and their Simplicity, Ignorance, and Docility, render them frequently liable to deception.” Adams referred to the “late Innovations” of the British government to warn inhabitants of Braintree against threats to their liberty. New taxes, the Court of Admiralty, and the “introduction of a standing army into our Metropolis” all signaled serious threats to the inhabitants of North America. His language referring to the presence of British troops contained strong words of warning. He asked, “Have you not seen horrid rancour, furious Violence, infernal Cruelty, shocking Impiety and Profanation, and shameless Debauchery, running down the Streets like a stream?” Adams’s speech warned that liberty was always in danger and stated, “The Love of Power is insatiable and uncontrollable.” Countries could not always rely on the virtue of their leaders to protect liberty, because the lure of power seduced even strong men. In closing, Adams strongly advised, “be upon your Guard, my Countrymen.”³⁷ He was certainly not alone in his fears and concern for the worsening relationship between the American subjects and Britain government grew in all colonies.

George Washington, from his home in Mount Vernon kept abreast of the political scene through his correspondence. From Londoner Robert Stewart in January 1764, Washington received word of the sentiments of the British government toward their North American colonies.³⁸ Stewart wrote, “American affairs is becoming a standing Topic- It is said, I’m afraid from too good authority that the Colonies will be Saddled with a tax of no less that three hundred

Fund, 1995, 983-4.

³⁷ L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol.2, Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1961, 242.

³⁸ Robert Stewart had served under Washington’s command during the Seven Years’ War and was a frequent correspondent.

pounds sterling[per annum]: in order to support the Troops Judg'd necessary for defense.”³⁹

Stewart wrote several letters to Washington in which he included news of the British government that pertained to the American colonies in general and Virginia in particular. In several pieces of his personal correspondence, Washington included news of the Stamp Act and the legislation's unfavorable reception in Virginia.

In a letter to Francis Dandridge, Martha Washington's uncle, Washington explained the local reaction to the passage of the Stamp Act. He wrote, “The Stamp Act Imposed on the Colonies by the Parliament of Great Britain engrosses the conservation of the Speculative part of the Colonists, who look upon this unconstitutional method of Taxation as a direful attack upon our liberties, & loudly exclaim against the Violation – what may result of this and some other (I think I may add) ill judged Measures, I will not undertake to determine.”⁴⁰

Washington echoed these sentiments in several letters written in 1765. In every instance, he stressed that colonists saw the acts as a means to deprive them of their liberties. The passage of the Stamp Act impassioned colonial leaders and prompted a great deal of discontent. Both public and private discourse revealed the growth of American republicanism. Even as colonists rejoiced at the repeal of the contentious Stamp Act, they continued to nurture their republican ideology.

³⁹ Robert Stewart to George Washington. London, January 4, 1764, in *The Papers of George Washington*, Colonial Series, vol.7, January 1761-June 1767, W. W. Abbott and Beverly H. Runge, eds., Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999, 281-283.

⁴⁰ George Washington to Francis Dandridge, Mount Vernon, September 20, 1765.

Difficulties arising from implementation of the Mutiny (or Quartering) Act of 1765, soon overshadowed the joy surrounding the repeal of the Stamp Act.⁴¹ Colonists influenced by the conspiracy theory saw Parliament's actions as further proof that a powerful and corrupt segment of the British government was trying to enslave the colonists and deny them the rights to which they were entitled as British subjects.⁴² Americans refined their arguments against England and began formulating their own concept of a just government.

The creation of the Sons of Liberty in 1765, revealed the deep dedication to freedom shared by an ever-growing number of colonists. Later, the Townshend Acts brought about another outpouring of colonial protest.⁴³ John Dickinson, a preeminent Philadelphia lawyer, member of Pennsylvania's colonial legislature, and vocal opponent of British policies whose remonstrations appeared in the form of a series of open correspondence collectively entitled *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer*, presented another example of the developing republican thought. His articles clearly stated the colonists' oppositions to the newly imposed duties and delivered a point of view representative of many Americans.

⁴¹ The Mutiny Act of 1765 required colonists in America to provide quarters and supplies for British troops in America. American colonists had been voluntarily (albeit somewhat reluctantly) doing so.

⁴² British colonists in North America began to think they could discern a definite pattern in the acts of parliament. Many who wrote pamphlets and essays declared there was a conspiracy afoot, and that parliament was taking away the liberties of the colonists in a pre-planned and systematic manner.

⁴³ The Townshend Acts, sponsored by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, were British legislations enacted on June 29, 1767. Their intent was to raise revenue, tighten customs enforcement, and assert imperial authority over the unruly American colonies. The key statutes levied import duties on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea. Its main purpose was to provide salaries for some colonial officials so that the provincial governments could not coerce them by refusing them their wages. Other bills authorized Writs of Assistance, created three additional vice admiralty courts, which operated without juries, established a Board of Customs Commissioners headquartered in Boston, and suspended the New York Assembly for not complying with the Quartering Act of 1765.

Dickinson's first essay provides a very apt characterization of the ideal lifestyle of a conscientious colonial subject. The introduction, in which he proclaims, "I am a farmer," although it does not accurately portray the author, confirms the importance of small independent farmers to the developing political ideology of the colonists. Dickinson continued to describe his idealistic version of a small independent farmer. He wrote, "My farm is small; my servants are few, and good; I have a little money at interest; I wish no more; my employment in affairs is easy; and with a grateful mind (undisturbed by worldly hopes or fears, relating to myself) I am completing the number of days allotted to me by divine goodness."⁴⁴ Dickinson later explained falsely representing himself as a small, independent farmer because he felt compelled to write his essays due to his strong sense of civic virtue. After no one else came forth to shed light on the objectionable actions of the British Parliament, which assaulted the liberties of the colonists, Dickinson reluctantly took pen in hand to enlighten the American public concerning the impending danger they faced. In his letter concerning the Townshend Acts, Dickinson used his knowledge of history to bolster his argument against the duties placed on manufactured goods. The Carthaginians, according to Dickinson, decreed that the Sardinians could not grow corn and were only allowed to import it from the Carthaginians. He wrote that "whenever the oppressed people made the least movement to assert their liberty, their tyrants starved them to death or submission." The most important question concerning the new taxes levied by the Townshend Acts, Dickinson contended, was whether parliament could legally impose duties "to be paid by

⁴⁴ John Dickson, "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer," in *The Writings of John Dickinson*, vol. 1, Political Writings, 1762-1774, ed. Pail Liecester Ford, Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1889, 307.

the people of these colonies only, for the sole purpose of raising a revenue. . . . “ He concluded, “If they can, our boasted liberty is but a sound and nothing else.”⁴⁵

In letter VI, Dickinson continued to warn the colonists to remain ever vigilant concerning their liberty. He reminded them of the Caesars, who, in his words, “ruined the Roman liberty, under the titles of tribunical and dictatorial authorities.” James II, Dickinson wrote, “talked of liberty” when he “meant to establish popery.” The idea that liberty always faced danger from attempts of rulers to increase their power resounded throughout this essay. Dickinson warned, “All artful rulers, who strive to extend their power beyond its just limits, endeavor to give their attempts as much semblance of legality as possible. Those who succeed them may venture to go a little further; for each new encroachment will be strengthened by a former.”⁴⁶

The influence of Dickinson’s political essays spread throughout North America. The pieces were presented in pamphlet form and distributed, reprinted in major newspapers in the colonies, and collected and published together. His “Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer” espoused almost all of the concepts that made up American republican thought in 1767. He praised the small independent farmer, warned against the English government’s attacks on liberty, repeatedly cautioned colonists to remain vigilant against the dangers of a standing army in time of peace, and reminded his readers that history contained many examples of others who had lost their liberty by failing to recognize and guard against the evil, corrupting nature of power.

⁴⁵ John Dickinson, “Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer,” 321-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 345-6.

As the British government enacted more measures affecting the colonists and the colonists responded with often-rebellious actions, Americans began to embrace openly the ideals of republicanism. These concepts, including elements of ancient republican principles of Greeks and Romans, the Whiggish Country discourse of seventeenth-century British politics, and the enlightened ideals of men such as Locke bound the disparate settlers of British North America together as they moved ever closer to a break with Great Britain. Revolutionary-era republicanism brought Americans together as they prepared to fight a common enemy. It was a time to put aside earlier social, political, and economic differences in favor of a moralistic set of ideals that bound the colonies together. American Revolutionary republicanism provided justification for Americans to proceed in their righteous struggle against a corrupt and unjust government that had tried to enslave them.

In due course, Americans fought and won the Revolutionary War, and American republicanism, the unifying discourse in the years leading up to the American Revolution and throughout the war years, lost its power to hold the new nation together. The central government under the Articles of Confederation, as well as the early state constitutions, reflected the former colonists' republican beliefs. Now, without a common enemy to oppose, the idealistic tenets of Revolutionary-era republicanism lost their appeal to many Americans. Gordon Wood maintains that it was during this time that some Americans came to doubt the feasibility of operating a government according to the republican ideals, which had been so popular during the period just prior to independence.⁴⁷ Tristan Dalton, one of many Americans discontented with the lack of

⁴⁷ Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1972, 430.

effectiveness of the new government, expressed his disappointment in the Articles of Confederation in a letter to John Adams in 1786. He wrote, “No people ever had a fairer opportunity to be what they anxiously wished to be – none ever neglected their interest more.” Dalton clearly recognized the lack of unity among the members of the new nation. “From the seeds of division among us, much is to be dreaded.”⁴⁸ Dalton’s pessimistic comments concerning the state of the new nation reflected a growing disillusionment with the government. Even before the first federal charter took effect in 1781, individuals drafted proposals to amend the Articles of Confederation. Since amending them required unanimous approval, it proved virtually impossible to do so. Support for the national government lagged far behind commitment to state and local authorities. With no eminent threat to liberty, the cohesion and patriotic enthusiasm of the 1770s vanished. No amendment proposed by the legislative body of the Continental Congress ever passed; therefore, prominent leaders in several states began to cast about for ways to reform the national government. Virginia called for a meeting of representatives of all states to discuss interstate commerce. Although this meeting, called the Annapolis Convention, attracted delegates from only five states, it set the stage for a convention to be held during May in Philadelphia. This meeting, later called the Constitutional Convention, led to the creation of a government under a newly written Constitution.⁴⁹

On February 21, 1787, the Confederation Congress adopted a resolution authorizing the convention. Congress’s mandate empowered delegates to revise the Articles of Confederation.

⁴⁸ Tristram Dalton to John Adams, Boston, July 11, 1786, in John Adams, vol.5 of *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961, 246.

⁴⁹ Jack N. Rakone, *Original Meanings: Politics and Ideas in the Making of the Constitution*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997, 25-33.

From the initial meeting, and even before they actually gathered in Philadelphia, it was understood by many of the participants that the convention would ignore the legitimate purpose of the gathering and create a new Constitution.⁵⁰ From May 25 until September 17, 1787, delegates grappled with the problems of creating a new government. Disagreements abounded and careful political maneuvering and skillful compromises were necessary to reach an agreement. There was never unanimous approval of the new constitution among the convention members, and five delegates refused to sign the finished document. As the procedure for forming a new government moved into the ratification stage, two groups appeared: Federalists and Anti-Federalists. Federalists supported the new Constitution and Anti-Federalists opposed it. Both groups used the still popular Revolutionary-era republican rhetoric to bolster their positions.

Pamphlets, articles, and open letters, which were circulated and often printed in newspapers, relied upon Revolutionary-era discourse to convince the population to vote for delegates who would accept or reject the new Constitution. Federalists, those who supported the Constitution, couched their arguments in the popular republican language and argued that the liberty so recently won would not be compromised by the new Constitution. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison wrote a series of essays in support of the Constitution. These essays, collectively known as *The Federalist Papers*, supported the concept that the Constitution allowed the Federal government very limited powers that were plainly expressed.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Patrick Henry refused to represent Virginia at the convention because he knew something other than amending the Articles was afoot. His reason for refusing was that he “smelt a rat.”

⁵¹ New York State presented the strongest opposition to the new Constitution and a public relations campaign began to win their support for the Constitution. Hamilton, Jay, and Madison shared the pen name Publius

Following ratification of the Constitution, those who opposed the direction of the new government used the *Federalist Papers* to remind members of the government of their promises concerning the limits of the new United States government.

The Anti-Federalists opposed ratification of the Constitution, and responded to the avalanche of pro-Constitutional propaganda. Elbridge Gerry, George Mason, Samuel Bryan, Richard Henry Lee, and Luther Martin wrote the most widely circulated Anti-Federalist literature.⁵² Anti-Federalists were not an organized or united group who shared consistent political ideals. They came from diverse regional, social, and economic backgrounds. Parts of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas strongly opposed ratification. Basic elements shared by Anti-Federalists were their opposition to the Constitution and the use of republican language to defend their stance. Aristocrats in Virginia and struggling yeoman farmers in Pennsylvania turned to the republican rhetoric of the Revolution to fight against ratification. This discourse could be effectively used by both those who thought the government was too democratic and those who believed it was not democratic enough. James Madison characterized the Anti-Federalists in a letter to Jefferson, by stating, “They had no plan

as they bombarded New Yorkers with pro-constitution rhetoric. Many argue that the *Federalist Papers* had little positive impact on the ratification process; however, these collected essays gave politicians an authoritative interpretation of the Constitution after it was adopted.

⁵² Saul Cornell argues that historians must consider how widely publicized essays, letters, and pamphlets were in order to achieve a true picture of Anti-Federalist sentiment. He compiled lists showing the most often published Anti-Federalist works and maintains that these were more representative of the main segment of the population. Print culture, according to Cornell, united the Anti-Federalist’s movement and provided them with “a shared language and common set of criticisms.” Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition, 1788-1828*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 28.

whatever. They looked no farther than to put a negative on the Constitution. . . .”⁵³ Madison’s statement was true; Anti-Federalists never called a convention to form an alternative constitution, nor did they band together in any organized fashion.

The Anti-Federalists did not argue that changes in the government under the Articles of Confederation were unnecessary; however, they tended to defend the status quo and resist all sweeping changes. A number of those opposing ratification of the new Constitution did so on the ground that “whatever is old is good.”⁵⁴ Anti-Federalists viewed themselves as defenders of the pure republican principles of the Revolutionary era, and they argued that these ideals were embodied in the Articles of Confederation. In the first Brutus essay, readers were asked, “whether a confederated government be the best for the United States or not?” The treatise contended that the present form of government was more suitable for the young nation.⁵⁵ Those in favor of the new Constitution, according to Anti-Federalists, desired to adopt a new form of government based on concepts that differed from the principles of the Revolution. Patrick Henry, in a speech before the Virginia Ratifying Committee, urged Virginia to consider the gravity of approving a new Constitution. He declared, “Here is a revolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain. It is as radical, if in this transition our rights and

⁵³ James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, New York, February 19, 1788. James Morton Smith, ed., *The Republic of Letters: Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1776-1826*, vol. 1, New York: W. W. Norton, 1995, 529.

⁵⁴ Herbert J. Storing, *What the Anti-Federalists were For: The Political Thought of the Opponents of the Constitution*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, 7.

⁵⁵ The Brutus Essays were a series of sixteen writings that appeared in the *New York Journal* at the same time that the Federalists essays were published. They were probably written by Robert Yates, a New York judge. These essays were widely quoted and reprinted all over the United States, but they were never published in pamphlet form. Ralph Ketcham, ed., *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates*, New York: Penguin Putnam, 1986, 269.

privileges are endangered, and the sovereignty be relinquished: And cannot we plainly see, that this is actually the case?”⁵⁶ Many Anti-Federalists represented a type of republicanism that stridently opposed the attempts to create a national government that would in any way negate the authority of state governments. Eldridge Gerry noted the consolidating tendency of the Constitution. He insisted that “The Constitution proposed has few if any *federal* features, but it is rather a system of *national* government.”⁵⁷ Disagreements over who were the true federalists reveal the difficulty of defining the beliefs of Federalists and Anti-Federalists. The rhetoric of both those who supported and those who opposed the Constitution reflected the popularity of republican discourse, with each group using the language of republicanism as it attempted to sway American opinion on the Constitution.

Anti-Federalists believed that only if state governments had primacy could liberty be preserved. Patrick Henry, in a speech filled with solemn warnings of dire consequences, admonished the delegates of the Virginia ratifying Convention to reject the new Constitution. “We are come hither to preserve the poor Commonwealth of Virginia, if it can be possibly done; something must be done to preserve your liberty and mine.”⁵⁸ Behind the concept that states were more fit to govern and better prepared to protect individual freedom than the national

⁵⁶ Patrick Henry, June 5, 1788, “Speech to Virginia Ratifying Convention,” in Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 5, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981, 215.

⁵⁷ Rather ironically, Anti-Federalists did not oppose government of a federal character. They argued that under the Articles of Confederation representatives of a group of sovereign and independent states met and handled a limited range of common issues. This system depended largely on the cooperation of the states. Under the federal system of government the balance of power shifted to the state. Many opponents of the Constitution resisted the label Anti-Federalists and rarely used it to describe themselves. As the ratification progress progressed the term federal was also used to refer to those in favor of the new government. Strictly speaking, the term nationalist more clearly represents the sentiments of proponents of the Constitution. Cornell: *The Other Founders*, 165.

⁵⁸ Patrick Henry, June 5, 1788, “Speech to Virginia Ratifying Convention,” in Storing, *The Complete Anti-Federalist*, vol. 5, 215.

government lay the belief that the republican form of government could only be successful in small territories. Antifederalists were obsessed with the dangerous aspects of power. Just as Americans in 1776 had fought against the corrupting and ever expanding evils of power, which would rob them of their liberty, Anti-Federalists in 1787 contended that the Constitution posed the same threat to their freedom that British policy had prior to the Revolution. The fears of Revolutionary leaders passed to the Anti-Federalists, and later to men like Macon and Randolph, who so fiercely clung to the republican principles of the 1760s and 1770s. These two men were often referred to as part of a group called the Old Republicans, who, like the revolutionaries and Anti-Federalists, perceived threats lurking behind every political bush and remained vigilant against them.⁵⁹

Fear of too much government power was a major concern of the Anti-Federalists and it closely reflected the fears of Americans prior to the Revolution. Anti-Federalists warned that even a good man could be corrupted by power and an executive could make himself king and take away all of the liberties and freedoms Americans now enjoyed. Anti-Federalists also worried that the judicial branch gave primacy to national courts and would undermine the integrity of state courts. By placing so much power in the hands of individual judges the danger of corruption increased, and the corrupting influence of power, according to republicanism, must always be guarded against. Anti-Federalists contended that the lack of control of the House and Senate, especially the length of Senate terms and lack of term limits, would lead to the development of an American aristocracy. Another problem with the new Constitution, according

⁵⁹ Jack Rakove, 149-50.

to Anti-Federalists, was that it gave the national government too great powers in regards to the enactment of taxes. These powers not only oppressed citizens, they also threatened the authority of the state governments. The intense fear of standing armies in time of peace caused Anti-Federalists to complain that the new Constitution did nothing to prohibit the national government from creating and maintaining a national army. This possibility coupled with the fear of a corrupt executive led to dire predictions about the fate of America liberty.⁶⁰

Among the names of prominent Anti-Federalists, especially the southern elite opposition to the Constitution, one finds close connections to two primary defenders of Revolutionary-era republicanism: Nathaniel Macon, who while serving in the North Carolina state legislature, disapproved adoption of the Constitution, and John Randolph of Roanoke, whose family participated in the attempt to deny ratification of the Constitution in Virginia. His stepfather, St. George Tucker, and his uncles Dr. Theoderick Bland and Thomas Tudor Tucker, helped to lead the fight in the Commonwealth against the new national government.⁶¹ Randolph acknowledged his early political influences in a letter to Josiah Quincy, a member of the House from Massachusetts. Randolph stated, “You know I was an Anti-Federalist when hardly breeched.”⁶²

Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph serve as excellent examples of statesmen who remained faithful to and defended the tenets of Revolutionary-era republican beliefs throughout their entire lifetimes. Both men spent most of their adulthood as members of Congress, Macon

⁶⁰ Saul Cornell, 28-34.

⁶¹ Dodd, 54-5.

⁶² John Randolph to Josiah Quincy, 1813, quoted in Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts*, Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1857, 337.

representing North Carolina and Randolph representing Virginia. Following their public careers allows a continuous view of the fate of Revolutionary-era republicanism during the politically unsettled Early National Period.

In many ways, Macon and Randolph's backgrounds were similar for they both had roots in the Old Dominion and were slaveholders from the tobacco-growing South with Anti-Federalist leanings. In other instances, they differed: Macon's family background though not as illustrious as Randolph's was quite respectable. Macon, sixteen years older than Randolph, fought in the Revolutionary War, while Randolph was a young man "still in short pants" during the fighting. Despite their differences in age and economic circumstances, they held a strong commitment to the republican ideals formulated before the American Revolution. A glimpse into the personal history of these men sheds light on their political lives.

The Macon family had roots in Virginia's tobacco country. Gideon Macon, claimed connections with many of Virginia's prominent families.⁶³ He migrated to the frontier of North Carolina and in the 1730s settled on the Roanoke River, lured by the availability of cheap fertile land. Tobacco, the main money crop in the Old Dominion took a heavy toll on the soil, and much of the available farmland in the state had been "worn out." After crossing the Virginia border onto the North Carolina wilderness, Gideon Macon soon married the daughter of another former Virginia planter and eventually managed to amass landholdings amounting to 3,000 acres and around thirty slaves.

⁶³ Gideon Macon was distantly related to both Martha Custis Washington and James Madison. His father had been a tobacco planter in eastern Virginia. William E. Dodd, *The Life of Nathaniel Macon*, Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1908, 1-2.

Gideon and his wife, Priscilla, also produced a large family consisting of four daughters and an equal number of sons. Nathaniel was the sixth child to be born to the couple. William Dodd, in his 1908 biography, records Nathaniel's date of birth as December 17, 1758.⁶⁴ Gideon Macon died in 1763 leaving his widow to raise their large brood and manage the plantation. Although, as was usually the case in colonial North America in the eighteenth century, Gideon's widow soon remarried, and she also managed young Nathaniel's inheritance quite well. The two tracts of land left to him by his father were in excess of five hundred acres. His father's bequest also included three slaves and Gideon Macon's prized blacksmith tools. Not a princely inheritance by any means, but a respectable base on which Macon through hard work and diligent attention was able to greatly enlarge.

Even though Nathaniel Macon spent his early years in a sparsely settled frontier settlement, his mother saw to it that he received an education.⁶⁵ Following her marriage to James Ransom, Priscilla continued to attend to the welfare of her children vigilantly, and insuring that her sons received an education befitting their position was quite important. Therefore, to that end, she, along with a neighbor, Philemon Hawkins, hired a young man from Pennsylvania, Charles Pettigrew, to open a school. He operated the small school from 1766 until 1773, and

⁶⁴ Dodd, 3. Macon believed himself to be born in 1758 and an entry in the Macon family Bible confirms this; however the year of his birth is listed as 1757 in several other sources. James Helms's dissertation, "The Early Career of Nathaniel Macon and Thomas Hart Benton's *Thirty Year View* both use the 1757 date.

⁶⁵ North Carolina was quite sparsely populated at the time of Macon's birth and throughout his youth. Indeed, in 1764 the largest town in the piedmont region of the state had only about forty inhabitants and there was no town at all in Bute County where Nathaniel's family resided.

young Nathaniel and his brothers attended during this time.⁶⁶ In 1774, the teen-aged boy left the backwoods of North Carolina to attend the College of Princeton in New Jersey. Here, he joined his older brother, John, and two of his former classmates from the Pettigrew School. Macon's college career began during a time of severe unrest in the colonies, and details of the two years spent at Princeton under the tutelage of John Witherspoon remain quite sketchy. No record can be found of the courses he undertook, or any other details of his studies. In 1776, when war broke out between England and its American colonies, Macon joined the New Jersey militia for an undetermined amount of time. Information concerning his participation in New Jersey's militia is unavailable, and he does not mention being involved in any battles in his brief memoir. The Revolutionary War interrupted his studies at Princeton, as the college closed in 1777, resulting in Macon's return to his home in Bute County. He did not resume his studies at Princeton following the end of the war; however, Macon began to study law immediately upon his return to North Carolina.⁶⁷ Although many blank spaces exist in Nathaniel Macon's early life history, evidence abounds to show that he acquired more than just a rudimentary education. He knew Latin, the English common law, and history. His letters and speeches reflect more than an adequate command of the English knowledge of history.

In 1779, Bute county split, creating two new counties: Franklin and Warren, and in this same year Macon reached his majority and took control of the estate left him by his father. He continued to study law until May 1779, when he enlisted in the North Carolina militia. The state

⁶⁶ Charles Pettigrew accepted the position of schoolmaster to the Macon and Hawkins children in 1766. He later left to accept the position of principal of the Academy of Edenton. Eventually, Pettigrew was selected as the first Bishop-elect of the Episcopal Church in North Carolina.

⁶⁷ Autobiographical sketch of Nathaniel Macon, undated, Macon Papers, Duke University Library.

had been spared direct military involvement in the early years of the American Revolution. Then, following the successful British siege of Charleston, South Carolina, British General Cornwallis and his forces planned an invasion of North Carolina. Because of the British capture of continental forces at Charleston, North Carolina was totally dependent on its militia for protection.⁶⁸ The eminent danger to his beloved state spurred Macon into action and he immediately joined a newly formed Warren County militia unit. His brother, John, who had only recently returned from Valley Forge, was elected as Captain of the Warren Militia.⁶⁹ When Harrison Macon joined the militia, three brothers were serving to protect their state from British invasion. Nathaniel refused an offered commission, and true to his ideals, concerning civic responsibilities never accepted any compensation for his military service.

During Macon's brief stint in the New Jersey militia, no evidence exists that he saw any military action; however, the same is not true of his tour of duty in the Warren County militia. Macon fought the British in South Carolina in 1780 at the Battle of Camden, when the American forces, which consisted of regiments of the Continental army and militia units from North Carolina, and South Carolina, and Virginia. The British troops greatly outnumbered the colonials and they were soundly defeated. Macon's militia unit faced a series of humbling defeats in the winter of 1781. In February Macon, a young man who had not long since reached his majority, learned of his election to the North Carolina state senate. Initially, because of his military responsibility, Macon refused to accept the position. An anecdote contained in a July 4

⁶⁸ John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780-1782*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 98.

⁶⁹ John Macon, Nathaniel's older brother, had joined the Continental Army in 1776 and fought under Washington's command prior to returning to Warren County. His experience and his family standing explain his easy election as captain. Dodd, 21.

speech given by Thomas S. Pittman at a ceremony for the unveiling of a monument honoring Macon contends that the commander of his unit sought out Nathaniel and asked why he declined to take his seat in the state senate. Macon reportedly replied, “He had seen the faces of the British many times, but he had never seen their back, and he meant to stay in the army until he did.”⁷⁰ Whether Macon actually participated in any action that drove back the British is uncertain, but in the spring of 1781, the British under the command of General Cornwallis bloodied by North Carolina troops, decide to move his forces to Yorktown, Virginia.

By the time the second session of the North Carolina Senate met in June 1781, Macon had taken his seat. He attended the General Assembly but returned to his militia unit when the Assembly adjourned. Officially, he remained a member of his militia unit until November 30, 1782. During his four years as a representative of Warren County in the North Carolina State Senate, Macon began to put into effect his strongly held republican ideals. He stressed economic prudence within the government by opposing a raise in the amount of money paid to members of the general assembly.⁷¹ Macon’s service in the North Carolina General Assembly prepared him for a successful congressional career in the federal government, and he would unwaveringly follow the same republican course throughout his thirty-seven years in the United States Congress. The meaning of republicanism shifted and changed from the Revolutionary era through the early national period; however, Macon clung tightly to the republican ideas of the

⁷⁰ Pittman, Thomas S. “Nathaniel Macon: An Address on the Occasion of the Unveiling of a Monument to Mr. Macon at Guilford Battle Ground, July 4, 1902, Greensboro: Guilford Battlefield Company, 1902, 4.

⁷¹ Alethea Jane Macon, comp. *Gideon Macon of Virginia and His Descendants*, Jarvis Wood, ed., Washington: Wilkes Publishing Co., 1981, 30.

eighteenth century. His personal life and political career emphasize his deep commitment to republican precepts of the Revolutionary era.

At the same time Macon was serving in the North Carolina General Assembly, he met Hannah Plummer and they were married on October 9, 1783. Macon and his bride resided on a small farm, called Buck Springs, he had inherited from his father. Macon quickly settled into life as a tobacco farmer, and in 1785, he left the state Senate and intended to retire fully from the political arena and devote his life to raising his family and becoming a successful planter. Macon's dreams of living an isolated life on his Warren farm were not to be. The outside world continued to intrude and in 1787, the citizens of his district elected Macon to the Continental Congress. He refused to serve and became a strong opponent of ratification of the new Constitution. He and his brothers fiercely opposed the adoption of the Constitution, and only after the promise of the addition of a Bill of Rights did their resistance end.

Macon's plans for an idyllic country life surrounded by his wife and children ended in 1790 with two important events; the death of his wife Hannah and his election to the North Carolina House of Commons. He left the solitude of his beloved Buck Springs plantation to become an active participant in the governance of his state and the new country. In 1791, Macon took his place in the federal House of Representatives, a position he would hold for the next twenty-four years. As the elected delegate for the Halifax district of North Carolina, Macon arrived in Philadelphia on October 24, 1791, to assume his position in the Second Congress. Participation in the national government was unknown to him; however, he carried with him legal training, business management skills acquired in running Buck Spring, and experience in state government. Macon was not a worldly man; he lacked expertise in matters of foreign

diplomacy and the workings of the federal government; nonetheless, he brought with him to Philadelphia a well-defined sense of American Revolutionary-era republicanism and a strong devotion to its principles. He lived his life according to these tenets and strove to keep the government of the United States on a course that upheld them. After almost a decade passed, John Randolph of Roanoke joined Macon as a member of the United States House of Representatives and the two worked diligently to preserve the republican ideals of the Revolutionary era.

Any attempt at understanding John Randolph of Roanoke requires an examination into his background. He was born into the Virginia gentry on June 3, 1773, at Cawson's, the large and prosperous plantation of his maternal grandparents. His father, a wealthy planter, died when Randolph was only three, leaving his wife, Frances Bland Randolph, to manage his debt encumbered estate and three young sons. Although, John Randolph left his estate in Matoax (just outside of Petersburg, in Chesterfield County, Virginia) to Frances, for reasons of her own she spent much of her widowhood living under her parents' roof. She remained a widow for only two years. In the autumn of 1778, she married St. George Tucker, a native of Bermuda, who had immigrated to Virginia in 1772, where he attended the College of William and Mary and studied law under the tutelage of George Wythe. Before his marriage to Frances Randolph, St. George Tucker and his brother, Thomas Tudor Tucker of Charleston, South Carolina, became very involved in the struggle between England and her colonies. Tucker, before leaving Williamsburg and returning to Bermuda at his father's insistence, informed both Thomas Jefferson and Peyton Randolph of an unguarded magazine of gunpowder in Bermuda. During the summer of 1776, two ships, one from Virginia and the other from Charleston, South Carolina

sailed into the port at St. George, raided the magazine and confiscated 112 barrels of gunpowder and sailed away undetected. The distinguished Tucker family fell under suspicion in Bermuda and this caused a great deal of embarrassment to the elder Tucker, who granted St George permission to return to Virginia, which he did in December 1776. Upon his arrival, he was welcomed as a hero. Finding the practice of law none too profitable, Tucker, upon his return to Virginia, became involved in trade between Bermuda and Virginia. His business ventures proved successful and his reputation as a supporter of the revolutionary cause grew. In the spring following his marriage to Frances Randolph, he enlisted in a Virginia militia unit in Williamsburg, but after the imminent threat of invasion passed, he returned to Matoax, and lived there with his growing family until early 1781.⁷²

In January, British ships rendezvoused in the Chesapeake Bay carrying troops for an invasion of Virginia. The infamous traitor, Benedict Arnold, now a brigadier general in the British army, led the invading troops. With Arnold's forces moving in the direction of Matoax, Tucker decided to evacuate his growing family to safer quarters. After a three-week stay at Wintopoke, the family began a difficult mid-winter journey to Bizarre, the Randolph estate located in the central Virginia county of Cumberland. After safely depositing his family at Bizarre, Tucker returned to the war and served as a major in command of a militia detachment, sent to aid General Nathaniel Green's troops in North Carolina. Safety and tranquility evaded Frances Tucker and her children at the Bizarre plantation and news of the British advance on

⁷² Matoax was the plantation in Chesterfield County, Virginia that the elder John Randolph had bequeathed his wife, Frances Bland Randolph for life. It was a large property consisting of about 1305 acres and was so heavily encumbered with debt that John Randolph and his older brother, Richard were eventually forced to sell an attempt to save the rest of their inheritance. Hugh A. Garland, *Life of John Randolph of Roanoke*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, 60.

bordering Prince Edward County caused the family to flee to the Roanoke Plantation in Charlotte County.⁷³ It was an isolated and lonely place where only slaves lived. There was no white overseer and only a two-room log cabin to shelter Frances and her brood. This rather unusual arrangement of unsupervised slaves had often brought complaints from the other farmers who had settled the area. Roanoke plantation produced enough to support and maintain the large slave population, but otherwise was not profitable. It did offer sanctuary to the family and Hugh Garland, an early Randolph biographer contended that it was at this time John developed his bond with the rough and largely untamed Roanoke Plantation. According to Garland, while at the isolated Charlotte County property, the young John Randolph rode over the farmlands and at one point they stopped and Frances counseled her son concerning his holdings. “Johnny” she said, “all of this belongs to you and your brother Theoderick; it is your father’s inheritance. When you get to be a man you must not sell your land; it is the first step to ruin for a boy to part with his father’s home: be sure to keep it as long as you live. Keep your land and your land will keep you.”⁷⁴ Evidently, Randolph remembered his mother’s admonition, and combined it with his republican belief that property ownership was the safeguard against dependence. Throughout his life, he never sold his land, only added acreage to his beloved Roanoke Plantation.

Soon after the hurried flight to the Charlotte County backwoods, the family deemed it safe to return to Bizarre, the more hospitable plantation in Cumberland County. Frances and her

⁷³ The Randolph holdings on the Roanoke River had been bequeathed to John Randolph and his brother Theoderick, and this was the first time they had ever visited it.

⁷⁴ John Randolph was known to the people of Charlotte County as Jack. Hugh Garland, *Life of John Randolph*, vol.1, Philadelphia: 1850, 2.

brood remained there until the fighting came to an end with Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, at which time they traveled back to Matoax.

The elder John Randolph had stressed the importance of education in his will and directed that his sons be "educated in the best manner without regard to expense as far as their fortunes allow, even to the last shilling."⁷⁵ The boys, because of war-related disruptions, had received little formal education before 1782, although it is known that their mother and stepfather had schooled them. In 1782, their uncle, who had been charged by his brother-in-law's will to see to their education, gave up hopes of finding a suitable tutor and enrolled all three Randolph boys, Richard, Theoderick, and John in Walker Maury's school. Maury, a graduate of William and Mary, with a reputation for a quick temper and heavy hand operated a grammar school, first located in Orange County. The school was soon moved to Williamsburg. With the closing of Maury's school in Orange, John and his brothers enrolled in the new school in Williamsburg. They boarded at the school and were often victims of Maury's ill temper. After attending the school in Williamsburg for about one year, John's health seems to have become a concern and his parents sent him to Bermuda to live with his stepfather's family, in hope that the change in climate would strengthen him. Here he lived for about a year and during part of that time his mother and the entire Matoax family joined him on the island. Frances Tucker's health was failing, probably due to the frequent and numerous pregnancies she experienced, and her husband thought the trip might help her recover her strength and vitality. After their return to Virginia, John with his brother, Theoderick, once again enrolled in the Maury school but soon thereafter, the disturbing reports of the schoolmaster's abusive behavior, and an especially severe

⁷⁵ Will of John Randolph, the Elder, Clerk's Office, Petersburg, Virginia.

beating Theoderick had received at Maury's hand led both Bland and Tucker to agree that the boys should be immediately removed from the school.

Randolph's political education began at home and was steeped in the principles of American Revolutionary-era republicanism. The influential men of his family molded his political beliefs: his stepfather St. George Tucker, a well-respected jurist, Dr. Theodorick Bland, his maternal uncle, who fought under Washington's command during the Revolutionary War and later served in the first U S Congress, and Thomas Tudor Tucker, a staunch anti-Federalist who later represented South Carolina in the First and Second Congress, all contributed to the early political education of John Randolph. Both his stepfather and relative Edmund Randolph had served as delegates to the Annapolis Convention in September 1786. Although Edmund Randolph was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and introduced the Virginia Plan, he refused to sign the document by the time it was adopted, because he felt it was not sufficiently republican. He changed his mind yet again and supported the Constitution and served as the nation's first Attorney General and assumed the post of Secretary of State following Jefferson's resignation in 1794. The inconsistency of Edmund Randolph's actions also made an impact on John Randolph, for he had little respect for men who, in his opinion, were not true to their convictions. The influential men closest to Randolph opposed the creation of a new federal government under the new constitution . St. George Tucker and Dr. Theodorick Bland both openly and vigorously opposed its ratification.

The constitutional question held the attention of much of the nation when John and Theodorick Randolph left Virginia and traveled to New Jersey to begin attending a grammar

school operated by the small New Jersey Presbyterian College at Princeton.⁷⁶ Randolph's early letters show that he was quite content with his situation at Princeton. Then during the first month of 1788, their stepfather called John and Theodorick home due to their mother's poor health. Frances Bland Tucker died, apparently from complications following childbirth before her sons arrived. Following their mother's death, Richard, Theoderick, and John remained at home until June. For reasons of his own, Tucker decided that his stepsons would not return to Princeton. Instead, he enrolled all of Frances's sons in a tiny New York City college, Columbia. The three young men did not seem to be well pleased with their academic experience at Columbia but being able to observe the political history being made in the city thrilled John. He observed a Federalist parade that urged New Yorkers to accept the Constitution and wrote home about ratification arguments and debates swirling throughout the city. Randolph included detailed accounts of how New York was preparing for the new government and inserted his opinions on the politics of the day. In one letter he wrote, "The words Party, Tory, Anti, and Federalists compose the greater part of the conversation of this place."⁷⁷

John Randolph's connection to the new government was not merely the product of youthful curiosity. Two uncles, Thomas Tudor Tucker and Theodorick Bland were members of the first Congress and a more distant relative, Edmund Randolph, was the nation's Attorney General. Even though William Samuel Johnson, president of Columbia, resided in New York, his former constituents selected him to serve as senator from Connecticut. Randolph eagerly

⁷⁶ The grammar school was much like a modern prep school, which the college operated to prepare students prior to the matriculation.

⁷⁷ John Randolph to St. John Tucker, New York, March 1, 1789, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

accepted invitations to dinners and gatherings from his family members and Dr. Johnson, and participated in the political discussions that occurred. His eagerness to involve himself in the conversations was not always welcomed and Dr. Johnson complained that John Randolph's exuberant interruptions were often irritating to his elders. In a letter to his stepfather, Randolph admitted that it was difficult for him to sit silently while others talked about such important matters.⁷⁸

Washington's inauguration took place on April 30, 1789, and Randolph was there to witness the event. His early letters concerning the new government were often enthusiastic, describing events such as the inauguration, and Washington's address, an occasion that made a lasting impression on Randolph, who would long remember it. Years later, he spoke of the day in a speech to his constituents. He said, "The Constitution was in its chrysalis state. I saw it—George Mason and Patrick Henry saw it—the poison under its ivy." Randolph wrote to his father and friends about other ceremonies; however, as the year progressed Randolph's correspondence showed him not just concerned with public events but also taking a close interest in the everyday business of Congress. Also evident in his letters was his intense feelings about efforts to strengthen the central government and disagreements with certain interpretations of the Constitution. His attendance at congressional sessions took priority over his college classes, and he wrote his stepfather regularly and kept him informed on the business of the Congress. He complained about the feeling of superiority members of the Senate had. They were, he wrote, "becoming worse every day, wanting higher pay for their services than that paid to the

⁷⁸ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, January 17, 1790, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

Representatives.” Randolph believed that the basis of their demands for higher salaries rested on the fallacy that the “Senate was superior, while everyone should know that the people’s representatives in the House were certainly more powerful than the members of the other chamber. Although he was only sixteen years old, Randolph had some very strong opinions about government and those involved in it. He had sharp criticisms for the Vice-President, as he wrote that Adams was “continually filling the papers with encomiums on Titles and other such Nonsense.”⁷⁹ In another letter, Randolph wrote again of Adams’s disdain for anyone who could not speak Latin or French. Randolph noted that Adams made no reply when asked what he thought of General Washington since he understood neither language.⁸⁰

Randolph became very dissatisfied with Columbia and wanted to return to Virginia to read law; however, his stepfather was not agreeable and instead arranged for him to reside in Philadelphia and read law under the tutelage of Attorney General Edmund Randolph. Philadelphia was now serving as the nation’s temporary capital, and once again, John Randolph found himself located near the center of the new government. As he had never been very keen on the idea of becoming a lawyer, the young Virginian spent more of his time attending sessions of Congress than studying law. His intense interest in politics was quite evident in his correspondence with St. George Tucker, and his connection to the Attorney General gave him greater access to the inner workings of the national government. Many of the people Randolph

⁷⁹ Randolph always maintained that the House of Representatives was the most honorable chamber of Congress and that only they truly represented the people. Randolph’s dislike for John Adams was formed while he was just a teenager and continued throughout Randolph’s entire life. John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, August 11, 1789, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸⁰ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, New York, September 11, 1789. Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

met during his stay in Philadelphia became major participants in the federal government, and in just a few short years, he, himself, would be a member of the House of Representatives.

Randolph continued to live in Philadelphia and maintained at least a pretense of studying law, but in 1792, he quit the city of brotherly love and headed for Virginia. He entered the College of William and Mary and studied law under Judge Tucker, but Randolph's time at the college ended abruptly when his actions led to his expulsion. An argument between Randolph and a fellow student, Robert Barraud Taylor, resulted in a duel, strictly forbidden by the institution. Immediately before the duel, Randolph had withdrawn from the college. When the two young men met on the field of honor, the first round proved unsatisfactory, so the men agreed to another attempt. The second exchange resulted in Taylor being shot in the leg. The two men before leaving the site of the duel reconciled their differences and maintained their friendship for the remainder of their lives.⁸¹

Following the duel, Randolph returned to Bizarre, his brother's plantation in Cumberland. This visit could not have been very pleasant because of the recent scandal involving the Randolphys. Richard Randolph, John's older brother had married Judith Randolph (a not so distant cousin) and soon thereafter her younger, and by all accounts livelier and prettier sister, Nancy had come to live with them. While the Randolphys were visiting the Carter Page family at a nearby plantation, Nancy went into labor and gave birth to a child. Whether the child was Richard's or not has never been proven, but it seems highly likely that he was responsible for the pregnancy. Quite a stir was caused in the Page household the night of the child's birth, but Judith and Richard all claimed that Nancy was suffering from a fit of hysteria, which was not

⁸¹ Lemmel Sawyer, *A Biography of John Randolph of Roanoke*, New York: 1844, 9.

uncommon. Later, when rumors of infanticide circulated, the Randolph's denied a child was born; however, the fetus of a white male child had been found by slaves in the wood pile behind the Page home. Eventually, Richard was charged with murder and a sensational trial followed. It is quite evident that Judith, Nancy, and Richard all perjured themselves and denied there was ever a pregnancy or child, and since slaves could not testify against whites, the fact that a baby's body had been found could not be presented. Richard was acquitted but that did not stop the rumor mill from spreading real and imagined details concerning the private lives of those involved. When John arrived at Bizarre he testified in his brother's behalf at the murder trial. Even after Richard's acquittal, Nancy continued to live with her sister and brother-in-law at their Cumberland home. To say that the atmosphere in the household was awkward is a gross understatement. John stayed at his brother's for about one month before returning to Williamsburg. Tucker managed to convince John to journey back to Philadelphia and make one last attempt at studying law. John probably had little choice but to go back to his legal studies; he had not yet reached his majority, he could not enroll in William and Mary because of the duel, and for the proud young man the continuing gossip about his brother must have been terribly humiliating.

In mid-July, Randolph arrived in the temporary United States capital. It was an unusually hot and dry July, and the political environment was equally heated as the French Revolution became the main topic of debate. Many Americans felt pride because France, the greatest and most sophisticated power in continental Europe had decided to follow the shining American example and establish a new republican government. Others worried about how the wars in

Europe would affect the United States due to the Treaty of Alliance, which was a defensive agreement between France and the United States, formed in the midst of the American Revolutionary War. It promised military support in case of attack by British forces indefinitely into the future. As the French Revolution became more radical, many of those who had admired it became disillusioned.

Two distinct points of view concerning the revolution in France had been developing in the new American government since its inception. These views soon manifested themselves in the president's cabinet. Thomas Jefferson, Washington's Secretary of State, sided with the French and saw their revolution as an outgrowth of the American struggle for independence from Britain, and he supported abiding by the alliance with France. Alexander Hamilton, Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, advocated maintaining a close relationship with the British. After they joined into a European coalition against revolutionary France, Hamilton favored breaking the Treaty of Alliance between the United States and France. Young John Randolph was witness to much of the debate surrounding this issue.

Around this time, Randolph's early political ideals began to harden into permanent and unshakeable rules for moral and ethical governance. He had shown in his letters to his stepfather and friends a preference for the Revolutionary era republican ideals since he was about seventeen years old. He had denounced the "monocratic" government he believed Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton was trying to create. He rekindled his earlier friendship with Joseph Bryan, and together they watched as two competing political factions seemed to divide the nation. Initially, Bryan and Randolph were enthralled with the French Revolution and for a brief period addressed each other as citizen in their correspondence. John Randolph became so

carried away with the French war that he even wrote requesting his stepfather's permission to proceed to France and fight with the Army of the Republic. After Congress adjourned for the session, Randolph returned to Virginia, and while there he passionately wrote, "I assure you, my dear father, that my heart is set on this scheme, and I dream of nothing else. I Think of nothing else. . . what life can be so glorious, what death can be so honorable? Then, as always, Randolph seemed confident of his own abilities and assured Tucker that "I should be able, by my own exertions to obtain an ensigney. I would not if I could get it wish for a higher post. . . I submit these things, my dear Sir, to your consideration, hoping that when you judge of them you will suppose yourself a single man of twenty. . . ."⁸² Although no reply to the letter exists, Tucker certainly must have denied John's exuberant request and the young man returned to Philadelphia in the middle of a yellow fever epidemic. His inability to join the French in their fight did not dim his enthusiasm for their cause. He complained to Tucker that he could not concentrate on "Old Coke" because his thoughts were "on the plains of Flanders, trembling with anxiety for a French victory."⁸³ Randolph's inattention to his studies may have also reflected the absence of Edmund Randolph, under whom John Randolph was supposed to be studying law, from the city. Edmund Randolph, as did many others, fled the city because of the epidemic.⁸⁴ Slowly, in the late fall of 1793, the city returned to normal, and the maneuvering of national politics resumed,

⁸² John Randolph to St. George Tucker, Matoax, May 25, 1793, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸³ John Randolph to St. George Tucker, Philadelphia, August, 25, 1793, Randolph Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

⁸⁴ The deadly disease that overtook Philadelphia was identified as Yellow Fever. In September approximately 1400 died and during the second week of October it hits its peak with 400 deaths being recorded in a five day period. After the first hard frost the epidemic began to die down and by November Dr. Benjamin Rush

while John Randolph continued to follow closely the political activities of the government, paying particular interest to Congress. His letters to Tucker showed his increasing interest and understanding of politics. In fact, his last year spent in Philadelphia had accomplished nothing in the way of advancing Randolph's legal education, but during that time his knowledge of the daily workings of the government had grown and he had perfected his own political philosophy. His political thoughts had matured to the point that he fully understood the federal system of government.

Then in April of 1794, Randolph left Philadelphia, and in June he celebrated his twenty-first birthday and all pretense of studying law ceased. As Randolph bid Philadelphia and his formal education adieu, he assumed full responsibility for his heretofore neglected plantation on the Roanoke River in Charlotte County, Virginia. He took up residence at his brother's home in neighboring Cumberland County, which remained troubled by the backlash caused by the murder trial. Randolph now had to deal with the debts with which his inheritance had been encumbered. His brother Richard convinced him to allow the sale of Matoax, and with his share of the proceeds he began to pay off the debts against Roanoke Plantation. John Randolph spent about two years living at Bizarre while attending to his own plantation and playing the role of a southern gentleman.

In January 1796, Randolph rode away from his brother's home in Cumberland to call upon old friends in the South. He accepted an invitation from Henry Middleton Rutledge to visit in South Carolina and his closest friend Joseph Bryan urged him to come to Georgia. Bryan

reported that the danger had passed. Dr. Rush to Mrs. Rush, Philadelphia, November 8, 1793, Lyman Butterfield, ed., *The Letters of Benjamin Rush*. Vol.II, Princeton: University Press, 1951, 742.

promised, “You will find me on the seacoast with the best Spanish segars, and the best of liquors, good horses, and deer hunting in perfection.” It seemed a proposition Randolph could not resist, and he saddled up his favorite mount, Jacobin, and set out on an 1800-mile adventure. He wrote exuberant letters to family and friends about his experiences, “the beautiful women, the gallant fellows” and the races Jacobin easily won. He continued southward to accept the hospitality of Joseph Bryan, where the Bryan family heartily entertained the young Virginian.⁸⁵ During his stay in Georgia, events unfolded that would later have a great impact on Randolph’s political career.

While in Georgia, Randolph gained firsthand knowledge of Yazoo land deals. A few months before Randolph arrived, the Georgia state legislature had voted to sell over thirty million acres of land, which rested along the Yazoo River to a New England based land company. The price of the land was an unbelievably low one and one-half cent per acre. It soon came to light that all but one of Georgia’s legislators had taken bribes from the land-speculating company. When details of the sale surfaced, a groundswell of public outrage emerged and at the next election the citizens of Georgia refused to return the incumbents to their positions. The newly elected state legislature burned the documents concerning the deal and rescinded the sale. Unfortunately, some of the Yazoo land had already been resold. The affair involved third parties. In years to come, after Randolph had been elected to the House of Representatives, Congress had to decide if the “Yazoo Land Deal” sales would be recognized. Randolph took his unwavering stand against any form of compensation to parties involved in the purchase, and throughout the

⁸⁵ John Randolph to Henry Middleton Rutledge, April 29, 1797, Pennsylvania Historical Society.

remainder of his life one of the worst insults he could hurl at an unscrupulous person was to call him a Yazoo man.⁸⁶

After Randolph's tour of South Carolina and Georgia, he returned to Bizarre Plantation, and the life of a planter. While visiting family and friends in Petersburg he fell ill, but within a couple of weeks, John was well enough to return to Cumberland. Before he was halfway to Bizarre, he received word of Richard's death. John did not reach the plantation until after his brother's funeral. Richard's demise resulted in John taking over management of Bizarre in addition to the responsibilities of running his Roanoke plantation. This was an even more daunting task because his brother's property was heavily mortgaged and Richard's will freed all of his slaves, save the few who had belonged to Judith. Randolph's fear and hatred of debt can be attributed to republican tenets, but they were also a product of his personal experience. The added responsibility of his brother's obligations and his grief at the loss of a brother, he had always admired, plunged him into a deep depression, which lasted nearly two years.⁸⁷ He finally emerged from the dark period, but remained troubled by bouts of depression (some even say insanity) and an intense hatred of debt throughout the remainder of his life.

Just as Randolph had answered the call of familial responsibilities, he agreed to take up the burden of civic duties as well. When Abraham B. Venable announced his plans to retire from the House of Representatives, Creed Taylor, a prominent Virginia politician and lawyer, approached Randolph and urged him to turn his attention to politics. Taylor, who lived in

⁸⁶ C. Peter Magrath, *Yazoo: The Law and Politics in the New Republic*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966, 4-6.

⁸⁷ Garland, vol.1, 70.

Cumberland County and was a long-standing family friend of the Randolphs and served as a Virginia state senator, persuaded Randolph to stand for election to the House of Representatives.⁸⁸ Randolph, as was the custom, did nothing overtly in support of his own candidacy, and Taylor shouldered the primary responsibilities for Randolph's campaign. In March, Randolph emerged from the background and began making appearances throughout his district. One such appearance that helped kick start Randolph's campaign occurred on the first Monday in March, court day, in Charlotte County. Here, Randolph shared center stage with the ailing, but still powerful orator, Patrick Henry.

Just as the sun sat on the life of one Virginia statesman and famed orator, another one came onto the scene. Patrick Henry's speech drew spectators from all over Southside Virginia and he went on to win his election to the Virginia General Assembly, but died before ever taking his seat. Randolph was elected to the U S House of Representatives and began his long congressional career.

⁸⁸ William Ewart Stokes, "Randolph of Roanoke: A Virginia Portrait, The early Career of John Randolph of Roanoke, 1773-1805", Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1955, 142.

CHAPTER II

FEDERALIST DOMINANCE

The bitter and contentious fight over the ratification of the Constitution ended with a victory for the Federalists. The anti-Federalists, a fragmented group at best, were no more, and in 1789, the First Federal Congress convened in New York. Many who had opposed the Constitution, and some who had not, sat in Congress determined to carefully monitor every move of the national government. Those who closely adhered to the American version of republicanism, which had developed in the years just prior to the Revolution, believed that a real threat to their liberty existed. Republicanism, by nature, bred distrust. In order to ensure that liberty was not subverted, republicans had to be ever vigilant against the ever-encroaching evil connected with the lust for power. Subscribers to Revolutionary-era republican beliefs knew that only under the watchful eye of virtuous men could the liberties and freedoms so recently won survive.

During the administration of George Washington, signs of a conspiracy by Federalists to deprive Americans of their recently won freedoms appeared to many members of the legislative branch of the government. Every move made by the Federalists resulted in a questioning of their

motives. The resistance came not from a recognizable political party, but from a group of men whose main connection was their desire to prevent any increase in executive power and to challenge any attempt by the Federalists to strengthen the authority of the national government at the expense of local and state sovereignty. As the new government began to take shape, all aspects fell under the watchful eyes of congressional members dedicated to the republican ideals that had been a vital part of the American political discourse during the preceding decades.

One of the first battles in Congress arose over the question of how to “address the President.” Fear of a tendency toward monarchy caused opposition to such titles as His Highness or His High Mightiness. In this argument, Federalists in the Senate found their suggestions voted down, and a majority of the members of the House of Representatives showed little inclination toward princely titles. This early disagreement set the stage for battles to follow not only on the tone of the government but the role of each of the three branches of government.¹

When the second session of Congress opened in the fall of 1791, the fears concerning the subversion of American liberties had not abated. Taking his seat in the House of Representatives, Nathaniel Macon, served his constituents in the newly created Halifax district of North Carolina. He immediately showed his colors as an ardent adherent of Revolutionary-era republicanism.

Political parties were non-existent in 1791 when Macon first joined the House of Representatives. Soon the division between those who supported Alexander Hamilton and his financial policies and those who opposed his course of action as “unrepublican” became

¹ Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, 120-3.

apparent. As Hamilton's influence in the Washington administration grew, members of Congress openly began taking sides. James Madison was often the leader of those men who feared that Hamilton's actions were detrimental to the young republic. Macon often voted with Madison on important issues; however, the two men had quite different views of government. Macon feared a strong central government and retained much of the Anti-Federalist point of view that dominated political thought in his congressional district. Madison represented a different or modified strain of republicanism; he had strongly supported the ratification of the Constitution. These ideological discrepancies often faded into the background because of the deep distrust of Hamilton and fear of his influence on the nation's economic policymaking. The political differences between the two men resurfaced in later years and Macon and Madison were often at loggerheads over the nature of national government.

Revolutionary-era republicanism fostered a strong distrust of large government. Macon saw the plan supported by Alexander Hamilton to base representation in the House on a ratio of one member for every 30,000 citizens as an attempt to increase the size of the government. According to the 1790 census, using the ratio of one representative per 30,000 citizens would greatly expand the size of the House, and also add to the governmental expense, which was ever a concern of republicans. Macon strongly opposed such an increase in the number of Representatives and supported a formula that would use the ratio of one representative per 35,000 citizens. Even though he disapproved of any measure that would substantially increase the total number of representatives, Macon served on a committee to write and present a bill based on the one to 30,000 plan. Macon's committee later proposed the requested bill, and Macon actually attempted to amend the bill to call for the 35,000 to one basis for representation.

This was an early sign that Macon would hold firm to his convictions in spite of the expectations of others. Macon refused to disregard his principles just because he was a member of the committee presenting the bill. This would not be the last time Macon stood firmly by his convictions in spite of stiff opposition.² Members of Congress wrangled over the reapportionment issue for several months and finally settled on the plan that greatly increased the size of the House of Representatives; however, President Washington vetoed the bill. Macon voted against the final measure, which actually doubled the number of representatives of his own state. His actions showed that his concern was not just with the interests of North Carolina, but that he considered devotion to the republican concept of a small government more important than the benefit of greater representation for his state.

Revolutionary-era republicanism maintained that power was able to subvert virtue. Upholders of this type of republicanism felt that it was dangerous to place too much faith in any man, because power could lead even the best of men astray. For instance, when the Senate proposed placing the image of George Washington's head on coins, Macon opposed the measure. Minting coins with Washington's likeness was too close a reminder of the monarchical practice of honoring kings and queens in such a fashion. Pure republican ideals remained popular enough to quash the Senate proposed plan, and the House opposed the bill and favored placing an idealized image of liberty on federal coins. Executives and their power, according to pure republican ideals, demanded close monitoring and it was dangerous to grant men holding executive office too great reverence.³

² *Annals of Congress*, Second Congress, First Session, 170-1.

³ Helms, "The Early Career of Nathaniel Macon," 20.

During Macon's first term and throughout his entire career, he took great care to protect the public purse. His voting record in the First Session of the Second Congress reveals his intention to safeguard government funds, and while few accounts of his actually addressing the House in his first term exist, his votes on government spending reveal his staunch republican commitment to frugality in government. He supported the concept that government officials were responsible for keeping and making available accurate fiscal records. In February 1792, Macon proposed a resolution calling for a strict accounting of expenditures by the Comptroller. While some House members complained that the language of Macon's resolution seemed to accuse the Comptroller of some sort of wrongdoing, others argued that the House had the right to ask any governmental body for official information.⁴

Macon's concern with national government finances continued, and on April 4, 1792, he accepted a seat on a committee to prepare a bill concerning the retirement of public debt. Macon abhorred debt, both public and private. On matters concerning the assumption and payment of state debt by the federal government Macon consistently voted nay. He was adamantly against the government borrowing money to pay off debts, some of which seemed to him to be of a rather dubious nature. In this regard, he rarely advocated the settlement of claims brought against the government by individuals. When Catherine Greene, widow of General Nathaniel Greene, brought a claim against the government for debts her husband accrued during the Revolutionary war, Macon opposed payment. There were enough irregularities in the claim to make it objectionable to several members of the House. Another factor contributing to Macon's opposition to the bill stemmed from the fact that Hamilton had personally prepared the petition

⁴ *Annals*, Second Congress, First Session, 425-6.

for the general's widow. Macon and others saw this as a clear conflict of interest and an abuse of power by the Secretary of the Treasury. Macon opposed reimbursing Catherine Greene for war-related expenses and unsuccessfully attempted to block House consideration of such payment. The bill eventually passed, but Macon steadfastly held his ground throughout the process and fought the government's recognition of Catherine Greene's claims.

James Madison played a dominant role in the actions of the second and third congresses. Historian Irvin Brandt in his multiple volume biography of Madison implied that his subject was responsible for all of the moves against the Treasury Department during that time period and that he was the undisputed leader of the Republican minority in the House. Even Macon's biographer, William Dodd, claimed that Macon followed Madison's lead in the House during those early years. The congressional record shows that on many occasions Macon voted with Madison; however, there are examples of the two men being on different sides. Early in 1792, the House took up the matter of postal roads. The proposed Post Office Bill called for the creation and federal control of post highways over which mail traveled. Macon did not take the floor on this issue; however, he did vote against the measure that would have increased the authority of the federal government. Madison cast his vote on the Post Office Bill in the affirmative. His voting record clearly reflected his support of a central government that was much stronger than Macon felt desirable. Another issue that highlighted the differences in Madison's and Macon's political philosophies is the stance each took on a bill "for making farther and more effectual provision for the protection of the frontiers of the United States."⁵ The purpose of this measure was to increase the size of the federal army, and Macon, along the lines

⁵ Ibid., 355.

of his republican ideals, abhorred a standing army in time of peace. He voted against the bill, and Madison voted with the ayes. Macon favored state and local militias and never supported efforts to create a standing army.⁶ Madison supported “an act for the encouragement of the Bank and other Cod-fisheries, and for the regulation and government of fishermen employed therein.” Macon opposed the bill that granted government the right to regulate the fishing industry. He realized that every attempt by the national government to regulate trade or manufacturing resulted in the loss of authority for the state and local governments, and such action by the federal government also eventuated a call for funds to finance the plan. Another motion made in the House was to “enhance the duty on imported hemp and cordage and to strike out imported cotton from articles exempted from duty.”⁷ Here we find a rare example of Macon in the unenviable position of having to choose between two republican principles: the opposition of duties and the restriction of trade and support of agriculture. His republican ideals would have certainly required him to oppose any duties or restrictions on trade, but his position as a planter and representative of other North Carolina planters could have also shaped his decision to object to the bill. When members of the House agreed to an amendment adding foreign cotton to a list of articles to be exempt from duties, Macon objected. He moved that cotton be struck from the list. He explained that the southern states raised large quantities of cotton and if the government exempted foreign cotton, the southern states would suffer from not having a domestic market for their crop. Pure American republicanism opposed the national government imposing duties and

⁶ Ibid., 436.

⁷ Ibid., 560.

regulations on trade, but it also held agriculture in high regard. Macon's decision on this issue can still be seen as republican in that he was trying to protect the highly valued agricultural pursuits against encroachment by government at the expense of the not so highly favored manufacturing sector.

During the Second Session of the Second Congress, William Branch Giles, a member of the House from Virginia, introduced several resolutions concerning the state of the U. S. treasury. Macon favored the resolutions. Some representatives, mostly those identified as Federalists, expressed concern that the resolutions impugned the reputation of the Secretary of the Treasury, but the majority of the members, felt that the House had the right to detailed records pertaining to public funds.⁸

Thus, the First Session of the Second Congress ended without Macon making any moving speeches or drawing any particular attention to himself. He did, however, establish a pattern for the path he would follow throughout his lengthy legislative career. He strictly adhered to the republican principles of the Revolutionary era. Neither a follower nor a leader, Macon's actions brought meaning to the concept of "civic virtue" into the House of Representatives. His participation in the First Session of the Second Congress was not spectacular, and during the Second Session, his involvement was even less so. Personal tragedy had once again struck Macon's family. His only son, Plummer, born in 1786, died on July 26, 1792. As always, Macon kept matters of a personal nature private; therefore, there is scant evidence of his state of mind or health. The papers of John Steele, a prominent North Carolina politician of the era, do reveal that during the Second Session, Macon often was absent from the

⁸ Ibid., 706.

House due to illness. Even when Macon was present, no record exists of him taking the floor and speaking, but the voting records within the *Annals of Congress* show him following his republican ideals. In fact, Congress accomplished little during the Second Session. Those who opposed the policies of Alexander Hamilton gained support and there was a feeling that after the upcoming congressional elections the anti-administration forces would gain strength. On Saturday, March 2, 1793, the House adjourned, and the Second Congress came to an end, and Macon journeyed home to Buck Spring to manage his growing farm.

When Congress reconvened on December 1, 1793, the increased influence of the republicans was immediately obvious. Jefferson wrote to Thomas Pinckney that Congress was now comprised of “a fuller and more equal representation of the people, and likely I think, to approach nearer to the sentiments of the people.”⁹ Macon’s republican ideals appeared to be more in the mainstream. Hamilton still held enough sway in Congress to command a majority on most economic issues, but Macon was now casting his votes with a much stronger minority. The Third Congress marked the beginning of a phase of Macon’s political career in which his Revolutionary-era republican principles were ascending. He could usually rely on support from the delegates of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, and the other members of the North Carolina delegation.

As a result of the congressional elections, Macon was now the senior member of the House of Representatives from his state. Of the ten representatives sent to the House by North Carolina, only Macon and William Barry Grove were re-elected. As a returning member,

⁹ Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Pinckney, 3 December 1792, Ford, ed., *The Writing of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. VI, 143.

Macon's participation in the business of the government showed a marked increase. One of the first acts of the House was to elect new officers, and as a result, a Republican from Pennsylvania, Frederick Muhlenberg, became Speaker.¹⁰ The *Annals of Congress* clearly show that Macon not only took a more active part during this session, he began to gain experience in international matters.

President Washington's annual address to the Congress highlighted some of the difficulties facing the new nation in its relationship with European powers. Problems with the Moroccan government and seizure of Americans by pirates demanding ransom, although not mentioned by Washington, confronted the Third Congress. Unrest among the Indian peoples on the western frontier, particularly the tribes north of the Ohio River created hardships for white settlers. Other danger existed along the Tennessee River due to the actions of five villages of Chickamauga's, and many feared the formation of a strong Indian confederation. In European affairs, the president declared the United States neutral, and in Indian affairs, he sought peace not war. Washington, however, maintained that declaring neutrality and seeking peace were not enough; Americans must have the ability to maintain their domestic and international positions. Washington appealed to Congress to increase the nation's military, improve the condition of the militias, and to begin stockpiling the materials needed to wage war. All of these proposed actions cost money and would result in raised taxes an idea that Macon and others who shared

¹⁰ No clear, distinct political parties existed in 1793. Muhlenber adhered to the republican principles and usually voted with Madison and other members who were often called anti-administration forces. Today historians refer to Muhlenberg as a republican: however, it is not an appellation he would have used to describe himself.

his convictions disapproved. In addition, the idea of increasing a national army went against pure republican tenets.

Macon found himself on a committee formed to draft legislation creating a naval force to protect American trade against the depredations of the Algerians, who had played havoc with American shipping since 1784. The so-called Barbary Pirates had continued to plague American ships in the Mediterranean by seizing ships, holding crews for ransom, and demanding tribute. This committee was also charged to search out a way to pay for the navy. On Monday, March 17, 1794, the committee's bill was read before the House for the third time. The bill, as presented to the House, suggested that additional import duties be enacted to finance the four 44-gun ships and the two twenty-gun vessels that the committee recommended. The bill met fierce opposition on the floor. Macon, although he had been a member of the committee that produced the bill, voted against it because of the high cost and his reluctance to enlarge the size of the regular army or navy. Throughout this session, Macon regularly opposed committing public funds to increase the military's strength.¹¹

To implement Washington's recommendations for defense the United States government needed more money. The president's insistence on paying all installments on the public debt in addition to current government expenses, led Alexander Hamilton to propose taxes on a large list of foreign and domestic items. On April 2, 1794, William Smith, a member of the committee inquiring into the matter of public credit, presented the House with a report from the Secretary of the Treasury on the funds necessary for the operation of the government. Hamilton's estimates showed that due to the necessity of supporting and maintaining the military establishment, the

¹¹ *Annals of Congress*, Third Congress, Second Session, 155, 250.

government had to find new sources of revenue. There was a proposed tax on carriages and other conveyances, a stamp tax on legal and commercial papers, a retail tax on wines and liquors, and an increased duty on silver. Macon voted against all of the proposed increases in taxes and on the matter of an eight-cent tax on snuff, he took the floor to voice his complaint. Macon stated “that the tax came to about four dollars per hundred weight, whereas the raw material itself cost about three dollars. This was, he believed, the first instance in history where a raw material was taxed to more than its value.”¹² Although tobacco was a major crop in Macon’s district and Macon was himself a tobacco farmer, he did not cast his negative vote only against the proposed tax on domestically manufactured snuff. He opposed all of the methods suggested by Hamilton’s plan for raising revenue. Macon had voted against the tax placed on whiskey, but was realistic enough to realize that it would not be repealed. The burden of the hated whiskey tax sat heavily and unfairly on small to moderate farmers. So in May 6, Macon took the floor to propose a change in the law requiring domestic whiskey to be taxed. With an eye toward justice and fair play, and because he realized that trying to revoke the whiskey tax altogether was impossible, he proposed that “an excise also be placed on porter, beer, and cider.” He argued that “in the Southern States, cider, during a great part of the year, would not keep. It was therefore distilled into brandy, and paid a duty. It was therefore not equitable that some parts of the Union should have cider and malt liquors, all year round, duty free, while others paid a duty

¹² Ibid., 1307, 621.

for almost all the liquor they made use of.” When Macon’s proposal was put to a vote the following day, it failed to pass by a substantial margin of 44 to 28.¹³

Macon was not on the losing side of every issue brought to a vote in the first session of the Third Congress. He voted with the majority against continuance of an embargo against Great Britain on May 12, 1794. On the same day, Macon moved that “a copy book in the Treasury’s office, marked E, should be transmitted to each of the states.”¹⁴ The book to which he referred “contained an account of the settlement of debts due to the United States.” National governmental fiscal matters, according to Macon, should be open to public scrutiny. Mr. Sedgwick, claimed that Macon’s motion would only raise “jealousy and discord” among the states.¹⁵ Macon disagreed and persisted; he viewed secrecy as a sign of corruption and abuse of power, and power was always a threat to liberty. He succeeded in having the information made available to the individual states.

The remainder of the First Session of the Third Congress was primarily concerned with financial issues. Members discussed and voted on the proper management of monetary matters between the individual states and the national government, public credit, indemnity for spoliations, compensation for widows and orphans, stamp duties, tax on carriages, the loan owed France, and purchase of galleys. True to his frugal nature and commitment to avoiding burdening the populace with taxes, Macon voted against every measure that laid more taxes on the public and any venture that would cost the government money. He opposed increasing the

¹³ Ibid., 652.

¹⁴ Ibid., 674.

¹⁵ Ibid., 675.

size of the navy and voted against a bill to allow Washington to purchase ten to twelve galleys. As always, Macon cast a suspicious eye on monetary claims against the government, and he voted against several claims by individuals including a group of orphans and widows. During the closing days of this session, he also cast negative votes against any measure that attempted to increase the authority of the federal government. On Monday, June 9, the first session of the Third Congress ended and once again, Macon made the long journey back to North Carolina and his duties there.

His respite from congressional obligations was brief, and on November 3, 1791, Macon once again traveled to Pennsylvania and took his seat in the second session of the Third Congress. The situation concerning international matters had changed little: France remained in turmoil, foreign powers continued to seize American ships, and the impressment of American sailors persisted. Domestic affairs were also quite unsettled. The Whiskey Rebellion, incited by the tax on whiskey, remained a major concern, and Indian wars plagued the western frontier, particularly in the area around the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers. These concerns, however, did not prove momentous enough to spur many of the nation's senators to rush back to Philadelphia. Macon, always punctual, reported to the House on the first day, and by the morning of the second day the lower branch of the legislature had sufficient members present for a quorum. Two weeks passed with little being accomplished because the Senate did not have a quorum. Macon's voting record shows that he faithfully attended to his duties, but for some reason, perhaps because he almost always opposed measures proposed by the majority of members, he failed to receive appointment to any high profile committees during the second session. He did, however, continue to adhere strictly to his republican principles. During this period, Macon's

voting record closely mirrored that of Madison. Macon did not follow Madison's lead on all issues for they were, in fact, very different men. Historian, James Helms quite aptly explains the difference between the two. Helms describes Madison as "a strategist, always willing to bend, if not break a principle in order to achieve a desired object. Often he seemed to follow a Machiavellian rule that the end justifies the means." Helms portrays Macon as "more of a bareknuckle fighter, who faced his opponents squarely, fought in the open, and accepted the consequences. To him the means and the ends had to conform to the same standard of value and honor. His code was stringent, rigid, and unchanging." Helms, undeniably a champion of Macon, summed up his comparison of the two by writing, "Where Madison was devious, Macon was direct. Where Madison would merit his opponent's suspicions, Macon would earn his respect."¹⁶ These differences are what set Macon apart from other members of the political faction that came to be called the Republican Party. Macon was a republican because of his strong commitment to his principles, not because of loyalty to any man or party.

When the Fourth Congress convened on December 7, 1795, and Macon took his seat in the House, the Republicans were in control. Forty-nine members of the house were Federalists and fifty-six were Republicans. There was little organization of those called Republicans. Indeed, most would not consider themselves part of a political party, nor could they be relied upon to cast their votes based primarily on the ideals of republicanism. Madison and those attempting to thwart the Federalists took little comfort in the slight majority Republicans held in the House, while Federalists still dominated the Senate. The effectiveness of the Republicans in the House gained a boost due to the election of Albert Gallatin of Pennsylvania, who soon

¹⁶ Helms, "The Early Career of Nathaniel Macon," 46-7.

became one of the most influential members of the House, and in a short time won Macon's respect as they forged a friendship that lasted over four decades.

Another significant change that Republicans saw in the Fourth Congress resulted from Alexander Hamilton's resignation as Secretary of Treasury in January 1795. His replacement, Oliver Wolcott, never wielded the power or influence that Hamilton had. The Republicans in the House, following Gallatin's lead, were able to wrest some of the management of the public purse from the Treasury Department. Gallatin, and other members of the House, realized the enormous importance of controlling government finance. He presented a resolution that established a standing committee of finance, the Ways and Means Committee, with the purpose of giving the House a significant amount of input into the federal government's fiscal policy. With Hamilton out of office and Gallatin bringing his political expertise to the House, the new Ways and Means Committee soon emerged as the most powerful committee in either branch of the legislature; however, not all of the changes proposed by the republicans were as successful.

Macon and Josiah Parker both objected to the practice of making a formal reply to the President. Parker proposed departure from tradition on December 8, 1795, when President Washington delivered his annual message. Heretofore, the House had always appointed a small group of men to prepare a formal response to the President. Parker's proposal that the House have a committee simply inform the President that the House would consider the matters outlined in his speech was placed before the House. Following Parker's attempt to put an end to the procedure of making a formal and often fawning reply, Macon seconded the motion. Even though the Republican members now outnumbered the Federalists, only a handful voted for

Parker's proposal. Macon and Parker stood on firm republican principles by supporting such a motion.

The new Speaker of the House, Jonathon Dayton appointed Macon, already quite well known for his financial conservatism, to the Committee of Claims. This was a highly responsible appointment, and he did not take it lightly. The committee faced the daunting task of sifting through numerous claims for various types of government compensation. The *Annals of Congress* indicate that the committee reported to the House on numerous occasions and its members recommended denial of many of the claims; however, Catherine Greene's claim that Macon had opposed earlier was finally settled in her favor. Macon often disagreed with recommendations to pay specific claims as he wrestled with the dilemma between paying legitimate claims, and the resulting necessity to place additional taxes upon the people. The spirit of frugality ran consistently throughout Macon's career as a public servant, and he was given ample opportunity in the First Session of the Fourth Congress to press for economy.

Washington worried about the influence British traders from Canada had on the Indian population, particularly in the Ohio River valley. His pet plan was to create what he called the factory (short for manufactory) system. His proposal called for government-run trading houses. The Indians would be required to bring their furs to the United States government factories and trade them for manufactured goods. The blankets, knives, guns, and other goods were usually low quality, European produced items. When the proposed trading plan came before the House for the fourth time, Macon opposed it as he had at every earlier reading. On the floor of the House, he remarked that "the business was highly improper for the government to embark in."¹⁷

¹⁷ *Annals of Congress*. Fourth Congress, First Session, 231.

Although he was unable to block passage of the bill, he strove to guard the public purse by attempting to delay funding for the venture.

Macon, in the previous session had served on a committee charged to consider revision of Congressional salaries. The passage of a bill presented by that committee reducing the compensation of Senators from seven to six dollars per day must have pleased Macon.¹⁸ His happiness at saving money on senatorial salaries did not endure because another bill passed increasing the salaries of cabinet members along with raises for the Secretary of the Senate, Clerk of the House and Assistant Postmaster. Macon, who believed that honorable men served their government out of a sense of civic duty, feared that these increases would start a movement to raise government salaries “from one end of the Continent to the other.”¹⁹ That, in turn, would lead to men flocking to government jobs not out of a sense of civic duty, but because of the money. Macon’s dedication to protecting the public purse remained constant throughout the entire Fourth Congress.

Macon’s attempts to lessen the expenses of the military proved unsuccessful. So did his efforts to deter increases for the support of the diplomatic corps. Macon opposed the proposal to increase the rank of Spanish and Portuguese ministers resident to ministers plenipotentiary. His argument amounted to a summation of the fiscal principles that had had led him through the whole session. He said, “Now when we were involved in debt for the unavoidable expenses of

¹⁸ Senators were paid the daily rate for the days Congress was in session and for travel days. *Annals of Congress*, Fourth Congress, First Session, 2885.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1383-4.

government, they [the House] ought not to go into measures which would increase those expenses in every quarter.”²⁰

More pressing than congressional salaries and diplomatic ranks, the controversy over the Jay Treaty occupied much of the attention during the First Session of the Fourth Congress. The Jay Treaty resulted from a crisis in Anglo-American relations, which began in 1793 when the British and French Revolutionary government went to war. Early in 1794, the British Royal Navy violated American neutrality by seizing hundreds of American vessels engaged in trade with the French West Indies. Hamilton, who did not want trade with England disrupted and distrusted the pro-French Edmund Randolph, who was in charge of the State Department, to find a suitable solution to the problem. So, Hamilton persuaded Washington to name a special commission to travel to London to negotiate a solution. John Jay, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court was sent to England with instructions to secure compensation for the recent British attacks on American shipping, to demand that the British withdraw their forces from their frontier posts, and to negotiate a commercial treaty. The House had no constitutional authority to approve the treaty; however, it did have the responsibility of appropriating the \$90,000 necessary to implement it. The Senate had ratified the Treaty and President Washington had signed it into law, but the House could actually nullify the treaty if it refused to allocate the funds. This was the first significant issue of international importance that Macon had participated in since he entered Congress and he worked diligently to defeat the passage of any bill to fund the Jay Treaty. Macon, was concerned with the rumors that were circulating at the time about serious and dishonorable irregularities in the Jay’s negotiations. An attempt to either prove or negate the

²⁰ Ibid.,1491.

allegations against Jay led Edward Livingston of New York to put forth a resolution that requested that the president give the House a copy of the instructions sent to Jay and all other correspondence concerning the treaty. Macon threw his support behind Livingston's resolution and it passed by a large margin, but Washington refused the request and maintained that the House had no right to any of the documents. The debate over the Jay Treaty dominated the House for several weeks before the House finally agreed by a vote of 51 to 48 to fund it.²¹

Although Macon lost the fight over funding the Jay Treaty, he distinguished himself in the eyes of his Republican colleagues. He was soon involved in an even more important diplomatic controversy shortly after John Adams took office in March 1797. The new president, on May 15, 1797, called a special session of the Fifth Congress due to the distressed state of Franco-American relations. The French interpreted the Jay Treaty as an alliance between Great Britain and the United States and a repudiation of the earlier 1778 treaty between France and the United States. Therefore, the French government refused to recognize Charles Pinckney, the United States's newly appointed minister, and this broke off diplomatic relations between the two nations. Even more serious, the French gave their privateers the authority to capture American ships and their cargo. Adams, in his address to Congress delineated the worsening state of affairs between France and the United States and recommended that the country should prepare for a possible French invasion. While preparing for the worst, Adams sent a delegation consisting of John Marshall, Thomas Pinckney, and Elbridge Gerry, to Paris charged with the task of reestablishing diplomatic relations and negotiating a treaty to insure peace and uninterrupted commerce. The delegation's mission did not proceed smoothly. In April, John

²¹ *Annals*, Fourth Congress, First Session, 940-1292.

Adams disclosed a letter, which revealed that the French had demanded a bribe prior to opening negotiations with the American delegation. Although many republican-minded men supported the French Revolution in its early stages, none of Macon's personal correspondence or his recorded speeches revealed any affection for the French. This episode, called the XYZ Affair, enraged Americans and seemed to make the likelihood of war with France a distinct possibility. The French crisis seemed to some to be a harbinger of war, and the first real business of the House was to decide how to cope with the situation.

South Carolinian representative, William L. Smith, a Federalist, began calling for significantly enlarging the navy, fortifying key ports, and rushing the completion of frigates already under construction. He asked the House to pass resolutions adding to the powers of the president in several areas. The congressman from South Carolina wanted the executive to have the authority to arm merchant vessels and raise a "Provisional Army." Smith also sought to give the president power to borrow the money to accomplish these goals.²² The Republicans fought a heated battle to thwart these Federalists efforts, and Macon became a prominent participant in the debates that raged in the House. Macon had always fought against increasing the military and jealously guarded against any boost in executive authority. Now, Federalists were pushing for an unprecedented increase in both areas, and Macon viewed this as a clear and immediate threat to the liberties of all Americans.

Macon used several arguments to bolster his objections to augmenting the size of the nation's armed services. The military buildup would necessitate borrowing funds and abhorrence of debt was a republican principle. In a speech, he condemned the effort to lead the

²² *Annals of Congress*, Fifth Congress, First Session, 51-2.

country “blindfolded into a war for the protection of commerce without speaking of expense.”²³

The commerce of which Macon spoke was what he and others often referred to as the carrying trade, in which American ships transported goods, not of American origin, to European nations. Macon also reminded his colleagues that it was possible that no war would occur. Such a dramatic increase in the military would greatly increase the power of the executive branch, and Macon fostered the republican fear of a standing army. He maintained that the resolution to increase the size of the army was a ploy “to get an armed force under the command of men appointed by the President of the United States, rather than under men appointed by the executives of the several states.”²⁴ The militia, according to Macon, would be sufficient to serve the country in case of invasion. He also saw the Atlantic Ocean as a deterrent to any French invasion and assured the House that even if the French managed to land forces in the United States “the militia would be able to kill them as fast as they could be brought over from Europe.”²⁵

Macon had another reason for attempting to defeat the proposals for an enlarged military. He firmly believed that a larger military enhanced the odds that a war would occur. He contended that without an actual declaration of war the increases were not only unnecessary but dangerous as well. Other republicans, along with Macon, believed that the Federalists desired a war with France and their efforts to reinforce the military were not merely a precautionary action. The buildup of the navy proved exceedingly worrisome to Macon, for he perceived that

²³ Ibid., 2090.

²⁴ Ibid., 1672.

²⁵ Ibid., 1756.

navies were built not for defense, but to conquer other nations. Macon summed up these fears in a very effective speech by declaring, “ If gentlemen were determined to have war at any rate, they had better bring forward at once a proposition to that effect.” He continued by reminding the House that “we are in possession of peace.” Macon informed the House that until a war was actually declared, he would not support measures for a military buildup. In this speech he questioned the propriety of augmenting the military just because the French government had “said some foolish things.” Macon also noted that the plans to increase the size of the navy and raise an army were not accompanied with an explanation of how and where they were to be used or how they were to be financed.²⁶

The efforts of Macon and other republicans to thwart any military buildup were unsuccessful and Congress approved legislation giving the president authority to increase the size of the army, reinforce American ports, and complete the construction of three frigates. Just as Macon had predicted, these actions resulted in a heavier tax burden and led to a substantial rise in the national debt. Congress increased the dreaded salt tax, implemented a Stamp Act, and authorized a loan for \$800,000. The debates on the matter did little to create an air of non-partisan cooperation in the House. In fact, Samuel Sewall of Massachusetts, reacting to one of Macon’s speeches seemed to suggest a separation of the new nation. He stated, “those gentlemen who depended upon agriculture for everything need not put themselves to the expense of protecting the commerce of the country; commerce was able to protect itself if they would only suffer it to do so.” Sewall conclude by declaring, “Let those States which live by commerce

²⁶ Ibid., 1698.

be separated by the confederacy.” His speech showed that he did not hold agriculture in as high regard as the supporters of Revolutionary-era republicanism did. He continued that the commercial side of the nation had adequate industry and property with which to protect themselves and went even farther by saying, “Let those states which live by commerce be separated from the confederacy,” and “let other parts of the confederacy take care of themselves.”²⁷ Macon, who rarely showed any emotional reaction to such Federalist jibes, made light of Sewall’s remarks by suggesting that he draw up a formal resolution to that effect and present it to the House. Macon’s cool head served him well during the contentious Fifth Congress, for almost daily heated debate erupted on the House floor. The Speaker of the House, John Dayton, a Federalist from New Jersey, did nothing to diffuse the explosive situation, indeed, his impartiality often served to fan the flames.²⁸ As the Special Session of Congress came to a close, Macon must have felt disappointment in his inability to stop the Federalist approved buildup of the military. If he had hoped for a less contentious Second Session, this wish would soon be dashed.

The Second Session was as conflict ridden as the first. It began with Adams’s address, which included another appeal to prepare for war with France. Even as he made this request, Adams informed Congress that there was hope that a peaceful settlement could be arrived at by the commissioners he had recently dispatched to France to assist C. C. Pinckney. Adam’s speech presented members of Congress with quite a dilemma. If, as Adams indicated, peace were a distinct possibility, why should they prepare for war? Therefore, Congress tended to treat

²⁷ Ibid, 385.

matters pertaining to war preparations without the sense of urgency exhibited in the previous session, and more mundane matters took on greater importance. Macon had always disapproved of the tradition of the House drafting a formal reply to the Presidents address, which often took days and sometimes even weeks. Until the reply was completed and delivered no other significant issues were considered. Macon felt the whole process was unnecessary and concluded that the money, in the form of the per diem allowance to members of Congress, spent during this time was wasteful. He had stated his thoughts on all of the members of the House personally delivering their reply to the President's address. During this session the Vermont representative, Matthew Lyon, once again questioned why representatives were required to participate. At the opening of the last session he had brought the issue before the House and after some debate had asked to be excused and the House had unanimously granted Lyon's request. Macon had wanted to settle the matter more decisively and had suggested that the House adjourn before marching over to the White House to deliver the reply and those who wanted to go could do so, but those objecting to the practice would be under no obligation to participate. Macon remarked that the power of the House might extend to bringing a member into the House but saw no power to carry him out. The House dismissed Macon's proposal and proceeded to deliver the reply. Macon was never one to give up and so when the second session of the Fifth Congress convened he again spoke out against the House compelling all members to participate in the delivery of the House response to the President.

This year a group of Federalists decided that Lyons would not get off so easily. After hearing Adams's speech, appointing a committee to draft a reply, and debating the exact wording

²⁸ Gerald R. Lientz, "House Speaker Elections and Congressional Parties 1789-1860," *Capitol Studies*, 6

of the reply, the House set the date for calling upon the president and delivering the formal reply. At this point, Lyon, rather mockingly commented “when the motion was proposed yesterday on the subject of waiting upon the President, he should have opposed it, only that he did not wish to deprive some gentlemen of the gratification of attending the ceremony; and now he hoped those gentlemen would consent to gratify him by agreeing to a similar resolution to that of last session, excusing him from an attendance upon the occasion.”²⁹ Mr. Sitgreaves, a Federalist from Pennsylvania, commented that he did not think Mr. Lyon should be excluded even if the House had voted to do so the previous session. He added, “When a resolution passed the House, it was entitled to the obedience of all members.”³⁰ Macon was soon on his feet to express his views on the matter. He stated, “that whether the resolution was agreed to or not, the gentleman might doubtless remain behind if he chose, as he had no idea that the House could compel members to go about parading the streets of Philadelphia. The gentleman might have conscientious scruples, and if the ceremony were meant to be respectful to the President, members should attend it freely, or not at all.”³¹ After several more representatives rose to add their opinions Lyon withdrew the motion, and the body failed to reach an agreement; however, with the next presidential election the whole issue of formally made presidential addresses and replies would disappear, because Thomas Jefferson sent his address to Congress with the instructions that a reply was not necessary. The strong emotions and partisan attitudes exhibited in the opening days of the session continued and intensified.

(*Spring, 1978*) 65.

²⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Fifth Congress, Second Session, 650.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Fears that the Federalists intended to involve the country in a war that could very well end the republic plagued Macon. When the Federalists introduced a bill on May 26, 1798, which would authorize the president to seize any French ship that ventured into American coastal waters, Macon moved to alter the bill to include ships from all countries that attacked American shipping. He felt that if Congress aimed the bill at all nations instead of directly at the French, the United States might be able to diffuse the situation and avert a Franco-American War. Macon contended that the manner in which the present bill was written came close to a declaration of war.³² Contentious debate followed Macon's motion, and in the end, the bill passed giving Adams the authority to seize any French ship in the United States coastal waters.³³

Another upshot of the perceived French threat was the passage of what came to be called the Alien and Sedition Acts. The Alien and Sedition Acts were some of the most controversial legislation in American history. The Alien Acts (three separate acts commonly referred to as; Alien Residence Act, Alien Friends Act, Alien Enemies Act) made it more difficult for foreigners to achieve American citizenship and increased the president's authority to deport or imprison aliens. The Sedition Act allowed the government to prosecute those who engaged in attacks on the government. The vague wording of the law gave the government the authority to stifle any opposition and was clearly unconstitutional. Republicans saw these acts as a clear example of the corrupting nature of power and maintained that their liberties and freedoms were slipping away. Because the Federalists held a majority of the House seats, they were so confident of passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts they declined to enter into debate on the proposed

³² Ibid., 1815.

³³ Ibid., 1828.

laws. When Republicans rose to speak, Federalists refused to observe customary courtesy and coughed, laughed, and held private conversations. The Federalist Speaker, John Dayton, refused to call his fellow Federalists to order.³⁴

When the resolutions concerning aliens came before the House on May 1, 1798, they attempted to increase the residency requirement before an immigrant became eligible for citizenship. The proposal also mandated that aliens register and granted the president extensive power to protect the country from immigrants “with hostile intentions toward the United States.” Almost immediately, the resolution was amended to restrict any naturalized citizen from holding political office.³⁵ Macon immediately joined the fray by vehemently objecting to the prohibition of naturalized citizens from holding office. He stated that he believed the legislation to be unconstitutional, and further argued that after a man had acquired citizenship, he should have the same rights as other citizens, including the right to hold elected office. To do otherwise, Macon contended, would amount to creating two classes of citizenship, and the Constitution never intended such a thing to come to pass.³⁶ Not only was the resolution unconstitutional on the aforementioned grounds, but also because it gave the executive the authority to deport aliens without due process. Macon further explained his concern that the extraordinary power that the bill gave to the president was not limited to times of war. If the Alien Bill passed, Macon

³⁴ Donald R. Kennon, ed., *The Speakers of the House of Representatives: A Bibliography, 1789-1984*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986, 20-1.

³⁵ *Annals of Congress*, Fifth Congress, Second session, 1566-7. Many republicans thought that Gallatin might well have been an important stimulus in the creation of this resolution. He had proven a very powerful opponent to the Federalists and had been expelled from the Senate in 1794 for not meeting the citizenship requirement. Gallatin was a perfect example of what the Federalists hated and feared from the immigrant population. He was successful, a brilliant orator, pro-French, and Republican.

declared that it would greatly increase the powers of the executive branch at the expense of the legislative branch. This would upset the balance of powers created by the Constitution. Macon attempted to amend the resolution to grant the president the power to deport aliens only in time of war; however, his amendment failed to carry.³⁷

Macon offered sound objections to the Alien Acts. He made clear his position and stood firmly on his pure republican ideals. It was, however, against the sedition laws that he fought most determinedly. The Sedition Bill as presented to the House provided punishment by fine and/or imprisonment for persons who obstructed the execution of federal law. Other punishable offenses under the bill were: writing, printing, publishing or speaking anything libelous, scandalous, or tending to defame the government or its officers. These laws contradicted the basic rights set out in the Constitution and Bill of Rights and seemed to prove the republican idea, of power as a corrupting force, true. Although the debate on the bill only lasted two days, Macon had much to say. While the Federalists argued that the laws were absolutely necessary, Macon countered with the argument that the laws were not only unnecessary but also useless. He predicted that instead of helping make the government more secure, the legislation would produce the opposite result. By not allowing people to criticize freely the workings of the government, people would assume it to be corrupt, and they would become distrustful, set up committees of correspondence and their criticisms of the government would continue, only as private communications rather than public ones.³⁸

³⁶ Ibid., 1571.

³⁷ Ibid., 1785-6.

³⁸ Ibid., 2105-6.

Macon argued against the necessity of the Sedition Act; however, he made it clear that a more important issue was the constitutionality of such an act. Macon challenged the Federalists to enter into the debate and defend the Sedition Act. The Constitution, according to Macon, did not give Congress the right to pass any such law. In fact, the First Amendment strictly forbade it. He peppered his speech with quotes from men who had voted for ratification of the Constitution and read speeches from members of the First Session of the House, and declared that none of them would have approved passage of the Sedition Act. He asked members to think about what they were advocating and asked, “How Congress should now conceive that they have the power to pass laws on this subject?” Macon stated that “He could himself find no ground to justify the change.”³⁹ Passing such an act would establish a dangerous precedent; Macon warned, “If a law like this passed, to abridge the liberty of the press, Congress would have the same right to pass a law making an establishment of religion, or to prohibit its free exercise, as all are contained in the same clause of the Constitution; and, if it be violated in one respect, it may very well be in others.”⁴⁰ Macon stated his hope that if the majority of members of the House voted for the act that the Supreme Court would exercise their power to rule it unconstitutional. In the end, the Sedition Act passed but only by a three-point margin.⁴¹

The exceedingly long Second Session of the Fifth Congress finally came to an end on July 16, 1798, and Macon headed back home to North Carolina. As he traveled home, he could not have been too pleased with the outcome of the session. There had been the XYZ Affair that

³⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Fifth Congress, Second Session, 2151-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2147.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2152-3.

had damaged the reputation of the Republicans by making them look unpatriotic, measures passed that increased the size of the military, tax rates raised, and unconstitutional acts had been approved. The battles Macon encountered in the Fifth Congress would be revisited repeatedly during his long career, and he would always fight against the evils of taxes and the expansion of executive power. Macon, throughout his career, used the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts as the prime example of how liberty must be guarded against encroachments.

The Federalists controlled the national government in 1798, and so they were able to push through the Alien and Sedition Acts despite spirited opposition in the House. Their victory was, however, short-lived. The acts that threatened newfound liberties frightened the American public and popular opinion shifted against the Federalists.

Macon battled the Alien and Sedition Acts in the House and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison took up the fight on the state level and did much to present the seriousness of the acts to the public. The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions written by Madison and Jefferson emphasized that the federal government was based on a compact between the states and that compact severely limited the powers of the national government. The ideals spelled out in these resolutions came to be called the Principles of '98. These principles stipulated a strict interpretation of the Constitution, retrenchment and reform in government expenditures, and the recognition of the undisputed rights of the sovereign states in forming all regulations concerning personal liberties of the citizen.⁴² The Principles of '98 defined the Republican platform in 1798 and 1800. However, to men like Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph of Roanoke they meant

⁴² Irving Brandt, *James Madison, Father of the Constitution, 1787-1800*, New York : Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1953, 458.

much more. The Principles of '98 represented the republican values Macon and Randolph believed in and would continue to uphold no matter which political faction assumed power.

Macon's struggle to defeat the Alien and Sedition Acts enhanced his reputation among other republicans in the House. During the Sixth Congress, Macon was looked to as an experienced and dedicated adherent of pure republicanism. A young man from Virginia, John Randolph of Roanoke, joined Macon in his fight to uphold the revolutionary-era republican ideals. They became fast friends as they carried the republican standard well into the nineteenth century.

The passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts coupled with the announcement that the French government was ready to welcome a United States minister placed the Federalists in a bad light. If there was not going to be a war with France then the rationalization for increasing the size of the army and the expense therein incurred, the creation of a Department of the Navy, the sixty percent rise in government outlay, and the extreme Alien and Sedition Acts were no longer justifiable. After portraying the Republicans as unpatriotic following the XYZ affair, Federalists had expected to increase their majorities in both chambers of Congress. Instead, Federalists saw their advantage slipping away and became concerned with gaining control of the Virginia state legislature where they hoped to pass a strong condemnation of the Virginia Resolutions. Towards this end, George Washington, in a confidential letter to the revered Patrick Henry, urged him, even though he was deathly ill, to "come forward in the ensuing elections" preferably for a seat in Congress, or in lieu of that for Henry to stand "as a candidate for representative in the General Assembly of this Commonwealth." Washington explained to Henry that "a certain party among us" was trying to stir up the general public and turn it against

the federal government. Washington confided in Henry that members of this certain party, if they were successful might actually destroy the Union. The former president painted a very dim view of the nation's future because "the most respectable and best qualified characters amongst us" refused to involve themselves "to engage in the turmoil of public business." Henry responded by announcing his candidacy for the Virginia House of Delegates and his intention of addressing the people of his district on the March court day in Charlotte Court House.⁴³

The Fifteenth District consisted of Charlotte, Prince Edward, Buckingham, and Cumberland counties, and from all over the state, Virginians came to witness Henry's speech. People traveled from the state capital in Richmond, some made the journey from the mountainous areas to the west, and Hamden Sydney College, in neighboring Prince Edward County, cancelled classes for the day to afford faculty and students the opportunity to hear the legendary Henry speak. John Miller, a young Hampden Sydney College student from South Carolina, remembered the day, and described it as follows, "As he began to speak, Henry's face was almost colorless and his voice slightly cracked and tremulous. According to this account, Henry had taken to heart Washington's contention that the entire Union was at risk. "But as he warmed to his theme, for the Union, for Washington, for caution in applying the Virginia Resolutions a wonderful transformation occurred. He stood erect, his eye beamed, his features glowed, his voice rang clear and melodious, and fell distinctly and delightfully on the ears of the most distant of the thousands gathered before him."⁴⁴ Following Henry's rousing speech, young

⁴³ William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: The Life Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1891), 601-605.

⁴⁴ Wirt, *Sketches of Patrick Henry*, vol. II, 607.

John Randolph took the makeshift podium. Unfortunately, no official manuscript exists of either speech, but there are several accounts by people who attended and a handwritten account was found in Mr. William Henry Wirt's papers. Randolph in an 1818 speech on the floor of Congress, recalled the stand he took. He stated, "I was asked if I justified the establishment of the armory for the purpose of opposing Mr. Adams's administration. I said I did; that I could not conceive of any case in which the people could not be entrusted with arms; and that the use of them to oppose oppressive measures was in principle the same, whether those of the administration of Lord North or that of Mr. Adams."⁴⁵ Randolph's speech proved a quite apt beginning to a political career devoted to battling any increase in power for the federal government.

The voters of Southside elected both Henry and Randolph. It is impossible to discern the reasons the electorate of the Fifth District had for electing Henry, who supported the current administration and Randolph who opposed the actions of Adams and the Federalist controlled Congress. One can suggest that Henry's reputation did much to influence his election. Randolph was young and untried as a leader; however, he came from a well-respected Virginia family and this might well have played a part in his election. For whatever their reasons, Southside Virginians chose to elect two men: one who supported the Federalist administration of John Adams and one who vehemently opposed the sitting president and his actions. Patrick Henry died without ever taking his seat in the Virginia House of Delegates ending a brilliant career just as Randolph's turbulent thirty-year political career began. Randolph entered into public life determined to fight "tooth and nail" the usurpation of power by the federal

⁴⁵ *Annals of Congress*, Fifth Congress, Second Session, 1241.

government at the expense of state governments. According to Randolph's philosophy, "Sovereignty rested in the people of a state; it was indivisible and not transferable." While people held their own sovereignty, state governments were better able to maintain the sovereignty of the people.⁴⁶

When Randolph took his place in the House of Representatives on December 2, 1799, the Federalists controlled both the House and the Senate. In the House, Federalists numbered 63 members to the Republicans 43, but this would be the last Congress in which the Federalists held a majority, for their political star was waning. Macon had held his seat for eight years, and, with the arrival of the young Virginian, a strong and lasting friendship was born. Randolph declared Macon to be a man of ideals and a true statesman, and called him "warm-hearted and sound-headed – the best, purest and wisest man I ever knew."⁴⁷ Macon returned Randolph's open admiration. Macon explaining his friendship with Randolph, using a Biblical reference, said, "Jonathon did not love David more than I have Randolph."⁴⁸ The two men had much in common. Both had lost their fathers at an early age, attended Princeton and studied under Dr. John Witherspoon, and read, but not practiced law. Randolph and Macon both raised tobacco on their plantations on the Roanoke River. They were successful planters who had strong respect for the agrarian way of life, and, most importantly, held the same pure republican principles. Striking differences were also obvious. Macon was physically sturdy, while Randolph carried

⁴⁶ Russell Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke; A Study in American Politics*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1951; reprint, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1997, 47-8.

⁴⁷ John Randolph, Washington, Letter to his niece, January 12, 1827, Bryan Manuscripts, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Bruce, *John Randolph of Roanoke*, vol. II, 594.

the curse of a frail and sickly constitution. Macon always seemed to maintain a sense of calm; Randolph was highly volatile and often let his emotions gain the upper hand. Still, the men became fast friends and together they battled all forces that tried to lead the national government from the Revolutionary-era republican ideals they held so dear. Macon had begun the fight before Randolph's arrival, but the alliance they formed created an unwavering front against attempts to veer from the republican path.

Not intimidated by his age or his lack of experience, Randolph addressed the House of Representatives less than a month after taking his oath of office. His first recorded speech questioned a resolution to give the Secretary of State supervisory authority over the state and territorial marshals who were to conduct the 1800 census. Randolph saw no need to strengthen the federal government at the expense of state sovereignty. The Federalist-dominated House passed the resolution, but Randolph had shown himself a proponent of the republican tenet that feared placing too much power in the hands of too few.⁴⁹

Shortly thereafter on January 7, 1800, Joseph H. Nicholson, Congress from Maryland, another proponent of Revolutionary-era republicanism, presented a resolution asking for a reduction in the army.⁵⁰ On the following day, Macon joined the fray and like Nicholson used the issue of finances to justify his support for a plan to decrease the size of the army. Macon argued that the government could not afford to maintain the army at its current force without taking out loans, and he opposed any additional increase in the national debt. He declared that

⁴⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress, First Session, 221-2.

⁵⁰ Joseph H. Nicholson was a Maryland lawyer who was elected to the House of Representatives in 1799. He like Macon and Randolph was a staunch supporter of republican ideals and during his years in Congress, he showed his loyalty to his beliefs.

he did not see an additional debt of five million dollars as a trifling thing, and urged others to consider that “The sections of Government are often compared to those of an individual, and what should we think of a father who would run in debt, and leave it to his children to pay?”⁵¹ Then on January 10, 1800, Randolph took the floor to argue in favor of the resolution. With the threat of a French war in abeyance, Randolph saw no need to maintain a standing army, which was anathema to republican thought. Instead of arguing about the financial aspect, he attacked the matter of maintaining an army in time of peace from a different angle. In this speech, Randolph declared, “When gentlemen attempt to alarm us with foreign dangers, they will permit me to advert to those of a domestic and more serious nature; they will suffer me to warn against standing armies.” In this speech he also stressed the republican preference of a voluntary militia over professional troops. He spoke “against destroying the military spirit of the citizen by cultivating it only in the soldier by profession; against an institution which has wrought the downfall of every free state, and riveted the fetters of despotism; which must produce in this country effects similar to those it has brought about in others.”⁵²

Randolph continued his criticism of a professional military and used the terms “mercenaries” and “ragamuffins” to describe members of the Army of the United States. He ended his speech with the plea that “the defense of the country be placed in the proper hands – those of the people.” Macon and Randolph voted in favor of Nicholson’s resolution, but it was defeated.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 282-4.

⁵² Ibid., 368.

⁵³ Ibid., 369.

Randolph's comment on the military resulted in an incident at a public theater later that night. Randolph and a party of eight or more men attended a play at the Chestnut Street Theatre. In the box adjoining the Randolph party were three marines who had taken exception to Randolph's remarks. During the play, they taunted Randolph with remarks about mercenaries and ragamuffins, but Randolph refused to respond. At the end of the final performance as Randolph and his party left, Captain James McKnight gave Randolph's coat a vicious tug. Randolph asked who pulled his coat and when he received no answer asked again and used the insulting term "damned puppy" to describe his assailant. The two officers shoved the Randolph party on a darkened stairway. Randolph's group was prepared and was able to prevent any harm. The two soldiers directly involved in the physical part of the attack locked arms and pushed past the Congressmen. The confrontation did not end there. Randolph believed that members of the House had the right to freely speak their minds during congressional debates and not fear repercussions and expressed that opinion in his letter to President Adams by stating, "for words of a general nature, uttered on the floor of this House . . . I have been grossly and publicly insulted by two officers, whose plans were thwarted by the presence of other Congressmen." He felt that the very nature of the attack had insulted every member of the House, and that the military officers involved had violated a code of military conduct. Therefore, he sent a letter to the Commander-in-Chief demanding that "a provision commensurate with the evil be made, and which will be calculated to deter any future attempts to introduce the reign of terror into this country."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ibid., 377.

Adams, known for his devotion to ceremony, was not pleased with the tone of Randolph's correspondence; he did not approve of Randolph's addressing him, the president of the United States as "fellow servant of the people and fellow citizen." After showing the letter to members of his cabinet, he presented it to the House. The president said that he thought it "proper to submit the whole letter and its tendencies to your consideration without any comments on its matter or style." Adams also promised to have the secretaries of War and Navy investigate the incident.⁵⁵ The President may have claimed that he was leaving the matter to the House, but his mention of tendencies and style indicate otherwise. He and his cabinet wanted Randolph censured for what Adams considered the contemptuous language of the correspondence. Adams's cabinet felt that Randolph's manner of addressing the president, if left unchallenged, would set a dangerous precedent. The meeting with the cabinet centered on chastising Randolph and did not address the behavior of the officers.⁵⁶ On the other hand, Republicans felt that it was not the place of the House to try to enforce any sort of style in addressing the chief executive.

Randolph seemed to have been shocked when both his letter and the President's were read before the House, and the Speaker appointed a committee to investigate the matter. Three Republicans and four Federalists made up the committee. Macon was appointed to the committee but asked to be excused. He was, after all, a witness to the incident and would be required to testify. The committee did not recommend that the House censure Randolph, but it did agree that the President had been correct in submitting the letter to them. Republicans were enraged that the preamble of the resolution chastised Randolph for writing the letter to the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 378.

⁵⁶ Charles Francis Adams, *Works of John Adams*, vol. .IX, Boston, 1854, 46.

President and addressing him as an equal. Seemingly, the committee's resolutions ended the matter in the House; however, the American press kept the story alive, and the outpouring of public opinion led to General Samuel Smith of Baltimore insisting on punishment for the Marine officers who had accosted Randolph. The Federalists and Republicans battled over the issue for six days. The Republicans maintained, as Randolph had earlier, that they had the right to express freely their minds in open debate on the floor without fear of reprisal, and the Federalists focused on Randolph's contemptuous language to the President. The House did agree that Captains Knight and Reynolds were in the wrong. Their punishment was mild and according to the wording of the resolution "considering it as an indiscretion of youth" the House was unwilling to exercise its constitutional authority of punishment."⁵⁷ Once again, the official outcome changed nothing and can best be described as a draw; however, Randolph the twenty-five-year-old Virginian was now known throughout the nation.

With the battle over military retrenchment lost, and the call for Randolph's censure defeated, Macon again attacked the Alien and Sedition Acts passed by the previous Congress. He called for the repeal of the section of the Sedition Act which declared it illegal to "write, print, utter, or publish anything false, scandalous, and malicious against the government, congress, or the president with the intent of bringing them into disrepute."⁵⁸ Macon explained that he was revisiting the matter due to an obligation to his constituents and he added new challenges to the acts constitutionality as well as its morality and common sense. Macon said the

⁵⁷ *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress First Session, 506-7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 604.

act contradicted liberties guaranteed the people by the Bill of Rights and challenged those who supported the Sedition Act to show him any part of the Constitution that justified it. Macon pointed out that under the Sedition Act free elections would be impossible, because the people would not have the opportunity of “freely investigating the character, conduct, and ability of each candidate to fill any place of public trust whatever.”⁵⁹ His final point concerned the logic of the law. He pointed out that the Constitution provided for impeachment, but with the Sedition Act in place, it would be illegal for anyone who had ascertained wrongdoing of a government official to reveal his findings. Macon’s reasoning was sound; however, due to an amendment added to Macon’s motion, which changed the entire point and brought Republicans to their feet in protest, even Macon voted against it.⁶⁰

The Republicans met defeat at every turn but only by a slim margin. This did not prevent them from taking a strong stand against actions, which they believed flew in the face of their ideals. Macon, always a faithful steward of public funds, objected to the plan to build an ornate mausoleum to honor Washington’s memory. Macon voted against the expensive mausoleum, not out of disrespect for the first president, but because he thought the expenditure was too great. On that note the first session of the Sixth Congress adjourned.

The second session of the Sixth Congress opened on November 17, 1800, in Washington D. C. and Speaker Theodore Sedgewick, a Federalist from Massachusetts, proceeded to appoint committee members in an extremely partisan manner. Of the thirty-four representatives named to standing committees; only nine of that number were Republicans. Even though the Federalists

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 404-6.

⁶⁰ *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress, First Session, 406-414.

controlled every branch of the national government their dominance would come to an end in the next Congress; therefore, the Republicans had merely to bide their time and do what they could to rein in the Federalists. Adams made his last address to the Congress on November 22. Ironically, Macon, who had always objected to the process of making a formal reply to the president, found himself a member of the committee responsible for drawing up the response. After drafting the formal reply, the chairman brought it before the House for approval. Nicholson, who had been the other Republican on the committee, attacked the final draft as “nothing more or less than a statement of Federalist policy and a glorification of Federalist performance.” Although the House accepted the response by a majority of only four votes, with Macon and Randolph’s votes counted among the nays, and the formal reply was delivered to the president.⁶¹

In early December, it was common knowledge that Republicans had won the White House. Because the Constitution stated that in order to win the presidency a candidate must receive a majority of the electoral votes it would be several months before Jefferson was officially named the winner over Aaron Burr. Jefferson had received a majority of the votes, but Burr had also. Electors, at this time, did not specify the offices of President and Vice-President when they voted. So according to the letter of the law, Jefferson and Burr were tied. Although, everyone knew that it was the intent of the Electoral College to select Jefferson as president and Burr as vice-president, the Federalists saw this as a chance to deny Jefferson the presidency, eliminate Adams, who was by now quite unpopular with his own party, and elect Burr. He was

⁶¹ *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress, Second Session, 786.

also a Republican; however, most Federalists felt anyone was better than Jefferson. The election's outcome could have easily been settled if Burr had instructed one of the New York electors to vote for Jefferson. This Burr would not do. With the election thrown into the House of Representatives on February 11, the Federalists carried out their plan to block Jefferson's election. Ballot after ballot ended with a tie. Finally, Joseph Nicholson, Maryland's representative, was carried from his sickbed to cast his vote for Jefferson. This broke the Maryland electors' tie and threw all of Maryland's electoral votes to Jefferson, thereby ending the drama.

The last session of the Sixth Congress was a "lame duck" session. With the White House lost and the legislature shifting to a republican majority, Federalists tried to retain control of the judicial branch of the government. They did so by expanding the number of federal judges and filling the new posts with Federalists. By nominating John Marshall, a Virginian and staunch Federalist, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Adams sought to give the judiciary more authority. Macon and Randolph voted against the Federalist expansion of the federal judicial system because they saw it an unnecessary drain on the public purse and an open attempt for the Federalists to maintain power over the federal courts.

Yet another battle against the Sedition Act, scheduled to expire on March 3, 1800, awaited the Republicans. The Committee of Revival and Unfinished Business, dominated by a Federalist majority, recommended continuation of the law. There was no shortage of Republicans wanting to speak out against an extension. Tom Davis of Kentucky wondered why those who boasted "of honesty, skulked in darkness and sheltered behind a sedition law."⁶²

⁶² Ibid., 877.

Randolph rose, entered the debate, and stated that even if he had not known the law to be unconstitutional, he would oppose its continuance because it infringed on the rights of his constituents and it was his solemn duty to protect those rights. When he finished, Nicholson picked up the debate, and before a vote was taken, Macon also had his say. He argued against the effectiveness of the law to “protect the government from calumny and falsehood.” Macon questioned his fellow members of the House about the nature of the American struggle for independence. “Was our Revolution brought about by the publication of a falsehood? No, sir, it was not; it was publishing and proclaiming the truth.” He admonished his peers that if they had truth on their side, they had no need to fear slander, and if their words and actions were honorable, they did not need the protection of such an obnoxious law. Macon reminded the Federalists that they had insisted they needed the law to defend the country due to the threat of war; the threat had now passed; therefore, they no longer needed the act, yet the committee had asked that it be continued. Macon asked, “Why?”⁶³

Whether the strong republican arguments resonated with the congressmen or some of the members already opposed the committee’s recommendation to extend the much-hated Sedition Act, it failed to pass and the controversial law expired within a week’s time. Not much was accomplished in the remaining two weeks of the session. There was, however, a resolution to apply the \$6,000 left from an earlier appropriation to decorating the presidential mansion. Fourteen thousand dollars had been appropriated for both Washington and Adams with an additional fifteen thousand approved when the capital was re-located to the Washington City.

⁶³ *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress, Second Session, 963-6.

Six thousand of this remained unspent, and the committee requested it be assigned to Jefferson. The Federalists attempted to amend the original resolution by increasing the amount by thousands. Macon was quickly on his feet to object to any increase in the appropriation. His arguments against allocating more money to decorate the presidential residence were based on the same principles as his objections to similar financial requests made during the Washington and Adams administrations. Macon further stated that he “did not think it was the responsibility of the government to furnish the president’s residence anymore than any of the departments heads, and with a salary of \$25,000, it seemed any man should be able to live in high style.” He continued that “he thought the monies for furnishing the president’s accommodations that had been appropriated over the last two administrations should serve their purpose for the next fifty years and hoped no further funds be requested.”⁶⁴ Because of Macon’s austere living habits and his public reaction to fiscal matters, he has often been characterized as parsimonious. There is, however, another explanation to his negative reaction to increased government spending, Macon believed himself to be a steward of the public purse and steadfastly guarded against expenditures that he thought unnecessary. By holding the line on governmental expenses, debt and increased taxes could be avoided.

When the House offered the customary resolution of thanks to Speaker Sedgewick for his conduct as chair, Gabriel Christie, a Maryland Republican, contended that the question was not in order. Christie told his colleagues that he did not intend to go into a detailed description of all of the Speaker’s improprieties, but he hoped to remind them of the many inconsistencies in Sedgewick’s actions as he presided over the body. He closed by saying, “In doing that, Mr.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1068-71.

Speaker, I shall behave better to you than you have ever done to me.”⁶⁵ And, thus ended the Sixth Congress and Federalist control of the House.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1071.

CHAPTER III

REPUBLICAN STALWARTS DURING THE JEFFERSON ADMINISTRATION

The dominance of the Federalists had drawn to an end. They had not only lost the presidential election of 1800; they also forfeited their majority in the legislative branch of the government. Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural address sounded a conciliatory note; however, it can be seen as an appeal to Federalists for a peaceable transfer of power. It also contained reassurances to the devotees of Revolutionary-era republican ideals. Jefferson's famous "We are all Republicans; we are all Federalists" inaugural address offered an olive branch to the Federalists who had just been ousted from power. The newly elected president then proceeded to outline his definition of a truly republican government and indicated that it was by these standards that his administration would operate. He promised, "equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political." On the international level Jefferson advocated, "Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none." He also made clear his intent to preserve the rights of states governments and to defend them as the "surest bulwark against anti-republican tendencies." Furthermore, he pledged his support of the national Constitution. In what may have meant to be a veiled warning against those who had just lost power in the national government, Jefferson advocated "Absolute

acquiescence in the decisions made by the Majority, the vital principle of republics, from which there is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate part of despotism.” In keeping with one of the bedrocks of Revolutionary-era republican ideals, he supported the reliance in a well-developed militia in times of peace. His statement about “economy in public expense, and the honest payment of our debts also reflected republican ideals. Jefferson made clear his position that farming was the backbone of the nation when he referred to the “encouragement of Agriculture and Commerce as its handmaid.” He also included a statement showing his feelings about the much hated Sedition Act, when he spoke of “freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom to persons under the protection of the Habeas Corpus; And tried by juries, impartially selected.”¹ Jefferson, although extending an olive branch to the Federalists, clearly indicated his intention to adhere to the republican concepts of the Revolutionary era.

Many of the Republicans who had struggled to hold back the Federalists during Washington’s and Adams’s administrations saw Jefferson’s victory as more than just a change in presidents. Republicans looked forward to their chance to recapture the ideals of the republicanism of the Revolutionary era. In a letter to Joseph Nicholson concerning the election of Jefferson, Randolph wrote, “In this quarter, we think the great work is only begun; and that without a substantial reform, we shall have little reason to congratulate ourselves on the mere change of men.”² The fear of executive power, reared its head among the adherents of pure

¹ Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address, March 3, 1801, in Paul L. Ford, ed., *Jefferson’s Writings*, vol. 8, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892-1899, 197-8.

² John Randolph, Bizzare, to Joseph Nicholson, July 26, 1801, autographed letter in Nicholson Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

republicanism even at the moment of their great victory over John Adams and the Federalist dominated Congress. Randolph was not alone in his reservations concerning the defeat of the incumbent and the election of Jefferson. Nathaniel Macon as well worried that the new administration might not follow the path of pure republicanism. Additionally, the prominent jurist and politician, Edmund Pendleton expressed his unease in an essay entitled, “The Danger Not Over,” and urged his “compatriots to make use of their recent victory.” Pendleton argued that if Jefferson’s obviously trustworthy character lulled them into a false sense of security their “happiness of the moment might be fleeting.” Pendleton urged his readers to remain vigilant protectors of republicanism. He declared, “The rare event of such a character [Jefferson] at the head of a nation imposes on us the sacred duty of seizing the propitious opportunity, to do all in our power to perpetuate that happiness: as to that species of confidence, which would extinguish free inquiry and popular watchfulness, it is never desired by patriotism nor ought to be yielded by freeman.”³ Pendleton’s ominous warning placed Jefferson and all members of the new administration on alert that the devout disciples of the concepts of Revolutionary-era republicanism would remain ever watchful of incipient tyranny. John Taylor of Caroline, nephew of Pendleton, John Randolph, and Nathaniel Macon were among those who continued to keep a close eye on the federal government, especially the executive branch.

After the close of the Sixth Congress, Macon found himself in an unaccustomed position. For the first time in many years, he was no longer part of an opposing minority. Jefferson was a

³ Edmund Pendleton, “The Danger Not Over,” October 5, 1801, *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton*, vol.2, ed. David John Mays (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1967) 695-99.

man who through his Kentucky Resolves and other political actions had identified with Macon's political beliefs. Macon and Jefferson were also evidently on friendly terms and occasionally corresponded concerning topics other than politics. Thus, Macon felt comfortable writing Jefferson and offering some suggestions for the tone of the new administration. While spending the recess between the Sixth and Seventh Congresses on his North Carolina plantation, Buck Springs, Macon, in accord with the revolutionary republican principles he embraced, disclosed to the president elect his hopes for a quieter, less ceremonial presidential term. Macon suggested that lavish entertainments, called levees, be eliminated and that the annual address of the president be delivered by letter without all the fanfare of the past. In accordance with his republican ideals, Macon advocated reducing the size of the army and navy as well as the diplomatic corps. The North Carolinian, ever mindful of his responsibility to monitor public spending closely, not only opposed large governmental expenditures but called Jefferson's attention to more mundane matters by suggesting that the government pay tax collectors a fixed salary rather than a commission. Fearing corruption, he also warned against making postal appointments to anyone associated with a newspaper or printing business, because he saw a conflict of interest.⁴ The newly elected President seemed agreeable to Macon's suggestions and sent him a reassuring letter in which he stated, "Levees are done away. The first communication to the next Congress will be, like all subsequent ones, by message, to which no answer will be

⁴ Nathaniel Macon, Buck Spring, North Carolina to Thomas Jefferson, April 23, 1801, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

expected. The diplomatic establishment in Europe will be reduced to three ministers. The compensation to collectors depends on you not me.”⁵

Macon, though encouraged by this response, took a wait-and-see approach toward Jefferson. The Inaugural Address and their personal correspondence with the president led Macon and other staunch supporters of Revolutionary-era republicanism to hold out strong hope for overcoming the governmental excesses of the Washington and Adams administrations and shaping a government that would more closely reflect their views.

When Thomas Jefferson assumed the presidency in 1801 he proceeded, with the assistance of strict adherents to the pure republican beliefs, to revamp the federal government. Reform and retrenchment, the goals of the first Jefferson administration, received the support of all Republicans during the first two years. The republican purists, such as Macon and Randolph, fell in line with Jefferson and wholeheartedly threw themselves into the task of erasing the odious Federalist policies of the former presidents.

Macon had served in the House of Representatives for ten years, and during that period had not wavered from his deeply held republican ideals. When the first session of the Seventh Congress convened, the body elected him Speaker of the House. Among his duties was the naming of House Committees. He immediately chose the twenty-eight year old Virginian, John Randolph, as chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. Randolph, steeped in the ideals of revolutionary republicanism from an early age, could be depended on to hold the line on government spending. Macon’s committee appointments gave the Federalists, now the

⁵ Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to Nathaniel Macon, May 18, 1801, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

minority party, an adequate voice on all committees, with Republicans having only a bare majority in each. Elections, Unfinished Business, Claims, and Ways and Means committees had a Republican-Federalist ratio of four to three, two to one, four to three, and five to four respectively. Republicans had long complained of partisanship being shown in the naming of committees by the Federalist controlled House. In the previous Congress Speaker Sedgwick had placed a disproportionate number of Federalist on the standing committees of Commerce, Claims, and Elections. The Judiciary Committee had no Republicans and the Defense Committee had only one.⁶ Macon, while speaker of the House, consistently appointed committees with Republicans holding only a bare majority of the seats. With committees named, it was now time to set about implementing the Principles of '98.

Randolph set out with almost a religious fervor to assist in the reformation of the federal government. Fear of a standing army, one of the hallmarks of Revolutionary-era republicanism, received early attention in the Seventh Congress. Within three weeks of the House being called into session, Randolph had submitted a motion stating that it was “expedient to reduce the Military Establishment of the United States.”⁷ In his speech to members of the House, Randolph argued that state and local militias were sufficient to the needs of the nation. His recommendations passed handily. Reducing the size of the military fit into the plan of returning to pure republican ideals not only because it lessened the danger of misuse of the army and navy by a power-hungry executive, but it was also a money saving measure. Cutting government

⁶ *Annals of Congress*, Seventh Congress, First Session, 312-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 354.

expenses on unnecessary and dangerous military expenditures had the added benefit of reducing or even discontinuing duties on goods.

Aversion to taxes, another distinguishing trait of pure republican thought, resulted in legislation to discontinue many of the taxes levied during the two previous administrations. Jefferson in his first address to Congress stated, “There is reasonable ground of confidence that we may now safely dispense with all the internal taxes.”⁸ Randolph was up to the task of reducing governmental expenses, and on December 31, 1801, he spoke of the expediency of repealing laws concerning internal taxes. Specifically mentioned were the duties on stills and distilled spirits, refined sugar, sales at auctions, pleasure carriages, stamps, and on postage for letters.

Jefferson’s address also suggested that Congress take a closer look at the Judiciary Act passed by the “lame duck” Sixth Congress. He had expressed his outrage at the former administration’s expansion of the judiciary branch. Jefferson had displayed his anger to William Giles when he wrote about his determination to “expunge the effects of Mr. Adams’s indecent conduct, in crowding nominations after he knew they were not for himself, till 9 o’clock of the night, at 12 o’clock of which he was to go out of office.”⁹ The president was not alone in his outrage concerning the increase and partisan appointments of federal judges.

⁸ James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, vol. I, New York: 1913, 316.

⁹ Thomas Jefferson to William Giles, March 23, 1801, Paul L. Ford, ed., *Jefferson Writings*, vol. 8, New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1892-1899, 25.

The advocates of Revolutionary-era republicanism in both branches of Congress saw Adams's actions as evidence of the corrupting nature of power. Randolph brought the matter before the House, submitting a resolution requesting an inquiry into the possibility of making necessary changes to the judicial system. A large majority adopted the resolution, and Macon appointed a committee to consider such action; however, the committee never met because the Senate had already begun framing a bill to repeal the Judiciary Act, and the House decided to await the Senate's action. When the Senate bill came before the House, the debate would be open to the committee of the whole and Macon, under those circumstances, would be allowed to enter the debate. The Federalist minority, rather ironically, opened the debate with an attempt to show that the Republican motive in repealing the Judiciary Act was a purely partisan action. The Federalists claimed that the Republicans' real aim was to eliminate the Federalist judges and gain control of the judicial branch. Furthermore, Federalists maintained that the repeal of the act would be unconstitutional, because it threatened the independence of the judiciary. Before they had finished with the subject, Federalists even threatened that passage of the bill could lead to civil war.¹⁰ There was no shortage of emotion on either side of the debate. William Branch Giles launched a scathing diatribe against the Federalists and John Adams, in which he called Adams's administration "monarchical." Giles said the Federalists had corrupted the government and followed the doctrine of despotism. The Virginia Congressman delivered such a vicious attack that Federalist James Bayard was able to take advantage of Giles's overstatements and

¹⁰ *Annals of Congress*, Seventh Congress, First Session, 510-22.

invective to place Republicans on the defensive. After Bayard's long and eloquent speech, Giles did not take the floor to answer.¹¹

Instead, Macon entered into the debate and outlined his reasons for supporting the bill: the country did not need such a massive judicial system, and the Senate bill would save money. He defended the bill based on his Revolutionary-era republican principles that guided him on all matters. Macon, however, was not ready to relinquish the floor and responded to the vindictive speeches given by the earlier speakers, primarily Giles, a Republican. He seemed to admonish both Republicans and Federalists for their intemperate remarks, saying, "In talking about the late or present president, it ought not be forgotten that they both signed the Declaration of Independence. They have both been Ministers in Europe, and both Presidents of the United States. Although they may differ in political opinion, as many of us do, is that any reason we should attempt to destroy their reputations." Then, in what must have come as a surprise to Federalists, Macon continued his defense of Adams. Macon said, "I have differed in opinion with the former President, but no man has ever heard me say, that he was either corrupt or dishonest; and sooner than attempt to destroy the fame of these worthies whose talents and exertions we owe our independence, I would cease to be an American; nor will I undertake to say that all who differ from me in opinion are disorganizers or Jacobins."¹²

Why would Macon, who hated the Judiciary Act as much as any Republican, offer such a defense of Adams, the man, Republicans held responsible for the act? Macon's aim was to

¹¹ Ibid., 579-602.

¹² Ibid., 718.

garner support of the bill to repeal the Judiciary Act; therefore, there was no valid reason to attack either Adams or the Federalists. Macon was defending his long held republican ideals. Even before there was a Federalist or Republican faction, Macon had committed himself to remain faithful to his ideological and political views. Macon's motto was "principles not men" and this allowed him to fight vigilantly against Federalist principles and not attack individuals.¹³ His strict adherence to pure republican views and his obvious respect for the opinions and rights of his colleagues give a good measure of the man. His entire career reflected his ethical standards. Macon found it possible to be fair to his opponents and still maintain his principles, and this won him the respect of men on both sides of the House.

Weeks of contentious debates and often-intemperate remarks by Federalists and Republicans passed before the bill finally came to a vote. On four occasions James Bayard, veteran Federalist member from Delaware, tried to amend the bill. A large number voted down all of his attempts. On March 1, the House passed the Judiciary Act and two days later Jefferson signed it.¹⁴

When the first session of the Seventh Congress ended on May 3, 1802, Macon, Randolph, and Jefferson were all well pleased with the outcome. The work of "reform and retrenchment" was well underway. Randolph had expected sweeping changes with the election of Jefferson and felt that this session of Congress was a good beginning. In a letter to Joseph Nicholson,

¹³ Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, January 28, 1810, Joseph H. Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ *Annals of Congress*, Seventh Congress, First Session, 1104.

Randolph maintained that he supported Jefferson because of the new style of government he brought to Washington. He qualified this statement of approval by adding, “but I am not like some of our party who are so devoted to him as the Federalists were to General Washington.”¹⁵ Randolph’s Revolutionary-era republicanism feared too much power entrusted into the hands of any man, and those adhering to the same ideals felt that power was such a strong force it could corrupt even the best men.

Although Randolph had high expectations for the government under Jefferson’s leadership, he never felt any obligation toward his distant cousin from Monticello or any political party. He expressed his attitude toward the president in a letter to his brother’s widow, Judith. Randolph would never blindly follow Jefferson or accept the inherent validity of his every belief. He declared that instead of being an unquestioning adherent of any man, he was “a citizen of the republic of reason,” and therefore, he owed his allegiance only to his own principles and obligation to execute honorably his responsibilities as a member of the House of Representatives.¹⁶ Randolph’s appointment as Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and his increased influence in the House did nothing to change his conviction that he was a free agent, answerable only to his own conscience.

The Second Session of the Seventh Congress continued the program of reform and retrenchment so dear to Macon and Randolph. When Jefferson received notification that

¹⁵ John Randolph to Joseph H. Nicholson, Washington, December 17, 1801, Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁶ John Randolph to Judith Randolph, Philadelphia, April 19, 24 year (1800), Bryan Papers, University of Virginia Library.

Congress was ready to accept any communication he wished to impart, he fulfilled his earlier promise to Macon and sent his state of the Union message to Congress in written form and expressed his wish that no formal reply be made. After receiving the written message, Macon instructed the clerk of the House to read it. Jefferson's message mentioned several items that coincided with the Republican plans for cutting back on taxes and government spending and he only briefly mentioned France's acquisition of Louisiana from Spain, which Jefferson had known about since June 1801, although the French government publicly denied it.¹⁷ Jefferson's brief mention of the transfer of ownership Louisiana did not diminish the importance of the issue and it was a frequent topic of discussion throughout the nation; however, Congress could do little other than debate the western crisis caused by Spanish retrocession of Louisiana. In France, Robert Livingston, and Talleyrand, the French Foreign Minister, began discussions on the possibility of the French selling the whole of Louisiana to the United States. So with the issue of Louisiana at somewhat of an impasse the Seventh Congress during the latter part of the second session devoted most of its attention to the more mundane business of running the government. Randolph, in his position as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, pushed for reduction in government spending and complained about a group of Republicans seeking political plums. He saw these actions by those claiming to support republican ideals as reprehensible and a betrayal of the principles they claimed to uphold. In spite of this concern, Randolph concluded

¹⁷ Jefferson had known about the French acquisition of Louisiana since early June 1801, although the French government denied it. Then, in November 1802, Americans were notified that their rights of free navigation of the Mississippi River and the use of New Orleans port facilities had rescinded. This placed American agricultural interests in great distress. The use of the river as a means to transport their goods was vital to the economy of the United States.

that there had been “substantial reform,” in the Seventh Congress but much more remained to be accomplished.¹⁸ Macon also seemed pleased with the progress in the House and he could have taken pride in the fact that the members of the House unanimously recognized and thanked him “for his conduct in discharging the arduous and important duties assigned him, while in the chair.”¹⁹ Traditionally at the end of Congress there was a motion to thank the Speaker, but in recent years, the motion had only passed by a small majority. Macon had earned the respect of both Federalists and Republicans. Federalist, William Grove, instead of leaving for home as soon as the important business of the House concluded, wrote to a friend, “I mean to stay and see the last of the session, and to give my vote of thanks to our old friend Macon who has conducted himself with more moderation and impartiality in the chair than many of us expected, and I firmly believe more than any of his party would have done, had they been in his situation.”²⁰ Thus ended the first Congress under control of the Republicans. The nation’s legislators had much to consider as they left Washington in the early spring.

The issue of the Spanish cessation of Louisiana to France was a topic of concern throughout the nation and even if Jefferson had not openly conveyed his qualms to Congress, he had made them known to many. Upon hearing of the French acquisition of Louisiana from Spain, he began to fear the consequences of such a powerful European nation controlling territory that was so close and vital to America. Republicans, particularly those from Virginia,

¹⁸ John Randolph to Joseph Nicholson, July 1, 1801, Nicholson Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

¹⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Seventh Congress, Second Session, 700.

²⁰ William Barry Grove to John Steele, February 25, 1803, Henry Wagstaff, ed., *The Papers of John Steele*, vol.1, Raleigh: Publication of the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1924, 370.

had admired the French Revolution in its early stage. This feeling had been somewhat diminished by the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte, but many of the proponents of the French Revolution had looked upon Bonaparte as a necessary, if unfortunate, outgrowth of the Revolution. Many of these same Republicans disliked the British government and distrusted that nation's imperialistic commercialism. Now, with the French controlling Louisiana, and Napoleon Bonaparte ruling France, the Jefferson administration and the Republicans had to re-evaluate their approach to foreign policy. Jefferson expressed his dramatic diplomatic about-face in a letter to Robert Livingstone, American minister to France. The president wrote that on the day that Napoleon's France occupied the port city of New Orleans Americans "must marry ourselves to the British fleet and nation." He went on to explain that France had up until this point been seen as America's natural friend, but the French acquisition of New Orleans changed this. Jefferson wrote, "There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass market. France, placing herself in that door assumes to us the attitude of defiance." According to Jefferson's reasoning, a weak Spain offered little threat to the United States; however, a powerful France was an immediate danger.²¹ These fears made the plan to acquire New Orleans even more acceptable.

The Eighth Congress began two weeks early due to the pressing issue of the proposed Louisiana Purchase. News from Paris reached Congress of an agreement for the United States to

²¹ Thomas Jefferson to Robert Livingstone, April 18, 1802, Ford, *Jefferson's Writings*, vol. 8, 287.

acquire not just New Orleans but the entire Louisiana Territory. Macon expressed his approval of the acquisition, with his only concern being if the money was on hand to seal the deal.

Availability of good, fertile land insured the continued existence of independent farmers and this was an important factor to the maintaining a healthy republic. The possible attainment excited Macon, and he hoped that soon the United States would acquire even more territory. In a letter to John Steele, he wrote, “The purchase of Louisiana is all the talk with us, all pleased, and we hope shortly to hear that the Floridas have been acquired by the same pacific measures.”²²

Randolph wholeheartedly supported the purchase, both publicly and privately. Macon and Randolph displayed no qualms about acquiring the vast amount of land. The acquisition would ensure the availability of fertile farmland for future generations and meshed with the republican ideal of a nation populated by independent farmers. Before the House could take up the matter of appropriating funds necessary to complete the purchase of Louisiana, the Senate had to ratify the Louisiana Purchase Treaty with France. While awaiting Senate action, the House once again elected Macon as Speaker, and he proceeded to appoint the standing committees. He named John Randolph as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Always an important appointment, it would prove even more so as the House committee was responsible for allocating the funds to purchase Louisiana. The most exciting business of the session dealt with Louisiana, but other matters also required the attention of the House.²³

²² Nathaniel Macon to John Steele, August 7, 1803, Henry McGilbert Wagstaff, *The Papers of John Steele*, vol.1, Raleigh: Publication of the North Carolina Historical Commission, 1924, 403.

²³ *Annals of Congress*, Eighth Congress, First Session, 370.

The Senate swiftly ratified the Louisiana Purchase Treaty. Now a battle was waiting in the House for funding. The terms of the treaty set the price for the Louisiana territory at fifteen million dollars, which amounted to approximately four cents per acre. The asking price amounted to the annual national budget, and Albert Gallatin, now Secretary of the Treasury, was given the unenviable task of funding the purchase without raising taxes. Randolph's purpose was to convince Congress to agree to the Gallatin's plan. Under the treaty of cession, part of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty, the United States was to pay France \$11,250,000 in 6% stock certificates redeemable in fifteen years with the remaining \$3,750,000 used to settle claims Americans had against the French government. The actual transaction was to be handled by the largest two European banking concerns, Dutch Hope and Company and the British Banking House of Baring Brothers. Two million dollars of the amount was already available because Congress in the previous session had voted that amount for the possible purchase of New Orleans.

With Gallatin's arrangements made, Randolph's undertaking began. Federalist senators had tried in vain to obstruct the ratification of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty. Now, the job of blocking the Louisiana Purchase fell to the Federalists in the House. Their first tactic, was to claim that the treaty was invalid because a clause in the Franco-Spanish Treaty of San Ildefonso prohibited Bonaparte from selling the former Spanish holding. They also attacked the bill by arguing that it was unconstitutional. Their actions were rather ironic, since while in power they had passed the Alien and Sedition Acts that were unconstitutional. Randolph, whose background and sentiment was clearly Anti-Federalist, had no qualms about throwing his accomplished

oratorical skills against the Federalists. Jefferson may have experienced pangs of conscience over the acquisition of Louisiana, but no such misgivings seemed to have burdened Randolph.

John Randolph rose to the occasion in the Louisiana Purchase debates and pushed through the funding measure. He chastised the Federalists for arguing the constitutionality of the purchase and reminded them that measures they passed in previous years had not shown the same concern for upholding the Constitution. He aimed his most pointed remarks at Roger Griswold, as he relentlessly hammered home his message. Where was the concern over crossing constitutional barriers when the Jay Treaty with Great Britain, Alien Acts, and the Sedition Act were passed? Now, that the United States had the opportunity to acquire the whole of the Louisiana Territory for a very small percentage of its value, the Federalists raised constitutional questions. Randolph argued his cause eloquently and the Federalists efforts to thwart the purchase did not succeed.

The Federalists were unable to sway the Republicans and the resolution to make available the necessary funds to conclude the purchase passed with a handsome majority of 84 to 29.²⁴ On the final vote a number of Federalists broke ranks and supported the resolution. The acquisition of Louisiana, Randolph maintained, was one of the most significant actions of his long political career, and he took pride in his involvement in bringing it to fruition. In a letter to James Monroe, he wrote that the Treaty of Paris would be recognized as “a monument to the wisdom of those who projected and executed it.”²⁵ Randolph praised the efforts of the Jefferson

²⁴ *Annals of Congress*, Eighth Congress, First Session, 488-9.

²⁵ John Randolph to James Monroe, July 20, 1804, Monroe Papers, Library of Congress.

administration and ably shepherded the Louisiana Purchase through the House, but he could never be called Jefferson's man anymore than could his dear friend and colleague, Nathaniel Macon.

Macon supported the Jefferson administration in its efforts to turn back Federalist excesses, but he would not sacrifice his principles for any man. He felt that Jefferson's determination to have Supreme Court Judge, Samuel Chase impeached was unfounded and ill-advised. In a letter to John Steele, Macon expressed his unfavorable opinion of Chase. He wrote, "Such men as he, no matter to what party they may pretend to belong, are a real injury to the country. Their imprudence and ungovernable temper have no limits. They neither feel charity nor know moderation to those who may honestly differ with them in opinion, if in fact they have any opinion, more than others."²⁶ Justice Chase's actions, both while on and off the bench, had incensed Jefferson leading him to send a letter to Joseph Nicholson, a Republican member of the House from Maryland, strongly suggesting that he take charge of actions to impeach Chase. Jefferson desperately wanted Chase removed from the bench, but he did not want any public connection to the proceedings: therefore, the president turned to his friend Nicholson, an accomplished lawyer, in the House. In his communication to Nicholson, Jefferson complained that the "seditious actions of Chase should not be allowed to go unpunished."²⁷ The aging Chase had on several occasions committed political and judicial indiscretions, which

²⁶ Nathaniel Macon to John Steele, August 7, 1803, Wagstaff, vol.1, 403.

²⁷ Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Nicholson, May 13, 1801, Andrew Lipscomb and Albert Bergh, eds., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 9 489.

resulted in the leveling of eight articles of impeachment. Nicholson confided in Macon concerning the president's letter and Macon warned his friend to avoid becoming embroiled in this matter. Although Macon deplored Chase's actions, he did not feel that Chase had committed any impeachable offense. Furthermore, Macon advised Nicholson to look at the situation from another point of view before agreeing to lead the impeachment procedures against Chase. Macon warned, "Change the tune and suppose Chase had stretched as far on the other side and had praised where no praise was deserving, would it be proper to impeach because by such conduct he might lull the people to sleep while their interest was destroyed."²⁸

Macon also found himself at odds with Jefferson over a proposed measure to strengthen the navy. The bill, sponsored by Macon's close friend Nicholson, called for an appropriation of \$50,000 to build two small vessels and requested that naval officers not on active duty, receive half pay and rations if they agreed not to sign up for duty on commercial ships. Macon was free to join the debate after the House opened the discussion to the committee of the whole and he entered the fray by opposing the measure, relying on his oft-used argument, the cost. He maintained that the measure would put undue pressure on the Treasury, and noted that the purchase of the Louisiana Territory had already placed a strain on the government finances so he could not favor adding another fiscal burden at this time. Macon agreed to table the bill for a week and after its revival, he suggested that he would be willing to compromise if he could do so without increasing the federal debt. Nicholson, then, informed the House that upon further consideration, although two ships were necessary, the House should consider that it was

²⁸ Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, August 6, 1803, Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

imperative to approve at least one ship. He stated that he would agree to a motion to fund the construction of one vessel at the cost of \$25,000. Jefferson, if he had not already been aware of the fact, learned that Macon would not compromise on an issue if it meant abandoning his principles. Macon politely informed Nicholson that he appreciated his offer but his position remained unchanged and he would continue to oppose the bill. Macon's firm resolve and Randolph's support was not enough to defeat the bill and the House approved funds for the building of two ships and the pay for officers.²⁹

During the Eighth Congress, Republicans experienced unparalleled success: they had reached their zenith. Even though not evident at the time, by the end of the second session cracks had begun to appear in their armor. The Republicans, with Federalists holding only a small number of seats in the House and Senate, no longer had a real or perceived enemy; therefore, no reason existed to remain united. One matter that came before the Second Session of the Eighth Congress brought these differences to the forefront: the Yazoo land sale scandal. Almost a decade earlier, the Georgia state legislature sold 35 million acres of land to speculators for the paltry price of one and one-half cents per acre, less than half of the price per acre of the Louisiana Purchase. Immediately, the fact came to light that all but only one of the Georgia legislators supporting the sale had taken bribes from the land companies. The story of the fraudulent land sales spread rapidly and newspapers all over the country printed the details of the Yazoo land sales. Understandably, the actions of the legislature outraged the citizens of Georgia

²⁹ *Annals of Congress*, Eighth Congress, First Session, 792-3, 802-4.

and in the next election they voted an entirely different group of men into office. The new government, in turn, negated the land sales, and to show their disgust for the previous body's fraudulent action, they publicly burned all official records of the sale.

The land companies who originally had bought the land from Georgia, knowing that government action to nullify the sales was inevitable, hurriedly set about re-selling the land to third parties, particularly in New England and the Middle Atlantic area. While a few of those purchasing the land may have been unaware of the circumstances, many others were apprised of the situation surrounding the sale and still purchased the land in hopes of a profitable settlement. Then the state of Georgia ceded the land to the United States for one and a quarter million dollars, and saddled the federal government with the unenviable task of deciding on an equitable method for settling the claims of those who had bought the land from the original speculators.³⁰

Jefferson appointed Secretary of Treasury Albert Gallatin, Secretary of State, James Madison , and Attorney General Levi Lincoln to investigate the claims of the third parties involved in the land scandal. The committee recommended setting aside five million acres of land for use in settling the claims. This proposal was presented to the House in the form of a resolution in the early months of 1804. Many of those involved in the purchase began lobbying for the compromise, which Jefferson and his cabinet had recently endorsed. Randolph, outraged at every aspect of the corrupt Yazoo land deal, resolved to defeat any attempt to compensate

³⁰ C. Peter Magrath, *Yazoo: Law and Politics in the New Republic*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967, 6-15.

those involved. Randolph's opposition resulted in delaying consideration of the matter until the next session of Congress.

In January 1805, the House once again took up the proposal to settle the claims resulting from the Yazoo land deal. Randolph vehemently opposed any plan in which the participants in the scandal would benefit. He saw the land speculators as a type of finance capitalists, who did not earn their living through honest labor, but instead acted as parasites taking profit at the expense of others. These ideals were part and parcel of the Revolutionary-era republican ideals requiring citizens to uphold principles of civic virtue by putting the good of the whole ahead of private gain. Throughout his life, Randolph was never willing to compromise his principles and when he encountered actions, which he deemed corrupt, his words and actions were moralistic. The idea that the federal government upheld a fraudulent and corrupt act violated Randolph's keen sense of honor, and the republican concept of civic virtue. He delivered several long, impassioned speeches aimed at defeating any compensation measure. In one such speech, he compared the Yazoo land sale and subsequent actions to events leading to the American Revolution. Randolph referred to the Georgia state legislature's sale of the Yazoo lands as an "act of stupendous villainy," that would "rob unborn children of their birthright and inheritance." He characterized the speculators who purchased the land as "a band of unprincipled and flagitious men." Randolph claimed that the Yazoo Land Sale caused a violent public reaction resembling the colonial responses to the "passage of the stamp act, or the shutting of the port of Boston." Taking a jibe at the northern speculators involved in the scandal, Randolph contended that "when the port bill of Boston passed, her Southern brethren did not take advantage of the

forms of the law, by which a corrupt Legislature attempted to defraud her of the bounty of nature; they did not speculate on the necessities and wrongs of their abused and insulted countrymen.” Randolph did not give credence to the statements of many who claimed no knowledge of the questionable nature of the transaction and stated that it was “a matter of public notoriety.” He singled out “men of education and intelligence” “who affect to have been ignorant of any such circumstance,” and accuses them of being “guilty of gross and willful prevarication.” He continued to characterize these men as having become devoid of the ideal of self-denial and civic virtue so important to republican ideals. Randolph declared, “They offer indeed to virtue the only homage which she is ever likely to receive at their hands – the homage of their hypocrisy. They could not make an assertion within the limits of possibility less entitled to credit.”³¹

The intense rhetoric used by Randolph reflected a sense of outrage and offended morality that was reminiscent of the oratory of colonists against a corrupt and unjust Parliament. Randolph also realized that by recognizing the Yazoo claims the federal government would be repudiating the validity of the Georgia Repeal Act, which had passed several years before the land was ceded to the United States, and thereby strengthening the power of the national government at the expense of the state government.³² This was a concept that went against the republican view concerning the sovereignty of state governments, and one he refused to accept.

³¹ *Annals of Congress*, Eighth Congress, Second Session, 1030.

³² MaGrath, 41.

He contended that any attempt to compensate participants in a fraudulent sale showed a total disregard by the federal government to the act of the Georgia legislature.

The Yazoo Scandal had a divisive effect on the Republicans. Randolph sensed this and alluded to it in his January 5, 1805 speech on the House floor. Randolph warned against the “spirit of federalism,” which he described as “a monster generated by fraud, nursed in corruption, that in grim silence awaits its prey.” He portrayed federalism as the antithesis of republicanism and referred to it as “a spirit which considers the many as made only for the few, which sees in Government nothing but a job, which is never so true to itself as when false to the nation.” After delivering his very unflattering opinion of federalism, he continued by chastising those who he had considered Republicans. Randolph complained, “But when I see associated with them, in firm compact, others [s] who once rallied under the standard of opposite principles, I am filled with apprehension and concern.” He lamented the actions of some who gave lip service to the republican principles, yet failed to uphold them. Randolph admonished, “Of what consequence is it that a man smiles in your face, holds out his hand and declares himself an advocate, when you see him acting with your adversaries upon other principles, which the voice of the nation has put down, which I did hope were buried, never to rise again in this section of the globe?” He challenged his fellow representatives to make their stand on the side of honor and civic virtue. In his closing statement, he reminded them of their duty and warned that the actions of those favoring compensation would define their character. He concluded, “I speak of the plunder of the public property. Say what we will. The marrow and the pith of this business will be found in the character of its friends, who stand, as they have stood before on this floor,

the unblushing advocates of unblushing corruption.”³³ Randolph was arriving at the discouraging conclusion that the Republicans once they had ended Federalist dominance no longer remained dedicated to their principles and were willing not only to sacrifice those principles but to adopt Federalist views as well.

Postmaster General Gideon Granger, a Republican from Connecticut, became a target for Randolph’s righteous indignation. Granger’s direct involvement in the Yazoo land speculation was no secret in Washington. He, along with several prominent men, had organized the New England Mississippi Land Company, and on February 13, 1796, they bought 11 million acres of the southwestern section of the Yazoo tract. When Granger began to aggressively lobby members of the House to vote for passage of the compensation bill, Randolph loosed the full force of his wrath upon Granger.

On January 29, 1805, as Randolph stood on the floor addressing the report and recommendation of the Committee on Claims, he noticed Granger in the House chamber. He immediately launched into a tirade against a certain member of the executive branch of government who had come into the House to influence members and peddle patronage. His denunciation of Granger’s actions was emblematic of his republican fears concerning the danger of too much power in the hands of a corrupt man. He saw Granger’s participation in the Yazoo Land scandal and his open lobbying for passage of a compensation bill as what happens when men are governed by self-interest, not civic virtue. Randolph commented that he was alarmed by Granger’s presence on the floor. He stated, that this “agent is at the head of an Executive

³³ *Annals of Congress*, Eighth Congress, Second Session, 1032.

department of our government, subordinate indeed in rank and dignity, and in the ability required for its superintendence, but inferior to none in the influence attached to it.” Randolph continued to denigrate Granger and bemoan the fact that as Postmaster General he had “many snug appointments and fat contracts to hand out.” Randolph also pointed out that because Granger’s influence was not limited to one particular area but included “every part of the Union.” Randolph expressed his indignation that Granger had the nerve to openly lobby on the House floor for passage of the compensation bill. He asked, “Are heads of Executive departments of the Government to be brought into this House, with all the influence and patronage attached them, to extort from, us, now, what was refused at the last session of Congress.”³⁴ Randolph exhibited his contempt for the Postmaster General and his actions; and he commented on Granger’s unethical behavior in his speeches and correspondence for years to come.

Although Randolph never called Gideon Granger by name, it was obvious to whom Randolph was referring in his speech on January 19. Both Granger and Congressman Matthew Lyon, who was not specifically mentioned but who held several postal contracts, took exception to Randolph’s impassioned speech. Granger immediately called for an investigation of Randolph’s allegations to clear his name: however, the House, questioning the propriety of such a request, refused to acknowledge it. Lyon, often described as one of the most outspoken and pugnacious men ever to sit in Congress, reacted with an intensely personal and ill-tempered tirade against Randolph in which he claimed that the charges against Granger had been “fabricated in the disordered imagination of a young man whose pride had been provoked by my

³⁴ Ibid., 1031-2.

refusing to sing encore to all of his political dogmas.”³⁵ Lending credibility to Randolph’s claims that Lyon’s move from opposition to compensation to support of the bill, were the documented postal contracts he had received from Granger since the end of the last session. By accusing Granger and Lyon of bribery, Randolph had attacked fellow Republicans. In so doing, he indicated that Republicans straying from the pure republican principles of the revolution and the “Principles of ’98” were not immune to his reproach.

Randolph was not able to defeat the resolution supporting the Yazoo claimants. He did, however, prevent the appropriation of funds for the claims. The Yazoo claims were to come before the House many times before the monies needed to fund the claims gained the necessary approval. Even after the Supreme Court ruling in *Fletcher v. Peck*, in 1810, which stated that a state grant was a type of contract and could not be unilaterally withdrawn, (making the Georgia State Legislature’s repeal of the 1796 sale illegal) the House refused to authorize the funds for compensation payments. Randolph, even though he soon fell from grace with Jefferson and Madison, was always able to muster enough support to block the settling of the claims. Not until he suffered his only re-election defeat in 1813 did the House finally vote the funds necessary to resolve the Yazoo claims.

The Yazoo land matter could be seen as a turning point in Randolph’s political career. He followed the only path open to him because of his strong commitment to the republican ideals by which he lived. The supreme insult he could hurl was that of “Yazoo man.” To the very end of his life, he felt deeply about the corruption and intrigue surrounding the Georgia land sale and

the maneuvering and lobbying for a compensation bill. Soon the term entered into popular usage and to be styled a “Yazoo man” was to be labeled as an unprincipled, corrupt individual.

Macon, as Speaker of the House, had little opportunity to support Randolph in his attempt to block the compensation plan, but he shared his Virginia colleague’s disgust with the matter. Macon saw in the Yazoo scandal the Jefferson administration’s willingness to compromise its republican principles. Others might turn a blind eye to dishonesty and corruption in the name of unity, but Macon and Randolph would never do so.

Macon had expressed high hopes with Jefferson’s election; however, by the beginning of Jefferson’s second term Macon saw disturbing signs that the president was in some ways threatening the power of the legislative branch. Macon had fiercely fought, often without success, attempts by Adams to strengthen the executive power at the expense of the legislature. Now, Jefferson’s party had firm control of the legislature as well as the presidency, and this caused Macon some concern. Jefferson was taking, according to Macon’s standards, too active a role in the affairs of the legislature. The president actively encouraged certain individuals to seek election to the House. When Jefferson identified someone who was sympathetic to his plans or if he wanted to eliminate a political enemy or person he felt was a malcontent, the chief executive was not above persuading his supporters to enter a political race to give him an advantage in the legislative branch.

Macon’s dissatisfaction with Jefferson’s behavior extended to the president’s use of executive patronage. When filling vacancies, Jefferson frequently looked to members of

³⁵ Ibid., 1121-6.

Congress for suggestions. Macon felt that this practice resulted in the president having undue influence over the legislative branch, and he expressed these concerns in a letter to Jefferson. Macon wrote, “I know that the executive is held responsible for appointments, and this may be a reason, for approaching members of Congress, but it is a truth, that people do not like to see so many appointments made from that body.” Macon believed that even if Jefferson was not attempting to use the political appointment at his disposal as a way to influence congressmen, his actions might be construed as such. He softened his suggestion by adding, “I mention this, because it may be possible your other friends may not have done so, and because I believe you ought to be informed of it, you will I know place it to its true motive.”³⁶ Macon continued to believe that such a practice was unethical and provided a way for an executive to exert influence on a legislator. Macon on four occasions placed a constitutional amendment before the House making it illegal for congressmen to accept an executive appointment from a president who had held that office while they were members of the Congress. This amendment never passed, and evidently, Jefferson did not heed Macon’s advice, because the president on one occasion offered the North Carolinian the position of Post Master General. Macon refused to consider the appointment.³⁷

³⁶ Nathaniel Macon to Thomas Jefferson, September 2, 1804, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁷ *Annals of Congress*, Eleventh Congress, First Session, 2028, *Annals of Congress*, Eleventh Congress, Second Session, 2038, *Annals of Congress*, Eleventh Congress, Third Session, 386, *Annals of Congress*, Twelfth Session, First Session, 1411, Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, February 11, 1806, Joseph H. Nicholson papers, Library of Congress.

As the Ninth Congress commenced, it was becoming evident to everyone that the previous cohesion of the republicans had all but disappeared. One hundred forty-two Republicans and twenty-seven Federalists made up the House of Representatives, but members of both factions were well aware of a serious rift. The divisions were reflected in Randolph's fear of an attempt to deny Macon the position of Speaker of the House. Randolph wrote Nicholson that something was afoot and warned him to be in the House on opening day.³⁸ Randolph had correctly gauged the mood of the House. It required three ballots to elect Macon as Speaker. Worse, his challenger was not a Federalist but a Republican, Joseph Varnum of Massachusetts. Varnum represented a more moderate faction of the Republicans, not as firmly dedicated to the old Revolutionary-era republican principles as Macon.

In this changing political atmosphere Jefferson, rather prematurely, announced he would not seek re-election. This, left men like Randolph and Macon and other adherents to the pure republican tenets to fear that their hopes for a government based on their principles would never be realized. Jefferson's disclosure caused concern because Madison's name was the one most mentioned as Jefferson's successor, and Randolph as well as many of the more conservative-minded republicans felt that Madison was not trustworthy. Madison had shown too much flexibility during his years as supporter of ratification of the Constitution and while a member of the House, and this had earned him considerable distrust in some quarters. His actions during Jefferson's last term brought Madison and Randolph into direct and open conflict, but Randolph's satisfaction with Jefferson also faded before the end of the President's second term.

³⁸ John Randolph to Joseph H. Nicholson, April 30 1805, Joseph H. Nicholson Paper, Library of Congress.

One major factor in the growing schism had to do with the proposed purchase of West Florida. Jefferson considered the territory vital to the United States because several of the major southwest rivers flowed through it. West Florida also included Mobile Bay, which the United States wanted to use as a port and custom district. Since 1803, Madison and Jefferson had taken the somewhat shaky stance that Western Florida had been part of the Louisiana Purchase. Then, in 1804, the French government had laid that claim to rest by insisting that West Florida had never belonged to France and could not have been part of the sale.³⁹ James Monroe, in his role as Secretary of State, unsuccessfully attempted to convince the Spanish government to sell the land to the United States. John Armstrong, the American minister to France, who replaced Monroe, told Madison that the French intended to intervene in the matter. He wrote of France, “This country has determined to convert the [Florida] negotiations into a job and draw from it advantages merely pecuniary to herself, or in other language, to her agents.”⁴⁰ Plainly put, the French wanted the United States government to pay a bribe. Armstrong sensed the dishonesty and corruption in the attempt by French agents to profit from any settlement concerning United States acquisition of West Florida. When French Foreign Minister Charles Maurice deTalleyrand made objectionable overtures to Armstrong, he reacted by showing open disdain for the French way of conducting business. He gave further detail of his dealings with the French in a confidential letter to Madison. He explained, “Since his [Monroe’s] departure

³⁹ Norman K. Risjord, *The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1965, 43-4.

⁴⁰ John Armstrong, to James Madison, December 24, 1804, National Archives, quoted in Irving Brandt, *James Madison; Secretary of State, 1800-1809*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1953, 259-60.

repeated intimations have been given to me that if certain persons could be gratified the negotiations should be transferred hither and brought to a close with which we should have no reason to find fault.” Armstrong reported to Madison that, “My answers have uniformly been that it is quite impossible that the measure of a nation like this could ever be influenced, much less determined, by considerations that would equally dishonor them to offer and the United States to hear.”⁴¹ Jefferson and Madison both seemed to agree with Armstrong’s handling of the delicate situation, and Madison conveyed the President’s approval in strong terms. Madison wrote, “I have the pleasure to observe to you that the President entirely approves the just and dignified answer given to the venal suggestions emanating from the French functionaries.”⁴² Madison added his own words of praise concerning Armstrong’s response using terms familiar to the republican tradition. He spoke of the “protest against corruption,” maxims of virtue,” and “justice of Heaven.”⁴³ It appears that at this time Madison and Jefferson both opposed bribing France to secure a deal with the Spanish government. For some reason, their position soon changed.

Since negotiations with Spain had not led to a purchase of the Florida lands, Jefferson began to consider a military occupation of both Florida and Texas, but his closest advisors dissuaded him from taking this action. On November 14, 1805, his cabinet approved claims

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² James Madison to John Armstrong, June 6, 1805, quoted in Brandt, 261.

⁴³ Ibid.

made by United States citizens against the Spanish government.⁴⁴ Within a few days of this decision, Armstrong sent Madison an unsigned letter in Talleyrand's handwriting offering Florida to the United States for ten million dollars. Far more territory than just West Florida was included in this offer. Under this proposal the Colorado River in middle Texas would be the western boundary of Louisiana. The note assured Madison that the emperor could induce Spain to accept the deal. Jefferson after conferring with his cabinet, decided to accept the proposal, although they agreed to pay only five million dollars.⁴⁵ This agreement seemed to contradict the administration's idea of justice and virtue expressed in Madison's correspondence with Armstrong the preceding summer. This arrangement to acquire West Florida had been planned between the adjournment of the Eighth Congress and the opening of the Ninth Congress.

The tone and thrust of Jefferson's annual message to Congress, dated December 3, 1805, was strange in view of the events and decisions made by the president and his cabinet on November 14.⁴⁶ Jefferson advised the Ninth Congress to consider what he characterized as the serious situation with Spain and move to prepare the nation for war. He supplied a long list of unsatisfactory actions Spain had taken against the United States. Jefferson claimed that the Spanish government had reneged on an agreement to pay claims for previous Spanish spoliations, and he cited the lack of an amicable settlement concerning the boundaries of the Louisiana Territory. In addition Jefferson reported to Congress that the threat to American

⁴⁴ Jefferson, Madison, and the Cabinet's Decision on Spain, November 14, 1805, in James Morton Smith, ed., *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison*, vol.3, New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995, 1396.

⁴⁵ Brandt, 290; Memorandum of proposed treaty, undated, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

citizens and their property on the Mississippi River and in New Orleans had necessitated him sending troops to “that frontier to be in readiness to protect our citizens, and repel by arms any similar aggressions in the future.” Also, he asked the legislators to grant funding for gunboats and suggested that necessary arrangements be made to augment the military. Every aspect of this speech seemed to indicate that in the near future Jefferson intended to use military force against Spain. As all such messages, this address was made public; however, on December 6, Jefferson sent another confidential message to Congress. Jefferson’s secretary delivered a bulky package to the Speaker’s desk. After opening it, Macon had the House cleared of all visitors before reading the documents to the members. In the first of the secret messages, Jefferson once again outlined the breakdown of Spanish-American relations. He noted that Spain refused to honor its commitment to settle the spoliation claims it had previously accepted responsibility for and that it was insisting that “we have no rights eastward of the Iberville, and that our line to the west was one which would have left us but a string of land on that bank of the river Mississippi.”⁴⁷ Jefferson stated that Spain was not only refusing to give up West Florida, it was attempting to regain territory that undeniably belonged to the United States. The packet also contained documents detailing Spanish incursions into what was unquestionably American territory. The actions, according to Jefferson, convinced him that the only way to stop the Spanish was by force. Jefferson concluded the message with a statement concerning the nature of the country’s current relationship with France.

⁴⁷ Confidential Message on Spain, in Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 8, 397-402.

Jefferson reported that the rapport between the French government had improved and it would probably support the Americans “if properly induced” Bonaparte would “effect a settlement” with Spain, acceptable to the United States. Jefferson provided no hint of what would be required to properly induce the French. He informed the House if it followed this course the nation could avoid war.

The secret message stressed the possibility of a peaceable solution as strongly as the President’s public address had emphasized the very real probability of war. The French proposal was not mentioned in this secret communication. Jefferson informed Congress that, “The present crisis in Europe is favorable for pressing a settlement; & not a moment should be lost in availing ourselves of it. Should it pass unimproved, our situation would become more difficult.”⁴⁸ Not included in this confidential message was the plan Jefferson and his cabinet had agreed upon in conjunction with Talleyrand by which the United States was to threaten hostilities against Spain, thereby causing Spain to ask France to intervene. Then, France would take on the role of mediator and broker a settlement allowing the United States to buy Florida and part of Texas. The price would be five million dollars, with two million going to France, supposedly to settle a Spanish debt and the United States would retain the remaining three million to pay for Spanish spoiliations due to United States citizens. If Jefferson pulled this off, he could claim a diplomatic coup, by avoiding war and acquiring territory from Spain. France would be two million dollars wealthier, and only Spain would be negatively impacted. It would be fair to

⁴⁸ Thomas Jefferson to the Senate and House of Representatives of the U. S., 6 December 1805, in Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 10, 198-205.

argue that this attempt to bribe one nation to rob another was unethical, and dishonorable. This, and the fact that the plan would not work if Spain realized what has happening, is why Jefferson was not open with his plan, and wanted it to remain confidential.

Therefore, when Jefferson informed Congress that he was pursuing a peaceable settlement and that France would assist the United States in reaching a pacific resolution his complete reversal amazed Congress. It had been contemplating war, and now Jefferson was offering them an opportunity to broker a peaceful resolution. After reading the secret messages, Macon appointed a committee to consider the President's recommendations. Randolph, as chairman, Nicholson, and Barnabas Bidwell, along with two other Republican and two Federalists comprised the committee. Bidwell was the only member who Jefferson could rely upon to blindly follow his lead. Macon's choices seem to indicate that he may have disapproved of Jefferson's scheme.

Jefferson and his cabinet had formulated a precise plan for the acquisition of Florida. The President had drawn up a list of six resolutions that he wanted the Congress to pass. He had enlisted the aid of Gallatin to deliver the proposal to Joseph Nicholson. In the correspondence was a request to present the resolutions to the select committee on Spanish affairs dealing with the executive's secret message to Congress. Among these resolutions was the statement that "he [Jefferson] will receive from the legislature the support necessary for carrying them into

execution.” The President advised that it was within the authority of Congress to determine the course the nation would take.⁴⁹

After reading the secret message of December 6, and prior to the first committee meeting, John Randolph requested an audience with the President. Evidently, Jefferson was somewhat apprehensive about Randolph’s reaction to his plan, because on December 7, he wrote the following memorandum to Secretary of Treasury Albert Gallatin, “J. Randolph has just called to ask a conversation with me, for which purpose he will be with me tomorrow morning; everything therefore had better be suspended till that is over.”⁵⁰ Randolph, after his meeting with Jefferson, promised that he was ready and willing to cooperate “as far as his principles and judgment would permit.” When the President informed Randolph that he wanted a two million dollar appropriation to purchase Florida, Randolph acted with surprise and indignation. He refused to agree to support a resolution to appropriate the funds on the ground that Jefferson’s message never asked for the money. He also told Jefferson that “even if the money had been explicitly demanded, he should be adverse to granting it; because, after the total failure of every attempt at negotiations, such a step would disgrace us forever.”⁵¹ Randolph correctly assumed that the two million dollars would eventually end up in the coffers of France. He also pointedly reminded

⁴⁹ Thomas Jefferson to the Senate and House of Representatives, December 6, 1805, in Ford, *The Writings of Jefferson*, 198-205.

⁵⁰ Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, December 7, 1805, in Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 201.

⁵¹ Randolph disclosed the events of his meeting with Jefferson in a letter to the editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*. “First Letter of Decius” in *Richmond Enquirer*, August 15, 1806.

Jefferson that the British, who were currently at war with France, would not sit idly by while the United States gave money to Napoleon Bonaparte.⁵²

Following Randolph's meeting with Jefferson, the committee appointed to consider Jefferson's recommendations convened to review the president's request. Only Barnabas Bidwell interpreted Jefferson's message as a request for money with which to purchase Florida. The remainder of the committee concluded that no such request had been made. Joseph Nicholson, who had been given a copy of the six resolutions Jefferson wanted Congress to pass concerning the Florida matter, realized that the majority of the committee was opposed to the plan and returned the papers to Albert Gallatin with an explanation of the committee's disapproval.⁵³

For the next two weeks, Randolph had several private conferences with the president and Secretary of State Madison. These meetings only served to cement Randolph's opposition to the proposal. When Madison told him that the French wanted money, "and that we must give it to her, or have a Spanish and French war," Randolph drew a parallel to the XYZ affair that had caused such an uproar during the Adams administration. On August 5, Randolph disclosed the details of his meeting with Jefferson in a letter to the editor of the *Richmond Enquirer*, which he penned under the name Decius. In the "Decius" letter, Randolph expressed his amazement that the President and Secretary of State planned to take part in a deal that so closely resembled the infamous attempt of Talleyrand to extort funds from the United States commissioners in 1798.⁵⁴

⁵² *Richmond Enquirer*, 15 August 1806.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Randolph left the capital on December 14, and remained in Baltimore, Maryland for a week. The administration was extremely anxious to conclude the deal with France and the delay caused by Randolph's absence annoyed them. Immediately, upon his return, the Secretary of the Treasury presented Randolph with a document entitled "provision for the Purchase of Florida." Gallatin, after personally delivering the proposal, said that the administration had instructed him to draw up the plan just in case the committee decided that it was advisable to buy Florida. Again, this secretive political maneuvering by Jefferson and Madison incensed Randolph. Not only had the President and his Secretary of State wanted to obtain the territory of West Florida by unscrupulous means, but they also wanted to place the responsibility for doing so on Congress. Randolph's response to Gallatin, as recorded in the "Decius letter," was, "That he was as sensible to the importance of Florida to the United States and as willing to acquire it honorably as any man, but that he would never consent to proceed in this way: that the most scrupulous care had been taken to cover the reputation of the administration, while Congress was expected to act as if they had no character to lose."⁵⁵ Jefferson, who spoke publicly of war with Spain intended to enter into a shady deal with France to gain possession of Florida. The President's public statements were upright and honorable, while he expected Congress to "deliver the public purse to the first cutthroat who demanded it."⁵⁶

Although the deceit and intrigue involved in the scheme to attain West Florida galled Randolph, there was another aspect of this measure that also offended his republican principles.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Jefferson, as the executive, was attempting to control the legislative branch. Randolph, who always expressed concern with the corrupting nature of power, feared the balance of the federal government would be upset if presidential authority continued to increase. He was standing firmly on the republican principles he had embraced while in opposition to the Federalist administration of John Adams.

Evidence suggests that Jefferson intended the Republican leadership to come to him for specific instructions. This was a procedure that was becoming routine in his relationship with Congress. In fact, Jefferson worked closely with party leaders in the legislature, communicating his views and occasionally even drafting legislation. The president's involvement in the business of the legislature was obvious enough to rouse the suspicions of men like Macon and Randolph. In a letter to James Monroe, Randolph gave voice to these concerns. He wrote, "It is certainly a melancholy truth that the only question which the major part of the House of Representatives inquires into is 'what is the wish of the Executive?' and an intimation of the pleasure of that branch of government is of equal force with law." Randolph was troubled by the willingness of legislators to bow to the president's wishes and he confided in Monroe that "There is a proneness to seek and favors among us which is truly mortifying and distressing to the true republicans, the number of whom, it is to be feared, diminishes every day."⁵⁷

The staunch believers in Revolutionary-era republicanism, with Randolph at the forefront, fought the appropriation of the two million dollars to purchase Florida, when the issue

⁵⁷ John Randolph to James Monroe, December 5, 1806, John Randolph Papers, University of Virginia Library.

came before the closed session of the House. The grounds for their opposition were that Jefferson had not officially requested the money. Confirming the fears of republicans concerning the dangerous executive influence was the statement of James Varnum, that the measure was “consonant to the secret wishes of the Executive.”⁵⁸ With this statement Varnum earned from Randolph the appellation of “Sworn Interpreter of Presidential Messages.”⁵⁹ Randolph did his best to thwart the administration’s plans to acquire Florida by what he saw as less than honorable means, but in the end Jefferson won the battle. Although the Ways and Means Committee failed to bring forward a request for the money, a resolution came from the floor that two million dollars be authorized to “defray expenses which may be incurred in the intercourse between the United States and foreign nations.”⁶⁰ Jefferson signed the Two Million Dollar Act into law on February 13, 1805, leaving the president free to complete his deal with the French government.⁶¹ From Randolph’s point of view, Jefferson had betrayed the “Principles of ’98” and was committing the same offenses against liberty as his predecessor had done. Randolph’s five years of support for the administration ended with the plan to acquire Florida by less than open and honorable measures. Another international issue that confronted

⁵⁸ First “Decius” Letter, *Richmond Enquirer*, 18 August 1806.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Tallmadge to Manasseh Cutler, February 19, 1806, in William P. Cutler and Julia Cutler, eds., *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler*, vol.2, Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Company, 1888, 326.

⁶⁰ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 1120-4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1129.

Congress was a resolution closing off the importations of British goods pending England's agreement to stop impressment of American sailors.⁶²

Randolph opposed the wishes of Jefferson and Madison on this matter as well.

The problems between the United States and Great Britain dated back to 1793 and were connected to the war between France and England. The British navy had proven very effective in preventing French and Spanish merchant ships from carrying on trade with their West Indian colonies. This allowed American businessmen, mostly in New England and the North Atlantic states, to become heavily involved in the carrying trade. British shipping interests considered this business to be solely theirs, and applied pressure on Parliament to find a means of curbing the Yankee skippers. By reviving and enforcing the "Rule of 1756," which stated that a trade closed in time of peace was also illegal in time of war, the British, who dominated the seas at this time, accomplished this. Although the United States never recognized the validity of this ruling, the superiority of the British Navy forced the United States to take measures to circumvent the rule. American merchant captains achieved this by using a method referred to as the broken voyage, which resulted in bringing their West Indian cargoes to an American port, paying custom duties, and then shipping them to European markets. This tactic worked until 1805, when Great Britain decreed that even this indirect trade was illegal. Under these criteria, all of the American carrying trade was subject to seizure by British men-of-war.⁶³

⁶² David Wendelken, "The Rhetoric of John Randolph of Roanoke," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ohio, 1984, 74.

⁶³ Risjord, 51.

This problem coupled with the continued impressment of American sailors caused the Jefferson administration to begin contemplating taking some measures against the British. On January 29, 1806, Andrew Gregg of Pennsylvania, presented a list of grievances against Great Britain to the House of Representatives. At the same time, he offered a resolution prohibiting the importation of any goods into the United States from Great Britain or any of its colonies.⁶⁴ The idea of using commercial restrictions to pressure Great Britain and avoid open conflict dated back to the mid-eighteenth century, when colonists had used this very tactic against the British rather successfully on several occasions. Randolph opposed this bill and argued that it sacrificed the agricultural interests of the nation for the sake of the carrying trade. England was a major importer of American agricultural products and banning British imports would result in the British halting or reducing import of American goods. Also, southern farmers imported most of their manufactured goods from Britain and would be adversely impacted by the proposed embargo act.

Randolph delivered a lengthy address to the House against the resolution advocating non-importation of British goods. In his two-hour discourse, he highlighted the basic republican principles for a just government and pointed out several instances in which the Jefferson administration had strayed from them. He attacked the measure on the grounds that it jeopardized the economic interests of the entire nation. When Randolph rose to speak, he first asked the question, “What is the object in this dispute?” He then answered his own question by stating, “The carrying trade. What part of it? The fair, the honest, the useful trade that is

⁶⁴ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 413.

engaged in carrying our own productions to foreign markets, and bringing back their productions in exchange? No sir.” Randolph continued his discourse by describing the majority of shipping done by American ships. “It is the carrying trade which covers enemy’s property, and carries the coffee, the sugar, and other West Indies products, to the mother country. No sir if this great agricultural nation is to be governed by Salem and Boston, New York and Philadelphia, and Baltimore, Norfolk, and Charleston, let gentlemen come out and say so: and let a committee of public safety be appointed from those towns to carry on the government.”⁶⁵ The Revolutionary-era republican tradition relied on the primacy of agriculture, and in keeping with these beliefs, Randolph argued that the Gregg resolution was an attempt to sacrifice the agrarian interests of the nation to benefit a few mostly northern merchants and shippers.⁶⁶

When proponents of the bill spoke of national honor, Randolph responded by saying, “This is the heroism of truck and traffic – the public spirit of sordid avarice.” He responded to the threats and innuendoes of war against England with a declaration against offensive war. Remaining true to his pure republican beliefs, he abhorred all war except defensive war. Randolph defined offensive war to his fellow members of the House. “I call that offensive war which goes out of our jurisdiction and limits for the attainment of protection of objects, not within the limits of that jurisdiction.” Entering into an offensive war would also result in more government contracts, increasing the evils of patronage. Randolph posed another rhetorical

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 557.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 534.

question. “Or do we want to be overrun and devoured by commissaries and all the vermin of contacts?”⁶⁷

Randolph knew that many government leaders were also considering the possibility of gaining Canada. He thought this was a foolish hope considering the size and strength of the British navy, but he also opposed the idea on moral principle. He stated that going to war to defend national honor with an eye toward conquest was repugnant to his ideals. Randolph openly admonished those who viewed a war with England as an opportunity to acquire their northern neighbor. His remarks warned that the risks of their actions were many and the proponents of war should not take them lightly, and he reminded the House that he had been against that “species of warfare” in 1798 and he would continue to oppose it on the same grounds.⁶⁸

The dangers of war, according to Randolph and Macon were not just from the visible enemy. Becoming embroiled in any war increased the threat of executive usurpation of power. Randolph warned, if war came, “That we must give the President power to call forth the resources of the nation – that is to filch the last shilling from our pockets, or drain the last drop of blood from our veins.” Again, Randolph admonished his colleagues to consider carefully the consequences of their actions. Relinquishment of liberties that result from war, he proclaimed were too great a price to pay unless there “was a powerful enemy at our door.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid., 560.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Randolph warned the members of the House to be cautious and realistic in their evaluation of American strengths. Jacob Crowninshield, a Republican from Massachusetts, asserted that the United States was not only capable of contending with England in a naval war, but was actually superior. Randolph's response, which reflects a clear assessment of the United States' naval capabilities, includes the following passage: "What! shall this great mammoth of the American forest leave his native element and plunge into the water in a mad contest with the shark? Let him beware that his proboscis is not bitten off in the engagement. Let him stay on shore, and not be excited by the muscles and periwinkles on the strand, or political bear, in a boat to venture on the perils of the deep." For those who spoke of defending their freedom, Randolph commented, "Gentlemen say, will you not protect your violated rights? And I say, why take to water, where you can neither fight nor swim."⁷⁰ Randolph reminded his audience of the dominance of the British navy, which forced France's ships to steal from point to point off its own coastline. The French were the "first military power on earth" and her navy was "second only to England." Randolph marveled at how anyone could suppose that the United States' military was in any way superior to the British.⁷¹ The debates concerning the Gregg Resolution marked the open schism between Randolph and the Jefferson administration.

When discussion turned to increasing the military strength of the nation, Randolph adamantly spoke out against such plans. He vigorously opposed any attempt to strengthen the navy, which he believed would lead a dangerous threat of aggression and called it "a moth in the

⁷⁰ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 570-1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 571.

public purse.” He also argued against any build up of the national army and insisted that a strong militia would be the nation’s best defense. With the introduction of a measure to bring the various state militias under the jurisdiction of the nation’s military courts, Randolph was on his feet once more. This move, Randolph maintained, “would strengthen the Executive in a most dangerous way.”⁷²

In a series of speeches on the Gregg Resolution, Randolph strongly denounced Jefferson, Madison and those members of the House who he believed blindly followed the administration’s dictates.⁷³ He remained incensed over what he considered Jefferson and Madison’s underhanded attempt to acquire West Florida from Spain, and he warned the House against undue influence from the President and his cabinet.

I have before protested, and again protest against secret, irresponsible, overruling influence. The first question I asked when I saw the gentleman’s resolution was: is this a measure of the cabinet. . . I speak of backstairs influence – of men who bring messages to this House, which, although they do not appear on the journals, govern its decisions. Sir, the first question I asked on the subject of British relations was: What is the opinion of the cabinet? What measures will they recommend to Congress? My answer was (and from a cabinet minister too): there is no longer any cabinet. Subsequent circumstances Sir, have given me a personal knowledge of the fact. It needs no commentary.⁷⁴

Randolph did not limit his campaign against non-importation to the floor of the House. The Decius letters added to the scathing remarks in the debates on the Gregg Resolution and

⁷² Ibid., 1782.

⁷³ Ibid., 671-698.

⁷⁴ John Randolph Papers. Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

following its defeat he also argued against Nicholson's more moderate Non-Importation Act, which was brought before the House as an alternative to the Gregg Resolution. Randolph's scathing criticisms voiced in the public letters insured there would be no mending of fences between him and the Jefferson administration.

Macon also took part in the debate on non-importation, and, although he never attacked the administration, he charged that the resolution put forward by Gregg would, if passed, benefit one section of the country while it harmed another. Macon used import and export data to support his assertions while refusing to condemn Jefferson or Madison directly. He maintained that this attempt to protect the "carrying trade" came at too high a price and believed that the measures could lead to war. Macon advised the House members that they had two choices, "To be happy and contented, without war, and without internal taxes; or to be warlike and glorious, abounding with what is called honor and dignity, or in other words taxes and blood."⁷⁵

Macon did not just criticize the resolution; he presented alternatives. He advised against approving a "measure which we cannot adhere to," and he then explained that the non-importation clause would probably injure the United States more than it would Great Britain. In doing so, he made a point that even those who supported the Gregg resolution could not deny. Negotiation, Macon urged, was the best alternative, and he reminded the House that it had worked with France in 1800 and 1803.⁷⁶ Congress, and indeed, the nation, remained incensed over the issue of the impressment of American sailors. Again, in his speech, Macon advised

⁷⁵ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 686.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

against any hasty and drastic action. He reminded his colleagues that the United States shared some of the responsibility for the problem. He suggested that if both the United States and Great Britain entered into an agreement not to employ the other's sailors a peaceful resolution could result. Macon also contended that the British were not the only nation who were infringing on American maritime rights and asked members to consider recent acts of the French and Spanish before passing resolutions designed to reprimand only the British. His calm and logical arguments seemed to have no more effect than Randolph's more emotional and personal speeches. In the end, Gregg's Resolution failed to pass; however, Nicholson proposed another more moderate measure, which listed the restriction of specific manufactured goods and promised to be less damaging to the nation's economy. This bill eventually passed without the support of Macon or Randolph.⁷⁷

Randolph not only condemned the Gregg Resolution and Nicholson's compromise resolution, he also criticized the nature of politics in the legislative as well as executive branches. Because of some of his harsh comments concerning administration policy, a few of his colleagues referred to him as a Quid. His reply to these statements has often led historians to refer to those who followed the same Revolutionary-era republican path as Randolph as Quids; however, the appellation which arises from the term "tertium quids," meaning a "third something" was frequently used in the early nineteenth century to refer to third party groups in state as well as national politics and to Federalists and Republicans. The term was usually

⁷⁷ Ibid., 706.

intended as a form of criticism, and seldom did any group refer to itself as Quids. In a speech on March 13, 1806, Randolph made references to the Federalism, Republicanism, quiddism, Burrism, and Yazooism. Referring to quiddism, Randolph stated, “I am willing to meet gentlemen on that ground.” He was unwilling to accept membership in any party, but remained committed to standing with those who shared his Revolutionary-era republican ideals.⁷⁸

The first session of the Ninth Congress ended with Randolph and Macon finding themselves once again in the minority. Randolph’s open criticism of Jefferson and Madison caused an irreparable breach. Macon never openly broke with Jefferson, but his voting record shows that he opposed most legislation sponsored by Jefferson after the thwarted attempt to purchase West Florida. During the waning days of the first session, the president moved to further isolate Randolph and render him powerless. Politicians of the era saw Jefferson’s appointment of Joseph Nicholson, an adherent to Revolutionary-era republicanism and close friend of Randolph, to the position of Chief Judge of Maryland’s Sixth Judicial District as one step in the process. Nicholson’s family was growing and his financial resources were meager; therefore, he needed the financial security the new appointment provided. So, he tendered his resignation to the House on April 8, 1806 and Randolph and Macon could no longer look to

⁷⁸ Noble Cunningham provides an excellent explanation of the term Quid. He maintains that the term was used extensively in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It seems to have first originated in Pennsylvania state politics. Following Madison’s election he was called a Quid by the Newark *Centinel of Freedom*. The editor of the New York *Public Advertiser* recognized the confusion over the term and in a brief notice stated, “The Quids, says Cheetam, are all for Madison – What say you, Jack Randolph?” Cunningham made a valid point when he states, “In view of the conflicting usages of ‘Quid’ in the campaign of 1808, little more need be suggested as to the necessity of historians to define the term whenever it is used.” Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., “Who were the Quids,” *The Mississippi Historical Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2. (September 1963, 252-263; Newark *Centinel of Freedom*, June 7, 1808; New York *Public Advertiser*, May 31, 1808; *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 776.

Nicholson for his support.⁷⁹ Jefferson then attempted to influence Macon to distance himself from Randolph. The President made his appeal to Macon in the following letter, “Some enemy, whom we know not, is sowing tares among us. Between you and myself nothing but opportunities of explanation can be necessary to defeat those endeavours. At least on my part my confidence is so unqualified that nothing further is necessary for my satisfaction. I must therefore ask a conversation with you.” Jefferson appointed a time when they could speak confidentially and not be interrupted.⁸⁰ There is no record of the actual meeting, but Macon probably accepted the executive’s invitation. He never openly broke with Jefferson; however, neither did he make any move to limit Randolph’s power as the Chairman of the important Ways and Means Committee. If Macon had done this he would not only have turned his back on Randolph, he would have been guilty of succumbing to executive pressure and that would have betrayed his republican ideals. So, Macon found himself in the middle of the schism splitting the Republicans. By refusing to bow to the president’s wishes, Macon would soon lose his own powerful position and once again find himself relegated to the role of oppositionist.

Macon encountered a challenge to his authority on the last day of the first session of the Ninth Congress, when James Sloan, a moderate Republican from New Jersey, brought before the House a resolution stating, “Hereafter all standing committees of the House of Representatives shall be appointed by ballot, and shall choose their own chairman.” Sloan made it clear in his speech that his intention was not meant as a personal challenge to Macon but was specifically

⁷⁹ *Annals*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 996.

aimed at Randolph.⁸¹ The House tabled the resolution until the next session. Macon, evidently saw the handwriting on the wall, and he wrote to Nicholson, reporting that Randolph “has been soundly attacked without any cause given.”⁸²

The opposition to Randolph did not abate during the recess. When the Second Session of the Ninth Congress reconvened, Sloan immediately asked that his resolution be brought before the House. Another enemy of Randolph, James Elliot of Vermont, realizing that Randolph was not present, moved that the Speaker be allowed to appoint the members of the standing committees. The member from Vermont had noticed that Randolph was not present and knew that Macon would not break tradition by naming someone who was not in attendance. Macon, well known for his adherence to proper parliamentary procedure objected that Elliot’s motion was out of order because there was already a motion on the floor. The first resolution was then considered and defeated. Macon maintained the authority to appoint standing committees. Macon then proceeded to name the committees, but since Randolph had not arrived, according to his custom (not written rule) Macon chose the Ways and Means Committee and named Joseph Clay of Pennsylvania as chair. Randolph, it seems, had not only lost his position as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, he was not on any of the standing committees.

⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon, March 26, 1806, Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Vol. VIII, 439.

⁸¹ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, First Session, 1108-9. Many felt that Sloan was acting on behalf of other moderates. His reputation was that of a man who did not mind getting his hands dirty in a fight. A contemporary described him as “the small end to small things. . . a man who has no qualification that I know to recommend him to any office, party violence excepted. Samuel Taggart to Rev. John Taylor, January 13, 1804. George H. Haynes, ed., “Letters of Samuel Taggart, Representative in Congress, 1803-1814,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Ser., 33(1923).

⁸² Nathaniel Macon to Joseph Nicholson, April 21, 1806. Joseph Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

Macon felt troubled by the actions his conscience forced him to take. He wrote to Joseph Nicholson explaining his feelings. “In the greatest trouble and the most anxious state of mind that I ever felt I write; to communicate my wretched state writing at least lightens an overburdened heart for a few moments and yet to put one on a committee who was not present when the committee was ordered seems to me be wrong.”⁸³ The following day Macon again confided his thoughts to Nicholson. He wrote, “In the disagreeable seat of the Speaker, I write. I have been obliged to hear the journal read, in which the name of John Randolph was not on the Committee of Ways and Means.”⁸⁴ The matter did not end here, and although Sloan and his cohorts may have congratulated themselves on their victory, it was short-lived. Another Virginian, James M. Garnett, asked to be removed from the committee and Macon had his chance to fill the vacancy. Macon’s letters to Nicholson and his obvious angst concerning Randolph’s exclusion from the Ways and Means Committee make it improbable that Macon was any part of a corrupt bargain. He named Randolph and on December 9, the Chairman of the committee asked to relinquish his position as chair and according to the rules of the House, the committee then elected Randolph as Chair.⁸⁵ This was a triumph of sorts for Macon and Randolph, but it only delayed the inevitable. Soon enough, both men would see their power and influence dwindle and would have to content themselves with assuming the role of underdog as they attempted to preserve the republican principles of the bygone era.

⁸³ Nathaniel Macon to Joseph Nicholson, Dec. 1, 1806. Joseph H. Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, December 2, 1806.

⁸⁵ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, Second Session, 167.

After the rocky beginning, the second session of the Ninth Congress settled down and was considerably less contentious than the first. Perhaps Randolph's speeches were less biting since the publication of the Decius letters. The suspension of the Non-importation Act and Jefferson's announcement that the Treasury was in a position to settle the national debt, which has always been a high priority for adherents of Revolutionary-era republicanism seemed to ease the tensions within republican ranks. Still on several matters Macon and Randolph did take the floor to defend their ideals.

In the early days of the second session, Randolph argued against appropriating funds for gunboats requested by the administration on grounds that the need for them had not been proven. He reminded members of the House of their responsibility to use caution in the approval of so costly a venture and asked "whether they were acting with their accustomed caution and distrust, where the expenditure of public money was concerned"⁸⁶ If the gunboats were proven unnecessary, the power of the government would be strengthened to no good purpose and according to Randolph's principles power was to be jealously limited to avoid too much being held in the hands of too few. Macon did not oppose the War Department's request for a mere \$20,000 to complete fortifications: however, he did strenuously disapprove the proposal presented from the floor to appropriate \$300,000 more to the War Department. In the end, much to Macon's dismay, the House agreed to provide \$150,000 for the fortifications budget.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., 295.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 347.

Another bill brought before Congress was opposed by both Macon and Randolph, which provided for the prohibition of the slave trade by the end of 1807. Peter Early, a representative from Georgia presented the bill. Macon and Randolph favored the closing of the slave trade but strongly disapproved of a portion of the bill that would not guarantee a slaveholder's right to move his slaves from one state to another. Both men opposed enhancing the power of the federal government by granting it such authority. Randolph and Macon had differing views on the slavery issue. Macon never expressed any aversion to the institution, but Randolph did.

Randolph's personal stand on slavery seemed at odds with his political actions; however, a closer examination reveals his distaste for slavery. He openly condemned South Carolina's reopening of the slave trade in 1803, expressing his disgust in a letter to Littleton Waller Tazewell. He wrote, "To her (South Carolina) indelible disgrace she has legalized this abomination and all her rice and indigo and cotton is to be converted into slaves. The labor of the miserable negro is to procure fresh companions of his wretchedness."⁸⁸

Not only was Randolph repulsed by the idea of increasing the slave population by foreign importation, he also feared the consequence of such actions. He articulated this concern in the aforementioned letter to Tazewell, by stating, "I tremble for the dreadful retribution which this horrid thirst for African blood, which the legislators of that state are base enough to feel and yet more base to avow, may bring upon us." He ended his discourse on slavery with the statement, "It behooves Virginia, in my opinion, to look to the consequences."⁸⁹ Randolph maintained that

⁸⁸ John Randolph to Littleton Waller Tazewell, January 8, 1804, Randolph Papers. Virginia State Library.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Congress possessed the right to prohibit the importation but not the power to regulate what owners could or could not do with their private property. He feared the consequences of attempts of the federal government to control slavery, He warned, “If ever the time of disunion between the states should arrive, the line of severance would be between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states.” Randolph ended this rather prophetic speech with a plea that the northern states “remain neutral: and that they not erect themselves into an abolitionist society.”⁹⁰

Macon, never wrestled with the qualms concerning slavery as Randolph did. He supported the part of the bill that sought to end the inhumane foreign commerce; however, he took the floor often and argued tirelessly against several amendments to the bill, which to his way of thinking gave authority to the federal government that rightly belonged in the hands of the state. Macon showed more fire in these speeches than usual and lashed out at those who opposed his position. The bill ended in a compromise, which said that the states in which illegal slaves were confiscated had the authority to determine their disposal. The legislation resulting from this agreement passed by a 113 to 5 vote, satisfying both Macon and Randolph’s republican ideals by not strengthening federal authority at the expense of state governments.⁹¹

The longstanding relationship between Randolph and Macon continued even when they differed on some points. As always, the two often disagreed over details of such issues as the proper parliamentary procedure, but their agreement on the principles of republicanism remained strong. Randolph’s actions showed that he bore grudges against the Jefferson administration and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 627.

was not willing to put them behind him. Macon on the other hand seemed prepared to let bygones be bygones, and forgive past transgressions. Macon wrote to Nicholson, "I shall regret very much to differ with Randolph on any great question during the present situation, but I must follow my own judgment, and I know that course will satisfy him and I hope every friend I have on earth."⁹² Macon did not intend to oppose administration measures because of events in the past or to please his dear friend. There is no indication that Randolph ever expected Macon to follow him, nor did Randolph seem upset when Macon disagreed with him

When the second session came to an end, Andrew Gregg proposed the traditional resolution of gratitude to the Speaker. Macon had served in that capacity for three terms, and, once again, the vote was unanimous. His tenure as Speaker was marked with a high degree of impartiality, a stringent insistence on adherence to parliamentary rules, procedures, and precedents, and a reverential observance of the dignity of the House of Representatives. Thus, ended the most influential and powerful years of the Republicans who held fast to the Revolutionary era ideals.

⁹¹ *Annals of Congress*, Ninth Congress, Second Session, 486.

⁹² Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, January 31, 1807, Joseph Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

CHAPTER IV

SUPPORT FOR REVOLUTIONARY-ERA REPUBLICANISM DECLINES

The conclusion of the Ninth Congress marked the end of Macon's tenure as Speaker of the House and Randolph's years as the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee came to a close. Macon, for the first time in his many terms as a House member, was not present on the opening day of the Tenth Congress. Perhaps, as Dodd suggested, Macon realized there was an attempt afoot to replace him as Speaker. Several explanations have been offered for Macon's late arrival. Jefferson asked that the Tenth Congress convene one month early because of pressing matters, and this date coincided with the death of Macon's grandson. His letter to Nicholson concerning his illness and family tragedy seems a more likely explanation than Dodd's. Macon had never let matters of a personal nature interfere with fulfilling his obligations to his constituents; however, this private man, who rarely wrote or spoke of personal hardships, confided in Nicholson that he had been ill most of the summer and that his grandson, Nathaniel

Martin had died on September 30.¹ In Macon's absence, the House elected Joseph B. Varnum as Speaker, although he barely garnered the necessary votes. Many members of the House felt he was too much under the influence of Jefferson. Josiah Quincy, a Member of the House from Massachusetts, described Varnum as "one of the most obsequious tools of the Administration, elected through the influence of Jefferson, who courted with the most extreme assiduity the leaders of the Democracy of Massachusetts. He was just capable of going through the routine of office, - an automaton ready to move in any direction the magician who pulled the strings jerked him."²

Varnum's choices for members of the Ways and Means Committee did not include Randolph or anyone else who had served on the Committee the previous session. Varnum's election may have well pleased Jefferson and Madison; however, the Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin was not. In a letter to his wife, he maintained that "Varnum has, very much against my wishes removed Randolph from the Ways and Means and appointed Campbell of Tennessee. It was improper as related to the public business, and will give me additional labor."³

The Republicans who had so rejoiced at the election of Jefferson in 1800 and the subsequent return to the tenets of Revolutionary-era republicanism had splintered. Macon, Randolph and others who touted the "Principles of '98" and reveled in the reform and

¹ Dodd, 231; Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, November 19, 1807, John H. Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

² Edmund Quincy, ed., *The Life of Josiah Quincy*, Boston 1868, 116.

³ Albert Gallatin to wife, October 30, 1807, Henry Adams, ed., *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, Vol. 4. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1879, 2, 363.

retrenchment of the Jefferson's first term now made up a small minority in the House. Randolph had recognized the administration's departure from the ideological values of pure republicanism earlier than most and tried to warn his colleagues and the nation. The popularity of President Jefferson and his ability to play politics rendered Randolph's efforts fruitless. Even before the Tenth Congress began, Joseph Nicholson realized that the dream of a government built on Revolutionary-era republican principles had died. He wrote of these feeling to James Monroe. Nicholson stated, "There is a portion who yet retain the feelings of 1798, and who I denominate the old republican party. These men are not personally attached to the President, and condemn his measures when they think him wrong. They neither receive nor expect anything from his extensive patronage." Nicholson continued his description of the Republicans who adhered to the earlier ideals and complained that Jefferson no longer supported them by writing, "Their public service is intended for public good, and has no view to public emolument or personal ambition. But it is said they have not his confidence and I lament it. You must have perceived from the public prints that the most active members of the House of Representatives are new men." These recently elected congressmen, according to Nicholson, were not of the same caliber as their earlier counterparts and caused Nicholson to despair at the thought of them gaining control. He continued his lament to Monroe by maintaining, "I fear that foreign nations will not estimate American talent very highly if our congressional proceedings are taken as the rule." Nicholson went even further by naming some of the newcomers that he felt were unworthy to serve in the government. "If you knew the Sloans, the Alstons, and Bidwells of the day, and there are a great many of them, you would be mortified at seeing the affairs of the nation in such

miserable hands. Yet these are styled exclusively the President's friends."⁴ The struggle between the pure republican concepts of the Revolutionary era and the growing nationalism of the new Republicans to whom Nicholson referred in his letter had resulted in a shift in attitude making Randolph's earlier comment following Jefferson's election to his first term seem prophetic. Randolph had written Nicholson saying, "In this quarter, we think the great work is only begun; and that without substantial reform we shall have little reason to congratulate ourselves on the mere change of men."⁵ By 1807, Randolph found himself shouldering more of the burden of upholding his republican values because his friend Macon was often not physically strong enough to attend House proceedings or enter into debate.

Macon's frequent absences from the House throughout the Tenth Congress resulted from his ill health. He was only present two days in November, and although his condition improved during the course of the first session, it only allowed him to participate in a limited fashion. He rarely spoke and then only briefly. When he did take the floor, his comments still showed his common sense approach to government and his consistency with his long held ideals. At the time that a new Embargo Bill came before Congress, which required that all American and foreign vessels in American ports be detained, and ordered all American vessels abroad to return home immediately, Macon was simply too ill to take his place in the House. Even though he was unable to attend or participate in the debates on the issue, it is apparent from his correspondence

⁴ Joseph H. Nicholson to James Monroe, April 27, 1807, James Monroe Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵ John Randolph to Joseph H. Nicholson, July 18, 1801, autographed letter in Nicholson Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

that he supported the bill and believed it was an effective tool for dealing with attacks on American neutral trading rights by both Britain and France. Circumstances had changed since the introduction of the Gregg Resolution, which he opposed. Several actions by the British and French as well as the “Chesapeake Affair” had transpired and these altered Macon’s view. Now, he saw the country’s choices limited to war, embargo, or submission, and to him an embargo seemed the only viable choice. Macon believed that if war broke out, it would be a defensive one.

On this particular point Macon did not agree with his dear friend, John Randolph. The representative from Virginia felt that the Embargo was unnecessary and might push the British into open hostilities. Randolph argued that the French had also violated America’s neutrality and that restricting trade with Great Britain would hurt American citizens, especially farmers more than Great Britain. Randolph also pointed out that this course of action could help France and warned against any action that could potentially strengthen Napoleon Bonaparte. Addressing the House, Randolph asked his fellow representatives if France succeeded in conquering the British what was to stop Napoleon from turning his attention to the United States. The Embargo Bill had Jefferson’s full support and Randolph’s debate was only able to delay its passage for a short while.⁶

As the government moved to implement the newly approved embargo, the nation began to make preparations for war, and Macon and Randolph found themselves on opposite sides of the issue. Macon realized that the embargo might fail and the country needed to be ready to

⁶ *Annals of Congress*, Tenth Congress, First Session, 50-51.

defend itself. During the Tenth Congress, he took the floor to once again state the opinion he had previously communicated to close friends: “war had existed between the United States and Great Britain ever since the latter had fired upon the *Chesapeake*.” He urged the government to spend available federal funds for the defense of the nation.⁷ Some House members accused Macon of abandoning his republican principles because of his support for building up the national defenses. Randolph publicly reminded Macon that he had been against such measures in 1798. Macon defended his actions by stating that his position “was not produced by a departure from principles on his part, but by an entire change in the state of our foreign affairs now and then. Then we seemed to provoke a war – in fact we were the attacking party; now we have been attacked.”⁸ Macon wrote to Nicholson that in 1798 there had been no real threat of invasion and now such a possibility existed. Macon’s republican principles would never have allowed him to support an aggressive war; however, the events surrounding the current state of affairs led him to view any possible war with Great Britain as a defensive one. To Macon the situation had changed significantly and so his response must be to prepare for the very real prospect of war.⁹

Macon, true to his republican views, maintained that the best way to fight a defensive war was through the use of state militias. His support of local forces began at the onset of the

⁷ Ibid., 1034-5.

⁸ Ibid., 1934-5.

⁹ Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, April 4, 1808, Joseph H. Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

Revolutionary War when he joined the New Jersey militia while attending Princeton and fought with the local North Carolina unit after returning to his home. Macon's disdain for a strong national army was rooted in his long held republican ideals. Putting too much power in the hands of one man could spell the end of personal freedoms, and since the United States army fell under the control of the president, as Commander-in Chief, it presented a dangerous situation to Macon's way of thinking. Macon, never a proponent of a strong navy, believed the best method of defending American coasts was to rely on the expanded use of privateers. This means of defense would not put a powerful navy under the control of the executive, and, also important to the thrifty North Carolinian, it would be much less expensive. Therefore, he approved Jefferson's plans for building gunboats to protect the coastline. Macon had always thought that a large navy would lead to aggression, but the use of privateers and small gunboats were necessary tools for defense. He abhorred the idea of an offensive war and always opposed measures that he believed supported acts of aggression; however, he was not a pacifist and was in favor of the nation defending itself from real threats. Macon, after reluctantly agreeing to a bill calling for the raising of 6000 troops, wrote to Nicholson saying, "It is not my friend an easy matter to raise an army, but it is easier to do this than to get clear of one when raised; I have thought that no president ought to be trusted with troops, unless Congress were ready to vote a declaration of war. I scarcely know what is worse, war or an army without war."¹⁰ Macon opposed granting the executive the authority to raise troops without the consent of Congress and although he had been in favor of the gunboats, Macon voted against the final resolution because it gave Jefferson

¹⁰ Ibid., January 31, 1806.

power to man the boats as he saw fit. This authority, according to Macon, rested with Congress.¹¹

Randolph, on the other hand, refused to support any of the military preparation measures. He did not believe that war with Great Britain was imminent and felt that diplomatic means were the only way the differences between the two nations could be solved. At the beginning of the second session of the Tenth Congress, he also spoke out against the recently passed embargo. Again, on this point, Randolph and Macon had very different views, and on the Embargo Bill, a large majority of the House shared Randolph's position. A motion to consider its repeal won by a substantial margin of 83 to 9.¹² Later in the session, Representatives repealed the Embargo Act and replaced it with the Non-Intercourse Act, which lifted restrictions on all American shipping except for vessels bound for British or French ports. Macon, terribly upset by this action, wrote to Nicholson, "The Lord, the Mighty Lord must come to our assistance, or I fear we are undone as a nation."¹³

Although the international crisis was in the forefront at the opening of the Tenth Congress, the impending presidential election soon began to take center stage. Jefferson had already announced that he would not seek a third term and his obvious choice for his successor was Secretary of State, James Madison. Madison faced some competition from another

¹¹ *Annals of Congress*, Tenth Congress, First Session, 1171 & 1498.

¹² *Annals of Congress*, Tenth Congress, Second Session, 474.

¹³ Nathaniel Macon to Joseph H. Nicholson, February 28, 1809, Joseph H. Nicholson Papers, Library of Congress.

Virginian, James Monroe. Randolph openly encouraged Monroe to run because Randolph had come to distrust Madison's lack of commitment to the republican ideals he had endorsed in 1798. Many republicans who adhered to the Revolutionary-era ideals agreed with Randolph. Madison had disappointed Macon, Randolph and other pure republicans by his actions during the Jefferson administration. Madison proved too willing to compromise the republican principles he had espoused during the Adams's administration, and he had used his influence to push for compensation in the Yazoo land scandal. As many members of the legislative branch of the government seemed to shift their focus to the upcoming presidential election Macon expressed his disappointment that politics was taking precedence over the real and present threat of war.

Macon did not become involved in the political maneuverings of the day. He supported neither Madison nor Monroe, in the presidential election of 1800. Still, Macon was concerned. In the election of 1800, the contest had been between Federalists and Republicans. Now, two men, who both supposedly upheld republican ideals, were fighting for the presidency. Macon saw the election as a danger to the Republicans and thought that neither Madison nor Monroe would be able to unite the party as Jefferson had done in 1800. As the campaign was raging, Macon confided his fears to Nicholson. He wrote, "As Republicans, (I do not mean those who pretend to be so, and would be ready to join any majority in the nation) we sincerely regret the divisions which have taken place among them. The cause of division need not be mentioned to you." Macon believed that the differences so evident in the last congressional session could have been lessened if republicans had sought out candidates "for the next President and Vice President, not obnoxious to either division." Macon added, "This I apprehend could safely have

been done, had the attempt been made solely with a view to the public good; and with a mind perfectly disposed to settle and forget past differences.”¹⁴ Macon also wrote to Nicholson about his concern that both presidential candidates hailed from the Old Dominion. Talk of a “Virginia dynasty” surfaced all over the nation and a fear of too much power in the hands of men from the Old Dominion weighed on Macon’s mind. Washington and Jefferson, Virginians, had both served eight years. Adams of Massachusetts had only served one term, and no matter the outcome of the upcoming election, the next president would also be a Virginian. Even with all of his misgivings concerning the election, Macon refused entanglement in political maneuvering, but his private correspondence revealed that he thought Albert Gallatin would have been the best candidate, although this was not a possibility because Gallatin was not a natural born United States citizen.¹⁵

Madison won the election, and just as Macon had feared, the new president did not preside over a jubilant coalition of Republicans looking forward to a return to republican ideals. Instead, Madison had to deal with Republican factionalism and jockeying for predominance. One such group, which often was able to dominate the government, Macon dubbed the “Invisibles.” This faction had important members in both the House and Senate and the president’s cabinet. Macon disliked the “Invisibles” for several reasons. They had an intense aversion for Albert Gallatin and after Madison announced that Gallatin was his choice for Secretary of State this circle of men intervened and convinced Madison to change his mind and

¹⁴ Ibid., June 22, 1808.

¹⁵ Ibid., June 1.

appoint Robert Smith, who had performed the duties of Secretary of Navy during Jefferson's administration in a rather lackluster fashion. Macon also felt that there was too strong a link between Robert Smith and members of the legislative body. Robert Smith's brother, Samuel, served in Congress as a senator from Maryland. Macon feared undue influence from such a powerful cabinet member as Robert Smith on the legislative body of the government. This connection was part of an entangling alliance of cabinet members and legislators that Macon referred to as the "Invisibles." Adherents to the Revolutionary-era republican ideals had always exhibited an intense jealousy of the influence of the executive branch and both Macon and Randolph feared corruption in the Madison administration.

Macon soon learned that his opposition to Robert Smith was well founded after discovering that a routine audit of the Department of Navy had uncovered details of unscrupulous use of government funds and the subsequent theft of a large sum of taxpayers' money. Robert Smith, while serving as the Secretary of the Navy, had directed the department to purchase \$250,000 in bills of exchange from Smith & Buchanan, a firm primarily owned and operated by Samuel Smith (Robert's brother). The Department of the Navy never drew upon the bills of exchange, bought from Smith & Buchanan, and the firm used the funds to operate the business and make investments. Then, a Mr. Degan, who was an employee of Smith & Buchanan, absconded with a portion of the government money. News of the scandal, soon dubbed the "Degan Affair," was suppressed due to the power of the Smith family. The Republican newspapers refused to carry the story because the main participant's family was too

powerful within the party and the Federalist newspapers reporting the facts carried no weight and was just seen as an attempt to discredit the Republicans. Macon was anxious to bring the scandal to light when the Eleventh Congress convened and indicated that he would either call for a hearing of the matter himself or have someone else do so.¹⁶ John Randolph, another watchdog of the government purse, after hearing of the misuse of government funds brought a resolution before the House asking that a committee be appointed to investigate federal government expenditures dating to the previous March. The House unanimously approved the resolution.¹⁷ Macon had hoped that bringing the incident to light would deter the Maryland state legislature from re-electing Samuel Smith to represent the state in the U. S. Senate. This did not happen. Even though the House appointed a committee to investigate the matter, Samuel Smith was returned to the Senate because the committees failed to present their findings before Maryland had appointed Samuel Smith to the Senate.

The first order of business for the House of Representatives in the Eleventh Congress was to elect a Speaker. Macon's and Varnum's names were put forward. The first vote gave the Massachusetts representative, Joseph Varnum, an edge but not enough votes to secure the position. After the initial round of voting, Macon took the floor and informed the members that due to his continued bad health he wished to withdraw his name from contention. Others, however, did not honor Macon's wishes and refused to remove his name from the second ballot. In the end, members elected Varnum as Speaker of the House by a margin of 65 votes to 45

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, May 23, 1809.

¹⁷ *Annals of Congress*, Eleventh Congress, First Session, 63—4.

votes. Although Macon no longer held the powerful position of Speaker of the House, he still clung fiercely to his ideals, and voted in a manner according to his beliefs.¹⁸

As the business of the House got under way, Randolph did not show any surprise at the role Madison played in advocating policies that strayed so far from the republican values he had so staunchly defended in 1798. It was during the Eleventh Congress that Randolph commented on his opinion of politics in the United States. He declared, “For, in the course of my political experience, I have found but two parties in all the States- the *ins* and *outs*: the *ins* desirous so to construe the charter of the Government as to give themselves the greatest possible degree of patronage and wealth; and the *outs* striving so as to construe it as to circumscribe – what? Their own power? No, sir; their adversaries power.” He continued to describe his view of parties by stating, “But let the *outs* get in, and lay hold of the artillery of the Government, and you will find their Constitutional scruples and arguments vanish like dew before the morning sun. No, sir; I have no faith in the declarations of parties, and, if we mean to guard the liberties of this State, we must watch the *ins*, be they who they may be, be they Federalists, or be they Republicans.” Randolph warned the members of the House where the responsibility for monitoring parties resided. He proclaimed, “When I say we, sir, I speak of us, *the people*, who cannot be the *ins*, and thus are fair umpires both between the *ins* and the *outs*.”¹⁹ Randolph definitely identified himself as an “*out*” and his voting record throughout the Eleventh Congress reflects his

¹⁸ Ibid., 54-5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 70.

opposition to most measures presented by the new Republicans. At times he even found himself at odds with Macon.

Macon's disappointment at the House's actions regarding the country's relationship with Great Britain was evident. He, unlike John Randolph, believed that the embargo was an effective means of dealing with Great Britain and felt the government should not have lifted it. Macon's correspondence reveals that he had become increasingly upset in the Eleventh Congress. He felt that Congress's vacillation made the country seem weak and sent conflicting signals to the world. Macon supposed that the United States had two choices in its dealings with the British: it could abolish all trade restrictions or it could earnestly support an embargo. Neither Congress nor the executive branch had presented a viable alternative and Macon, as head of the Foreign Relations Committee, introduced a bill, known as Macon's Bill, to address the problem. This piece of legislation proposed that United States vessels could sail wherever they chose and allowed the importation of goods from France if carried on American ships. It also stated that British ships could not enter American ports unless the British government rescinded restrictions on United States vessels. After many lengthy debates the bill passed the House by a sizable margin and went to the Senate.²⁰ In the Senate, Samuel Smith led a successful effort to make changes to the original bill and weaken it significantly by striking out all parts except the prohibition of British and French vessels entering United States ports and limiting it to the current session of Congress. Therefore, when the House returned Macon's Bill to the floor for a vote, Macon urged the body to reject the changes. His actions resulted in the defeat of "his bill"

²⁰ Ibid., 1354-5.

by the House.²¹ A week later Macon, as the chair of the Foreign Relations Committee introduced a bill written by South Carolina Representative, John Taylor, which became known as Macon's Bill #2. Whereas Macon had fought diligently for the passage of the first bill, he felt that this legislation was far too weak and refused to speak on its behalf and when it came to a vote, Macon joined with the nays. In spite of his opposition, the bill bearing his name passed into law in May 1810.

Notwithstanding Macon's resolve to fight the growing power of the Invisibles, their ability to influence the government continued to increase. He felt that they used their positions to attack and discredit Albert Gallatin. The friendship based on mutual respect that had developed between the North Carolinian and the Secretary of the Treasury had grown after Nicholson left the House to assume his judicial appointment. Macon and others saw Gallatin as the most capable member of Madison's cabinet, although many of the party members close to the president disliked him because of his adherence to the older republican principals. Men, both inside the government and out, attacked Gallatin's integrity during the Twelfth Congress. An anonymous article published in the *Virginia Argus* accused Gallatin of stealing huge sums of money from the treasury and blamed him for the depleted state of the nation's bank account. Outrageous lies and unfounded allegations filled the expose; however, Barent Gardeneir, a Representative from New York, asked for an investigation of the Treasury Department. He claimed that this and other allegations against Gallatin had compromised the public trust in the

²¹Macon felt that Samuel Smith's action was part of a plan by the "Invisibles" to discredit Gallatin, who had actually authored the proposal. *Annals of Congress*, Eleventh Congress, Second Session, 1931.

federal government as a whole. Although Macon and other members of the House saw this as a political attack on Gallatin, Macon voted in favor of the resolution. In a speech on the House floor, he staunchly defended the reputation of the Secretary of the Treasury, but he maintained that the men who previously held that position had had their records investigated and that Gallatin deserved the same treatment. Macon said, "Honesty and plain dealing have nothing to fear. An honest man may be calumniated, but time will put down the calumny. It was impossible that some of the charges could have foundation in fact; but he was willing to inquire into them. If the Secretary of the Treasury were his own brother, if he were his father and an inquiry was asked into his conduct he would grant it." Macon, because he had approved investigations of other public officials, felt honor bound to support the resolution calling for an investigation of his friend. Macon was also very confident that the probe would vindicate Gallatin. "Could anything be a greater triumph to a man placed in the position of the Secretary of the Treasury than for those opposed to him declare him innocent?"²² Many supporters of Gallatin took issue with Macon's stance, but he held firm to his principles of fair play and was one of only a handful of legislators who voted in favor of the resolution.²³

Macon continued to fear the power of executive patronage and he proposed an amendment to the Constitution that would curb the power of the present and future executives. The bill would not allow any Congressman to accept an executive appointment while serving in

²² Ibid., 1421.

²³ Ibid., 1423.

the Legislature. This was an issue that Macon had addressed on several previous occasions. Following some very heated debate the resolution passed by a substantial margin with a vote of 71 to 40. Immediately, those who opposed the resolution contended that the measure needed a two-thirds majority. Those supporting it were of the opinion that only a simple majority was necessary to bring the resolution out of the Committee of the Whole and only the final vote required a two-thirds majority.²⁴ Joseph Varnum, Speaker of the House, announced that a two-thirds majority was necessary in this instance. Randolph saw Varnum's decision as a piece of political maneuvering and appealed his decision. In the end, a very close vote of 61 to 59 upheld Varnum's ruling.²⁵ Randolph and other's believed that the Speaker had once again misused his position to assure that fellow Massachusetts congressional representative, Ezekiel Bacon, would be able to accept an anticipated presidential appointment as a Supreme Court Justice. The move disappointed Macon because he had seen the amendment as a means of curbing the evils of an executive who could influence Congress with the promise of lucrative offices. Soon after this action the Eleventh Congress adjourned.

When the Twelfth Congress convened in the fall of 1811, the nation stood on the cusp of war with England. The first order of business for the House was to elect a Speaker. Henry Clay gained the position on the first ballot and proceeded to rule the House with an iron hand. He not only controlled the floor activity, he also stepped down from his position as speaker to debate issues before the House and claimed the right to vote on all matters that came before the body.

²⁴ *Annals of Congress*, Eleventh Congress, Third Session, 900.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 905.

Clay's open partisanship, broke with long held precedents concerning the proper role of the Speaker, and his rather arbitrary methods must have rankled Macon, who, during his years as Speaker of the House, had striven to be fair and avoid any hint of favoritism in the performance of his official duties. Differences between Clay and Randolph were marked. Clay openly favored war and was among the faction in Congress styled "War Hawks," and Randolph vigorously opposed any steps toward war with England. Clay's blatant nationalistic leanings were also a contributing factor to the ill will that rapidly surfaced between the new Speaker and the representative from Southside Virginia. Their debates on the House floor usually became heated and acrimonious. Many members showed concern with the obvious animosity between Clay and Randolph, but others seemed pleased and thought that Randolph may have finally met his match.

While both Macon and Randolph often disapproved of Clay's methods, Macon had reached the decision that avoiding war with Great Britain was no longer an option and he sided with Clay in support of war. Macon took the floor urging his colleagues to accept the fact that no other alternative to war existed, and proclaimed, "we must go to war," and he urged his long-time friend to support a war. Although Randolph listened politely and his correspondence reveals that he respected Macon's differing point of view, Randolph continued to speak and cast his vote against any measuring pertaining to formal hostilities against Britain. Randolph wrote his fellow Virginian, James Mercer Garnett, about one such attempt to convince him to change his mind concerning the matter. Albert Gallatin, James Monroe and Macon spent an evening

dining with Randolph and presenting their opinions on the necessity of war. According to Randolph's letter to Garnett, he enjoyed their company and listened to their arguments but did not alter his position.²⁶ When the resolution to declare war came before the House on June 4, 1812, Macon voted with the majority favoring the war and Randolph cast his vote with those opposing the resolution.²⁷

Macon's commitment to his republican ideals had made him reluctant to entertain the prospect of war. Fighting required armies, and Macon dreaded the expense of maintaining troops and feared placing them under the control of the executive. Macon's voting record and correspondence show that he truly believed that war at this juncture was necessary; however, he strove to insure that the military actions proceeded in such a way as not to irreparably damage the republican foundations of the government. He preferred troops made up of militia to a paid national army, but he knew that once war commenced more than a voluntary force was essential for the United States to win. Macon reluctantly swallowed his reservations and showed his commitment to victory by calling for an extension of terms of military enlistment from one to five years. He argued that an enlistment of only one year showed Great Britain that the nation did not have the commitment necessary to stay the course. In his speech urging longer terms of service for the army, Macon defended not only his present position but also his lifelong commitment to republican principles. He addressed his colleagues, saying, "This is not a

²⁶ John Randolph to James Mercer Garnett, February 14, 1812, Garnett-Randolph Letterbook, University of Virginia Library.

²⁷ *Annals of Congress*, Twelfth Congress, First Session, 1638.

question about a standing army in time of peace. No man is more opposed to a standing army than I am in time of peace; and whenever it shall come, if I should then have a Seat in the House, I shall be willing to reduce the number to as few as any other member.” After explaining his republican stance on a standing army, he continued, “But we are at war, and that war ought to be carried on by regular soldiers; if we attempt to carry it on by militia, and it should last a few years, you would destroy the agriculture of the country, and that would be wrong.”²⁸ Although Macon’s call for a five-year enlistment failed, he continued to show his support for the war throughout the remainder of the Twelfth Congress.

Randolph, even when pressed by men he admired and respected, refused to support the war and his opposition to the war eventually cost him his seat in the House. His constituents in Southside Virginia sent John W. Eppes, Jefferson’s son-in-law, to Washington as their representative in 1813. Jefferson, whose relationship with Randolph had soured following the president’s attempts to acquire South Florida, strongly encouraged his son-in-law to seek the seat held by Randolph since 1799, and the election soon turned ugly. Eppes, who entered the race on July 4, 1812, less than one month after Congress had declared war on Great Britain, made no bones about his allegiance to Jefferson and the war. Many of Randolph’s constituents wanted him to support the war; however, this was not a possibility for him. Those in Eppes’s political camp attacked Randolph and accused him of being un-American and “abounding in British

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 769.

gold.”²⁹ Randolph saw Eppes’s candidacy for what it was. He was an outsider who had moved into the congressional district and threw his hat into the political ring to deprive Randolph of his seat and end his influence in the House.

As Eppes continued to court the Southside voters, Randolph returned to Washington to attend to his congressional duties. He seemed to have his views on the war somewhat vindicated because the country was in what President Madison referred to as an “embarrassing situation.”³⁰ Randolph still continued to speak out against the war despite his ill health throughout the entire session and the growing popular support for war with Great Britain. When Congress adjourned, he returned to his Roanoke Plantation in Charlotte County by way of Farmville, the county seat of Prince Edward County. After speaking to a gathering of his constituents on the steps of the court house he traveled the short distance to Bizarre Plantation, home of his sister-in-law Judith Randolph and her young sons, located on the edge of Cumberland County. Randolph planned to spend the night there and complete the journey home the following day. A fire broke out that evening, which completely destroyed the main house at Bizarre. Not only did Judith and her family lose their home, Randolph’s extensive library fell victim to the blaze and many valued personal belongings also burned. The loss of Bizarre took a heavy toll on Randolph and he did no further campaigning.

²⁹ John Randolph of Roanoke to James Mercer Garnett, September 14, 1812. James Mercer Garnett Collection.

³⁰ John Randolph of Roanoke to John Taylor of Caroline, December 5, 1812. John Randolph Collection.

The election resulted in Eppes winning the seat. This was the only time Randolph lost an election; however, as the war dragged on and lost its general appeal, support for Randolph rebounded in the Southside and in the next congressional election he soundly defeated Eppes's campaign for a second term. Even without Randolph's vocal opposition the Thirteenth Congress had to deal with a growing number of Federalists who were against the war. Once again, Macon seemed to be on unfamiliar ground when he fought for passage of bills that would provide the money necessary to fund the war. Raising taxes and going into debt were actions that any true believer in republicanism abhorred, but Macon voted for internal duties, direct taxes, and a 25 million dollar loan to finance the costs of the ongoing war.³¹ When Macon's contemporaries accused him of turning his back on his former ideals, he pointed to the circumstances surrounding his recent choices. Macon declared, "It was never my opinion that a national debt was a national blessing. And I dislike taxes as much as I do a national debt; but I do not dislike them as much as I hate impressment; and before I would acknowledge the right of Great Britain to impress American citizens, I would bear as much of both as I could without complaining."³² Macon took the steps that he felt were vital to the war effort; however, he balked at conscription and the creation of a new national bank as he had opposed the first Bank of the United States during the Washington administration. He believed that the army should be a volunteer army and the government had no right to compel men to join; furthermore, he maintained that a national bank was not necessary and would only add to the power of the central government.

³¹ *Annals of Congress*, Thirteenth Congress, Second Session, 1782.

³² *Ibid.*, 1782.

Macon refused to give in to wartime exuberance and sacrifice everything for a victory. The Thirteenth Congress, in which for the first time in his career Macon had strongly supported war measures, also, ended his years of service in the House of Representatives.

With the war over and the nation's capital in shambles, Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph once again traveled to Washington to take their seats in the House of Representatives. Randolph did not arrive to reclaim his seat until Monday, January 8, and by that time found his old colleague and fellow republican stalwart had reluctantly resigned his seat and accepted an appointment by the North Carolina legislature to the United States Senate.³³

Although Macon upon taking his place in the Senate must have been pleased to find that the power of the Invisibles was greatly diminished, his pleasure was short-lived because it soon became evident that the republican ideals of the earlier era were once again out of fashion. Evidence of this could be found in the president's opening address to Congress. Madison's annual message was a clear sign of the arrival of a new political direction for the nation. The president called for the Fourteenth Congress to pass legislation that would strengthen both branches of the military, re-establish a national bank, put import duties on foreign goods, fund internal improvements, and create a national university. He further advised Congress to amend the Constitution if necessary to gain the authority to accomplish these goals. Macon's deep disappointment in Madison's almost complete repudiation of republican ideals was recorded in a

³³ Macon strongly felt that of the two legislative branches of the federal government that the House most represented the citizenry and prized his years of service in the House as the most important in his many years of public service; *Annals of Congress*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 472.

letter to Thomas Jefferson. A disheartened Macon wrote Jefferson, “After it was known that President Madison, one of our best & most worthy men would sign the act, to establish the present bank of the U. S.; all who were tired of the principles, which put them into power, immediately laid them aside, and went further into constructive and implied powers than had ever been done at any time before.”³⁴ Macon found himself voting with the Federalists, whose numbers were greatly diminished by the Fourteenth Congress, on most issues. On his first day in the Senate, he wrote to his close friend Joseph Nicholson that “I feel as much lost in the Senates, as ever a country boy did, on his first trip to the city.”³⁵ As the first session progressed, Macon realized that he was more and more out of step with those who now called themselves Republicans and whom he referred to as “new Republicans.” Macon’s political history reached back to the 1790s, and he recalled the battles he and other Republicans had waged against Alexander Hamilton’s economic policies that greatly increased the power of the national government, thus going against basic republican tenets. He remembered his role as an oppositionist during the Adams administration. Now, Macon was still fighting similar measures that were the handiwork of Republicans. He continued to show his republican colors as he battled what he considered to be attacks on the ideals of government he had always followed. He feared that Madison’s proposals would lead to the governmental corruption he had always dreaded and would set dangerous precedents that would steer the United States government even

³⁴ Macon to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 20, 1821, in Elizabeth G. McPherson, “Unpublished Letters from North Carolinians to Thomas Jefferson,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 12(1935).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Oct. 20, 1821.

farther away from its republican roots. The recent war, which Macon had reluctantly supported, and Madison's endorsement of a national bank and the proposal for the creation of a system of roads and canals could swell the size of the federal government and the ranks of the federal bureaucracy. Macon saw this as a dangerous trend, because he believed that as governments grew so did the opportunity for corruption; therefore, he saw it as his duty to try to reduce the size of the national government or at least hold the line on any further expansion.

Randolph reacted in much the same way, as his political beliefs faced extinction. He viewed the new Republicans' proposed plans to develop a much stronger national infrastructure to provide a better system of transportation, which would physically tie the nation more closely together, as a perilous move. Internal improvements were only part of Madison's plans that Randolph battled against. He also vigorously opposed the president's request for the legislature to charter a new Bank of the United States. Randolph's voice was one of the few in the House raised up against the creation of a new bank and even as he argued against the measure, he admitted that any attempt to block it was futile. Remarks from his speech on the subject, as recorded in the *Annals of Congress* included the following sentiments. "A man might as well go to Constantinople to preach Christianity as to get up here and preach against banks. To pass this bill would be like getting rid of the rats by setting fire to the house."³⁶ As predicted by Randolph, the bill to charter a new bank breezed through the House with a large majority favoring its passage. Pure republican ideals lost out to the new nationalist tendencies of the government not only on the issues of internal improvement and a national bank, but, also, on the

³⁶ *Annals of Congress*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 1111-13.

question of increased tariffs as New Republicans also introduced a series of higher protective tariffs to protect America's nascent industries and an increased navy to protect the nation's trade. Randolph viewed the proposed tariffs as a tax on the agricultural segment of society, which heavily relied on selling its farm products on European markets and, in turn, importing finished goods from these foreign markets, and a financial benefit for the monied interests of the Northeast. Randolph's Revolutionary-era republican ideals rested on the premise that the nation was founded on agriculture and this favoring industry and trade over the industrious farmer was odious to the Virginia planter. He spoke and voted against the higher tariffs proposed by Madison and supported by the New Republicans.

Even though the Fourteenth Congress spelled the end of any substantial support for the pure republican ideals of the Revolution revered by Macon and Randolph, their continued adherence to their principles persisted throughout their remaining years. Both men battled, sometimes with a dwindling number of like-minded thinkers and on occasion alone, to remind the other members of Congress of the pure republican ideals of a bygone era. During the Fourteenth Congress Macon and Randolph served in separate branches of Congress. Macon in the Senate and Randolph in the House; however, during the Fifteenth Congress, they were reunited when the Virginia General Assembly, in a move that surprised many, appointed Randolph to serve the senatorial term of James Barbour, who had been appointed Secretary of War by President Adams. By the time Randolph arrived in Washington to take his seat, Congress was already in session. He was welcomed by Nathaniel Macon and warmly befriended

by Martin Van Buren, a senator from New York. He was a shrewd politician and saw Randolph as a possible ally in the political struggle that was raging between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. Van Buren described Randolph as being an extraordinarily intelligent man, who was “well educated, well informed on most subjects thoroughly grounded in the history and rationale of the Constitution. Van Buren also commented on Randolph’s eloquence and stated that he wielded “a power of invective superior to that of any man of his day.”³⁷ Randolph and Van Buren were seen enjoying each other’s company often during the Fifteenth Congress. Randolph, however, realized that Van Buren had ulterior motives and commented that Van Buren “rowed to his object with muffled oars.”³⁸ Randolph’s opposition to John Quincy Adams, which pleased the New York senator greatly, was not the result of Van Buren’s influence. Randolph had his own reasons for resisting the second Adams president and his political agenda. John Randolph, early in his congressional career, had had issues with the second president of the nation, and he admitted these feelings influenced his opinion of John Quincy Adams, but it was plans that he presented to Congress which cemented Randolph’s full-fledged opposition. Adams wanted the federal government to expand its role by funding a series of canals and roadways, providing aid for education and creating a naval academy. Increasing tariffs on imported goods was the main means Adams had for funding these projects. Programs of this sort that clearly violated the republican tenets that Randolph held so dear gave him the opportunity to turn his

³⁷ Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920, 427.

³⁸ John Randolph to Andrew Jackson, March 18, 1832, Bruce, vol. 2, 13.

oratorical skills and sarcasm loose. On one such occasion following the presentation of a proposal for expanding federal involvement in improving the nation's infrastructure Randolph declared that they were "The consequences of a meretricious alliance between Old Massachusetts and that Bawd, Kentucky."³⁹ Randolph fought tooth and nail to thwart the federal government's expansion, and during the Nineteenth Congress this was not a solitary or minority struggle. Adams's found that a majority of congressional members opposed his domestic plans and they had little chance of success.

Congressmen loyal to Andrew Jackson and William Crawford came together to thwart any actions supported by Adams. This became evident as soon as Adams took office and began to appoint his cabinet. Opposition to Henry Clay's confirmation as Secretary of State revealed the lack of cooperation between the executive and legislative branches that remained constant throughout Adams's entire administration. Macon voted against it not as a partisan act, but because he believed that some sort of corrupt bargain had taken place.⁴⁰ Macon, although not directly involved in the political maneuvering of the Senate, became part of an important struggle between the pro and anti-administration forces. At the end of the first session of the Nineteenth Congress an election was held to choose the president *pro tempore* for the next session. The two candidates were Macon and Samuel Smith. Smith was the candidate favored by the administration, and both Adams and Clay were present in the gallery when the voting took

³⁹ John Randolph to F. W. Gilmer, January 8, 1826, Bryan Papers, UVA.

⁴⁰ *Raleigh Star*, February 29, 1825.

place. After seventeen ballots, Macon was elected by a vote of 24 to 13.⁴¹ He was elected president *pro tempore* three more times; although he declined the position when elected on May 15, 1828, due to his increasing deafness. He steered the same political path while serving as president *pro tempore* as he had in his previous decades of service in the House and Senate.

Macon resisted attempts to increase the power and influence of the national government during the Adams administration. State and local governments, because they were smaller and closer to the people, according to Macon, were more responsive to the needs and sentiments of their constituents. He praised state and county governments as the best example of republican ideals, as he continued to monitor the national government for indications of unnecessary growth. During the Nineteenth Congress, he took the floor to lament the path on which the nation was being led. His idea of a small republic had almost vanished, and he saw many examples of the government's unnecessary growth. He pointed to the fact that when he began his service as a legislator during the First Congress "two men were sufficient for doorkeepers &c. to the two Houses; but now there is a regiment."⁴² He maintained that such an increase was completely unnecessary and not only inflated the cost of government but also multiplied the risk of corruption. As the end of Macon's years as a legislator drew near, everywhere he looked he saw a growing bureaucracy, which he had feared and attempted to thwart throughout his entire political career.

⁴¹ *Senate Journal*, Nineteenth Congress, First Session, 785.

⁴² *Register of Debates*, Nineteenth Congress, Second Session, 522.

As these two stalwarts of Revolutionary-era republicanism served together in the Senate, they seemed to have put aside past differences concerning the War of 1812. Once again they fought their battles to preserve the republicanism of a bygone era. They were serving together in the same branch of the legislature and again rooming at the same boarding house. They were no longer young men and the years had taken their toll on Macon and Randolph. Macon fell victim to influenza several times during the Nineteenth Congress and was often unable to speak because of a lingering hoarseness. Old age also made reading difficult as his eyesight began to fail; however, the infirmity that concerned Macon the most was his increasing deafness. Randolph thought that Macon not being able to hear some of the comments on the Senate floor might be for the best. Macon, however, worried that his loss of hearing might progress to the point that he might not be able to adequately perform his duties as president *pro tempore* of the Senate. Randolph, whose health had always been fragile, suffered some of the same problems as Macon. In a letter to Dr. John Brockenbrough, Randolph commented on Macon's and his own health problems. He wrote, "I can't read and my old friend's cough is excited by talking; so we sit, and look at the fire together and once in half hour some remark is made by one or the other."⁴³ Old age did not dim either man's dedication to Revolutionary-era republicanism and they continued their crusade.

Macon felt that the executive branch had become dangerously powerful, in part because of the lucrative government positions it was able to bestow. The internal improvement projects

⁴³ John Randolph to Dr. John Brockenbrough, January 12, 1827, Kenneth Shorey, ed., *Collected Letters of John Randolph of Roanoke to Dr. John Brockenbrough, 1812-1833*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1988, 81-2.

that Macon fought so steadfastly provided the executive even more chances to use his patronage. In 1826, after years of watching the national government grow and the executive branch become more powerful, Macon expressed the following sentiments in a letter to Bartlett Yancey. He wrote, “There are three things which produce almost of themselves, power begets power, money begets money, and patronage begets patronage, and any one of them well managed, will generally beget the other two.”⁴⁴

Macon’s fear of corruption and improper influence were not just directed at the executive. Especially during Madison’s presidency, Macon feared that the “Invisibles” within the Senate exerted too much influence on the president. This concern did not end with Adams’s election and Macon continued to embrace the principle that all three branches had to operate independently without influence over the other. He also felt obliged to respect the power of the judiciary branch.

Blind faith in one’s government spelled disaster and only an involved citizenry with watchful eyes could hold in check the corruptive nature of power. In his years in the Senate, Macon warned others of the negative tendencies of government while revealing his confidence in the abilities of Americans to oversee their leaders. He stated, “Ours is a government of suspicion; every election proves it; the power to impeach proves it; the history of Caesar, and Cromwell, and Bonaparte proves that it ought to be so to remain free.”⁴⁵ In his last term as

⁴⁴ Macon to Bartlett Yancey, March 31, 1826, Bartlett Yancey Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁴⁵ *Annals of Congress*, Fourteenth Congress, First Session, 79.

North Carolina's senior senator, Macon became quite pessimistic about the future of the nation and felt that the republican tenets he held so dear had completely fallen out of fashion. Soon after the Twentieth Congress convened, Macon decided that he was no longer able to conduct his duties in the Senate. He explained his dilemma in his correspondence with friends and colleagues. He wanted to serve North Carolina and his constituents ably. He wrote Bartlett Yancey about his concerns. "It is due to the state, & to myself not to be here after time may have made her inroads too strong on my faculties."⁴⁶ Loss of his mental "faculties" was not what led to Macon's retirement. Loss of hearing was the determining factor in his decision. When he realized that he could not grasp the content of the speeches on the Senate floor, he concluded that he could no longer perform his duties as president *pro tempore* or serve the people of North Carolina as they deserved. So, with his usual, plain and simple manner, he walked to the White House and informed the president of his decision to retire. He did this on May 19, 1828 after serving 37 years in the U S Congress. The only official confirmation of his retirement was a short statement written to the North Carolina Assembly. Macon stated, "Age and infirmity render it proper for me to retire from public service. I therefore resign the appointment to the Senate of the U. S., that of the Trustee of the University of the State, and that of Justice of the Peace for the County of Warren."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Nathaniel Macon to Bartlett Yancey, February 14, 1826, Bartlett Yancey Papers, University of North Carolina.

⁴⁷ Nathaniel Macon to the North Carolina Assembly, November 4, 1828, Nathaniel Macon Papers, Duke University, William R. Perkins Library.

Macon returned to Buck Springs. He always considered himself a farmer, although his holdings in land and slaves were extensive enough that he was a planter. He lived a simple life in the modest cabin he had built when he and Hannah had married almost four decades earlier. He remained involved in the management of his fields and continued to enjoy horse racing and fox hunting. He often visited John Randolph at his plantation on the Roanoke River. Macon's retirement was not carefree. Both his daughters died before he left Congress, Seignora in 1825 and Betsey in 1827. When in 1828 Betsy's husband died, Macon was left with the responsibility for their eleven children. This put a financial and emotional strain on him in the closing years of his life. Letters to his grandson's reveal some of Macon's anxieties and Randolph confided Macon's feelings to Brockenbrough. "Randolph, all animals provide for their own offspring. This is the great law of nature- The birds do not build nests for the young of their young."⁴⁸ In spite of Macon's statement concerning the responsibility of rearing grandchildren, he spent the last decade of his life providing for and worrying about his daughters' offspring. Only once after retiring from public life did Macon participate in government affairs.

In 1835 North Carolina held a convention to make revisions to its constitution. Macon was asked to be a member of the delegation. His association with the Convention gave it more legitimacy and he was unanimously elected as president. On several occasions he took the floor in support of issues that represented his republican ideals. For instance, he spoke out in favor of

⁴⁸ John Randolph to Dr. John Brockenbrough, Dec.22, 1928, Shorey, ed., *Collected Letters of John Randolph to Dr. John Brockenbrough, 1812-1833*, 114.

annual elections for state legislators, which he stated was “a fundamental principle of Republican government.”⁴⁹ Over Macon’s objection a biennial election was passed by the Convention. So, as was often the case in Macon’s career, when the new North Carolina constitution came to a vote before the convention, he voted against it. To the end, he refused to compromise his principles, and his last vote cast was against a rewritten constitution that emerged from a convention over which he presided.

Macon died on June 29, 1837 at his beloved Buck Springs. As would be expected, he had his affairs in order. He had given thought to his final arrangements and the disposition of property. Macon’s will had specific directions for his funeral arrangements. He gave his executors leeway in deciding whether to serve a meal following his funeral and requested that his belongs be dispersed as soon as possible if he died after harvest time. If he died in the spring when crops were being planted and tended, he asked that his estate not be settled until the crops were saved.⁵⁰

Macon’s will distributed his possessions among his grandchildren and friends. Much of his monetarily valuable personal belongings had (according to Macon’s description) been gifts from John Randolph. He gave prized hunting dogs to friends and assigned ownership of his slaves to particular kin. He left all his slaves a new suit of clothes and his will allowed one slave couple to decide to whom they would belong. Macon also requested that he be buried beside his

⁴⁹ *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of North Carolina Called to Amend the Constitution of the State which Assembled at Raleigh June 4, 1835*. Raleigh, 1836, 399.

⁵⁰ Will of Nathaniel Macon, October 25, 1835, Record of Wills, 36, 168-174, Warren County Courthouse, Warrenton, North Carolina.

wife Hannah, who had died almost five decades earlier. He stated that he did want any monument erected and asked that people when they walked by just pick up any old flint rocks lying about and throw them on his grave. His wishes were honored and his grave is covered with a large mound of rocks; however, in the twentieth century the state of North Carolina erected a marker at his grave.⁵¹

Macon followed his republican principles all his life. His private life was led by the same ideals he exhibited politically. He abhorred debt and avoided it all his life. He turned his humble inheritance into a sizeable estate. He considered farming to be the most honorable profession and worked in his fields until he was seventy years old. Macon believed in civic duty and for thirty seven years he left his farm and went to the nation's capital to serve his state and nation. He was a member of the House of Representatives and Speaker of the House in that body for several terms. His final years in Washington were spent in the Senate, where Macon was elected president *pro tempore* until he retired.

Macon was a republican in thought and deed. He followed his beliefs. To say, as Henry Adams did that Macon "fell under the spell" of Randolph is to do the North Carolinian a great injustice. Unfortunately, some twentieth century historians have repeated Adams's erroneous depiction of Macon as a follower of Randolph. Both Macon and Randolph adhered to the same republican ideals; however, neither man was led by the other. Macon supported men when those men adhered to republican principles. Because of this he was often portrayed as an

⁵¹ Will of Nathaniel Macon, October 25, 1835, Record of Wills, 36, 172.

obstructionist, and much of his latter years were spent fighting against those who tried to turn the nation away from the tenets of Revolutionary-era republicanism. Macon's name has faded into obscurity since his death. He is remembered in his native state, but his contributions to the young nation are mostly forgotten outside the boundaries of North Carolina. Macon, the plain spoken, simple farmer, left a legacy of honesty and dedication that is seldom seen and deserves to be remembered.

John Randolph, after serving the Twentieth Congress as a member of the House of Representatives, decided not to stand for office in the next election. He was soon informed that he had been appointed to the delegation charged with rewriting the Virginia state constitution. After some initial grumbling, Randolph took his place among a rather impressive assemblage of Virginians. James Madison, James Monroe, John Tyler, John Marshall also served. Even with the most widely known political names in Virginia associated with the convention, Hugh Pleasants, the editor of Richmond's *Daily Dispatch*, said that John Randolph was the man "to whom every eye was turned."⁵² In the first two weeks of the convention those wishing to hear him speak were disappointed for Randolph was uncharacteristically silent. Newspaper articles reporting the event wondered when he would take the floor. Finally, as James Monroe, who was presiding over the convention prepared to call for a vote on Green's Amendment concerning representation in the state legislative body, Randolph rose to address the assembly. Within minutes, the gallery and lobby were filled with spectators. Randolph spoke and he used his

⁵² Pleasants, Hugh R., "Sketches of the Virginia Convention of 1829-183 v0." *Southern Literary Messenger*. Richmond, Virginia: McFarlane and Ferguson, 1851. Vol. 17, 148.

oratorical skills to hold the attention of his audience. He made points in opposition to the proposed reapportionment plan, but he also entertained the crowd with his wit and sarcasm. He drove home his point, “change is not reform.”⁵³ Although Monroe was officially in charge of the proceedings, Randolph seemed to be in control, and Monroe did not attempt to rein in Randolph’s behavior as he told stories, exploded at mistakes of other delegates and even pantomimed his objection to another speaker’s comments. When the new constitution came to a vote, Randolph sided with the nays, and correctly prophesied that the newly written constitution would not survive twenty years.⁵⁴ When Randolph left Richmond following the Virginia Constitutional Convention, he did not return to Roanoke Plantation to retire from public service as he had earlier planned. Instead, he accepted the position as minister to Russia that was offered to him by President Andrew Jackson and unanimously approved by the U S Senate.

Jackson approved Randolph’s request that he not officially take his post in Russia until the August 10, 1830. His personal correspondence reveals mixed opinions of Russia. He found it more splendid than France and even deemed St. Petersburg as “the most magnificent city I ever beheld.” However, in the same letter, Randolph complained and compared it to Egypt and the plagues inflicted upon it in biblical times.⁵⁵ Regardless of his complaints about the city and comment on the despotism of the government, Randolph settled in with every intention of carrying out the duties of minister. He was officially presented to Emperor Nicholas I and later

⁵³ *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention*, 716.

⁵⁴ *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention*, 731.

⁵⁵ John Randolph to John Brockenbrough, September, 4, 1830. Shorey, 134.

met with Prince von Lieven to begin negotiations on a commercial treaty centered on maritime rights of both nations. Randolph proceeded to contact all Russian diplomats that he considered important to promoting the U S position. He noted in a letter to Brockenbrough that he called on a number of personages. All of his enthusiasm for his post was to no avail when his health failed. He wrote that he suffered from along range of maladies including: ague, dysentery, bilious fever and acute hepatitis.⁵⁶ So, less than one month after arriving in St. Petersburg, Randolph took his leave of Russia and traveled to London. Upon his arrival, he wrote President Jackson of his actions. He informed Jackson of his health problems and his plans to recuperate in Britain. Randolph confided in the president that he hoped to be well enough to resume his post in the following spring. After almost a year in London, Randolph accepted the fact that his health was not significantly improved and he wrote John Randolph Clay, the chargé d'affaires in St. Petersburg that he was "going home to die."⁵⁷ He notified Jackson of his intention to officially resign his post and return home. Randolph sailed home in September and began the final stage of his life.⁵⁸

Although still a very sick man, Randolph delivered several speeches to his constituents. On court day, for four successive weeks, he spoke to large groups of voters. His sharp wit had not deserted him as he pronounced his opinion of Secretary of State Edward Livingston.

⁵⁶ John Randolph to Elizabeth T. C. Bryan, September, 14, 1830. Bryan Papers.

⁵⁷ John Randolph to John Randolph Clay, September 1, 1831. John Randolph Papers, University of Virginia.

⁵⁸ John Randolph to Andrew Jackson, September 1, 1831. John Randolph Papers, University of Virginia.

Randolph declared Livingston so corrupt that “he shines and stinks like a rotten mackerel by moonlight.”⁵⁹ Despite Randolph’s activity, he was obviously a dying man. When he spoke at the county seats in Charlotte and Buckingham, he was extremely feeble and even had to be carried out of the Buckingham courthouse after his speech. Still, the freeholders of Southside Virginia elected Randolph to his old house seat; however, before Congress convened he returned to Roanoke Plantation, packed his bags, and announced he was immediately sailing to England. Randolph believed his death was eminent if he remained in the United States and hoped that he would recover his health while abroad. On the way, he passed through the national capital and was carried into the senate chamber where he listened to a speech by Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun before taking his final leave. He arrived in Philadelphia in a very weakened condition and died before embarking on his voyage to England.

Randolph left a prosperous estate in spite of his earliest prospects. When he was a young man attending college, his stepfather, St. George Tucker, had informed Randolph that he should be prepared to make his own way in life because his inheritance was so encumbered by debt that he would probably be left with nothing by the time it was settled. He turned his rather insignificant Roanoke property into a large and wealthy plantation with over 400 slaves. He never married or had children; however, he assumed responsibility for his brother’s family following Richard’s early death. Randolph, much like Macon, never built a large plantation house, instead living in a small two-room abode. He enjoyed his land and was a successful planter. When many of his contemporaries and kinfolk were suffering through financial hardship

⁵⁹ Bruce, vol. 2, 195.

Randolph prospered. He finally managed to pay off the debt he incurred upon taking over his inheritance, and he then followed his republican principles and avoided any further encumbrances of his finances. Randolph bred and raised racehorses and took great pride in his hunting dogs.

Unlike Macon, Randolph never worked his fields himself, but he had a great disdain for white overseers and generally worked with a trusted slave to oversee the labor on his land. Randolph often said his slaves were his family and in his words and deeds he reflected his affection for the men and women who belonged to him. In 1814 a devastating flood hit his Roanoke plantation and Randolph confided his worry to his friend Dr. John Brockenbrough. “With a family of more than two hundred mouths looking to me for food, I feel an awful charge in my hands. It is easy to rid myself of the burden if I could shut my heart to the cry of humanity and the voice of duty.”⁶⁰ Randolph further explained his connection with his slaves by declaring, “But in these poor slaves I have found my best and most faithful friends; and I feel that it would be more difficult to abandon to the cruel fate to which our laws consign them, than to suffer with them.”⁶¹ Randolph never sold a slave unless they asked to be sold. On occasion when a slave asked to be sold to an adjoining plantation so he could be with his wife, Randolph agreed to the sale. When he sent Davy to work on his neighbor’s plantation, Randolph wrote the overseer of the neighboring plantation a note describing Davy’s weak constitution and explaining that he

⁶⁰ John Randolph to Dr. John Brockenbrough, August 24, 1814. Shorey, 24.

⁶¹ Ibid.

needed to be excused from too strenuous jobs and required an extra coat in the winter months.⁶² Randolph's feelings concerning slavery and his real affection for his own slaves were revealed at his death. His early will, written 1821, stated, "I give my slaves their freedom, to which my conscience tells me they are justly entitled. It has long been a matter of deepest regret to me that the circumstances under which I inherited the, and the obstacles thrown in the way by the laws of the land, have prevented my emancipating them in my lifetime, which it is my fullest intention to do, in case I can accomplish it."⁶³ This will, which would be ruled by the courts as his true last will and testament contained provisions for land to be purchased in a free state for his slaves and set aside money to set them up with the necessities to run their own farms. Randolph breathed his last in Philadelphia and set in motion the process of freeing his four hundred plus slaves.⁶⁴ After twelve years of litigation, they were granted their freedom and land was purchased for them by the executor of Randolph's will. The land was in Mercer County, Ohio and when the free black Randolphs arrived to claim their inheritance the local inhabitants met them with violence. Randolph's former slaves were driven off their land and not allowed to settle in the area.

Randolph also left instructions for his funeral services. He had publicly stated that he did not want to be buried in the nation's capital, nor did he want any service there. So after he died his body was taken from Philadelphia to Norfolk on a steamship bearing the name of his distant

⁶² John Randolph to Benjamin Watkins Leigh, September 17, 1832. Randolph Manuscripts, Duke University.

⁶³ Garland, vol.2, 149-150.

Indian relative. The *Pocahantas* carried his casket to Norfolk and from there to Richmond the *Patrick Henry* bore him. His service was short and he was buried under a tall pine near his humble abode on Roanoke plantation. Per Randolph's request, his remains were positioned with him facing westward, so he could keep an eye on Henry Clay. Later in a move that went against Randolph's wishes, his body was disinterred and moved to Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Virginia.⁶⁵

Randolph died, according to his last words, filled with remorse. Then slowly, he passed from human memory. Accounts of his life have never seemed to do the Southside Virginian justice. He served in the House and Senate for over half of his life. In that time he fought to maintain the principles of Revolutionary-era republicanism. In his early political career he waged war against the nationalistic tendencies of the Federalists as they attempted to interpret the constitution in ways that contradicted Randolph's understanding of it. Then, Randolph saw the changing nature of those who claimed the designation Republican and defended his ideals against them.

Nathaniel Macon and John Randolph provide excellent examples of the tenets of Revolutionary republicanism. Their speeches, voting records, and correspondence reveal an unwavering dedication to the republican beliefs that led colonial Americans declare their independence from Great Britain. They adhered to their beliefs as the popularity of republicanism grew popular during John Adams's administration and Macon and Randolph

⁶⁴Bruce, vol. 2, 57.

⁶⁵ Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, December 15, 1879, 4.

remained committed to those same ideals when Revolutionary-era republicanism once again fell out of fashion. Although Macon and Randolph differed in temperament, background, and oratorical abilities, their dedication to the republicanism that led colonial Americans to declare independence from Great Britain render them both excellent examples of republican statesmen in the early national period of United States history. By studying the careers of Macon and Randolph one can more clearly understand the ways in which republicanism evolved. The republicanism of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John Quincy Adams and others represented a different view for the nation and eventually their political philosophies triumphed. Macon and Randolph did not abandon their beliefs even then; they continued to speak out. They became the conscience of republicans.

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