

# Unit 7 - The Early Republic

## **Focus Questions**

1. How did the Haitian Revolution influence ideas about racial difference (especially the theory of polygenesis) and slavery in the early nineteenth century?
2. What is Republican motherhood, and how did women advocate for their roles in federal society?
3. What were the primary factors that contributed to the American declaration of war on Great Britain in 1812? What were significant outcomes and consequences of that war?

## **Key Terms**

Haitian Revolution

Polygenesis

Republican motherhood

Louisiana

Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa

Andrew Jackson

Battle of Tippecanoe

Hartford Convention

American System

Monroe Doctrine

## Introduction

Thomas Jefferson’s electoral victory over John Adams—and the larger victory of Republicans over Federalists—was but one of many changes in the early republic. Some of these changes, like Jefferson’s victory, were accomplished peacefully; others were accomplished violently. The wealthy and the powerful, middling and poor whites, Native Americans, free and enslaved African Americans, influential and poor women all demanded a voice in the new nation that Thomas Paine called an “asylum” for liberty.<sup>1</sup> All would, in their own way, lay claim to the freedom and equality promised, if not fully realized, by the Revolution.



*“America guided by wisdom. An allegorical representation of the United States depicting their independence and prosperity,” 1815. Library of Congress.*

### 7.1 – Black Americans and Challenges to Slavery

The first decades of the new American republic coincided with a radical shift in understandings of race. Politically and culturally, Enlightenment thinking fostered beliefs in common humanity, the possibility of societal progress, individuality and self-improvement, and the importance of one’s social and ecological environment—a four-pronged revolt against the hierarchies of the Old World. However, a tension arose due to Enlightenment thinkers’ desire to classify and order the natural world. Carolus Linnaeus, Comte de Buffon, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, and others created connections between race and place as they divided the racial “types” of the world according to skin color, cranial measurements, and hair. They claimed that years under the hot sun and tropical climate of Africa had darkened the skin and reconfigured the skulls of the African race, whereas the cold northern latitudes of Europe molded and sustained the “Caucasian” race. Different environments endowed both races with respective characteristics, which accounted for differences in humankind tracing back to a common ancestry. A universal human nature, therefore, housed not fundamental differences but rather the “civilized” and the “primitive”—two poles on a scale of social progress.

Henry Moss, a slave in Virginia, became arguably the most famous black man of the day when white spots appeared on his body in 1792, turning him visibly white within three years. As his skin changed, Moss marketed himself as “a

great curiosity” in Philadelphia and soon earned enough money to buy his freedom. He met the great scientists of the era—including Samuel Stanhope Smith and Benjamin Rush—who joyously deemed Moss to be living proof of their theory that “the Black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is derived from the [leprosy](#).”<sup>2</sup> Something, somehow, seemed to be “curing” Moss of his blackness. In the whitening body of slave-turned-patriot-turned-curiosity, Moss’ fame illuminated how many Americans fostered ideas of race that would cause major problems in the years ahead.

Informed by European anthropology and republican optimism, Americans confronted their own uniquely problematic racial landscape. In 1787, Samuel Stanhope Smith published his treatise *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, which further articulated the theory of racial change and suggested that improving the social environment would tap into the innate equality of humankind and dramatically uplift nonwhite races. The proper society, he and others believed, could gradually “whiten” men the way nature spontaneously chose to whiten Henry Moss. Thomas Jefferson disagreed. While Jefferson thought Native Americans could improve and become “civilized,” he declared in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784) that black people were incapable of mental improvement and that they might even have a separate ancestry—a theory known as **polygenesis**, or multiple creations. His belief in polygenesis was less to justify slavery—slaveholders universally rejected the theory as antibiblical and thus a threat to their primary instrument of justification, the Bible—and more to justify schemes for a white America, such as the plan to gradually send freed slaves to Africa. Many Americans believed nature had made the white and black races too different to peacefully coexist, and they viewed African colonization as the solution to America’s racial problem.

Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* sparked considerable backlash from antislavery and black communities. The celebrated black surveyor Benjamin Banneker, for example, immediately wrote to Jefferson and demanded he “eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas” and instead embrace the belief that we are “all of one flesh” and with “all the same sensations and endowed . . . with the same faculties.”<sup>3</sup> Many years later, in his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), David Walker channeled decades of black protest, simultaneously denouncing the moral rot of slavery and racism while praising the inner strength of the race.

Jefferson also had his defenders. White men such as Charles Caldwell and Samuel George Morton hardened Jefferson’s skepticism with the “biological” case for blacks and whites not only having separate creations but actually being different species, a position increasingly articulated throughout the antebellum period. Few Americans subscribed wholesale to such theories, but many shared beliefs in white supremacy. As the decades passed, white Americans were forced to acknowledge that if the black population was indeed whitening, it resulted from interracial sex and not the environment. The sense of inspiration and wonder that followed Henry Moss in the 1790s would have been impossible just a generation later.

## 7.2 – The Haitian Revolution

Furthermore, the **Haitian Revolution** (1791–1804) posed a significant challenge to eighteenth-century assumptions about racial hierarchies and white supremacy. Toussaint L’Ouverture, himself a former slave, assumed military leadership after a massive uprising against French colonial authorities in the Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue. Founded in the 1660s, Saint-Domingue had become the most profitable sugar plantation colonies in the Americas where African slaves outnumbered free inhabitants ten to one. Influenced by the French Revolution, as well as centuries of exploitation under chattel slavery, Saint-Domingue slaves launched their initial revolt following a [Vodou](#) ceremony in the colony’s northern province. After two months of violence—described as “pillage, rape, torture,



mutilation, and death”—the number of rebels had grown to around 100,000. They had killed at least 4,000 free white inhabitants and laid waste to hundreds of sugar, coffee and [indigo](#) plantations. The rebels’ war against France (as well as Great Britain and Spain, who sent expeditions to occupy Saint-Domingue) continued for several years before L’Ouverture succeeded in abolishing slavery on the island and, in 1801, issued a constitution that declared Saint-Domingue to be a sovereign black state.

The Haitian Revolution inspired both free and enslaved black Americans and terrified many white Americans. In 1829 David Walker, a black abolitionist in Boston, wrote his *Appeal* that called for resistance to slavery and racism. Walker called Haiti the “glory of the blacks and terror of the tyrants” and said that Haitians, “according to their word, are bound to protect and comfort us.” Haiti also proved that, given equal opportunities, people of color could achieve as much as whites.<sup>4</sup> In 1826 the third college graduate of color in the United States, John Russwurm, gave a commencement address at Bowdoin College, noting that, “Haytiens [*sic*] have adopted the republican form of government . . . [and] in no country are the rights and privileges of citizens and foreigners more respected, and crimes less frequent.”<sup>5</sup> In 1838 the *Colored American*, an early black newspaper, professed that “no one who reads, with an unprejudiced mind, the history of Hayti [*sic*]. . . can doubt the capacity of colored men, nor the propriety of removing all their disabilities.”<sup>6</sup> The creation of Haiti, and the activism it inspired, sent the message that enslaved and free blacks could not be omitted from conversations about the meaning of liberty and equality, and left an indelible mark on early national political culture in America.



*The idea and image of black Haitian revolutionaries sent shock waves throughout white America. That black slaves and freed people might turn violent against whites, so obvious in this image where a black soldier holds up the head of a white soldier, remained a serious fear in the hearts and minds of white Southerners throughout the antebellum period. January Suchodolski, Battle at San Domingo, 1845. Wikimedia.*

Port cities in the United States were flooded with news and refugees. Free people of color embraced the revolution, understanding it as a call for full abolition and the rights of citizenship denied in the United States. Over the next several decades, black Americans continually looked to Haiti as an inspiration in their struggle for freedom, and even as a call to revolt, as Gabriel’s Rebellion in Virginia exemplifies. Led by the slave Gabriel, close to one thousand enslaved men planned to end slavery in Virginia by attacking Richmond in late August 1800. Some of the conspirators would set diversionary fires in the city’s warehouse district. Others would attack Richmond’s white residents, seize weapons, and capture Virginia governor James Monroe. On August 30, two enslaved men revealed the plot to their master, who notified authorities. Faced with



bad weather, Gabriel and other leaders postponed the attack until the next night, giving Monroe and the militia time to capture the conspirators. After briefly escaping, Gabriel was seized, tried, and hanged along with twenty-five others. Their executions sent the message that others would be punished if they challenged slavery. Subsequently, the Virginia government increased restrictions on free people of color.

Gabriel's Rebellion taught Virginia's white residents several lessons. First, it suggested that enslaved blacks were capable of preparing and carrying out a sophisticated and violent revolution, which undermined white assumptions about the inherent intellectual inferiority of blacks. Furthermore, it demonstrated that white efforts to suppress news of other slave revolts—especially the 1791 slave rebellion in Haiti—had failed. Not only did some literate slaves read accounts of the successful attack in Virginia's newspapers, others heard about the rebellion firsthand when slaveholding refugees from Haiti arrived in Virginia with their slaves after July 1793.

The black activism inspired by Haiti's revolution was so powerful that anxious white leaders scrambled to use the violence of the Haitian revolt to reinforce white supremacy and pro-slavery views by limiting the social and political lives of people of color. White publications mocked black Americans as buffoons, ridiculing calls for abolition and equal rights. The most (in)famous of these, the “[Bobalition](#)” broadsides, published in Boston in the 1810s, crudely caricatured African Americans. Widely distributed materials like these became the basis for racist ideas that thrived in the nineteenth century. But such ridicule also implied that black Americans' presence in the political conversation was significant enough to require it. The need to reinforce such an obvious difference between whiteness and blackness implied that the differences might not be so obvious after all.

### 7.3 – Jeffersonian Republicanism

Free and enslaved black Americans were not alone in pushing against political hierarchies. Jefferson's election to the presidency in 1800 represented a victory for non-elite white Americans in their bid to assume more direct control over the government. Elites had made no secret of their hostility toward the direct control of government by the people. In both private correspondence and published works, many of the nation's founders argued that pure democracy would lead to anarchy. Massachusetts Federalist Fisher Ames spoke for many of his colleagues when he lamented the dangers that democracy posed because it depended on public opinion, which “shifts with every current of caprice.” For Federalists like Ames, Jefferson's election heralded a slide “down into the mire of a democracy.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, many political leaders and non-elite citizens believed Jefferson embraced the politics of the masses. “In a government like ours it is the duty of the Chief-magistrate . . . to unite in himself the confidence of the whole people,” Jefferson wrote in 1810.<sup>8</sup> Nine years later, looking back on his monumental election, Jefferson again linked his triumph to the political engagement of ordinary citizens: “The revolution of 1800 . . . was as real a revolution in the principles of our government as that of 76 was in its form,” he wrote, “not effected indeed by the sword . . . but by the rational and peaceable instrument of reform, the suffrage [voting] of the people.”<sup>9</sup> Jefferson desired to convince Americans, and the world, that a government that answered directly to the people would lead to lasting national union, not anarchic division. He wanted to prove that free people could govern themselves democratically.



*Thomas Jefferson's victory over John Adams in the election of 1800 was celebrated through everyday Americans' material culture, including this victory banner. Smithsonian Institute, National Museum of American History.*

Jefferson set out to differentiate his administration from the Federalists. He defined American union by the voluntary bonds of fellow citizens toward one another and toward the government. In contrast, the Federalists supposedly imagined a union defined by expansive state power and public submission to the rule of aristocratic elites. For Jefferson, the American nation drew its “energy” and its strength from the “confidence” of a “reasonable” and “rational” people. Republican celebrations often credited Jefferson with saving the nation’s republican principles. In a move that enraged Federalists, they used the image of George Washington, who had passed away in 1799, linking the republican virtue Washington epitomized to the democratic liberty Jefferson championed. Leaving behind the military pomp of power-obsessed Federalists, Republicans had peacefully elected the scribe of national independence, the philosopher-patriot who had battled tyranny with his pen, not with a sword or a firearm.

Buttressed by robust public support, Jefferson sought to implement policies that reflected his own political ideology. He worked to reduce taxes and cut the government’s budget, believing that this would expand the economic opportunities of free Americans. His cuts included national defense, and Jefferson restricted the regular army to three thousand men. England may have needed taxes and debt to support its military empire, but Jefferson was determined to live in peace—and that belief led him to reduce America’s national debt while getting rid of all internal taxes during his first term.

## 7.4 – Women in the Early Republic

The celebrations of Jefferson’s presidency and the defeat of the Federalists expressed many citizens’ willingness to assert greater direct control over the government as citizens, but meanings of citizenship were changing in significant ways. Early American national identity was coded masculine, just as it was coded white and wealthy; yet, since the Revolution, women had repeatedly called for a place in the conversation. For example, Mercy Otis Warren, an affluent New England author and playwright, became a political activist during the Revolutionary period and was one of the most noteworthy female contributors to the public ratification debate over the Constitution of 1787 and 1788. Women all over the country were urged to participate in the discussion over the Constitution and embrace Federal values. “It is the duty of the American ladies, in a particular manner, to interest themselves in the success of the measures that are now pursuing by the Federal Convention for the happiness of America,” a Philadelphia essayist announced. “They can retain their rank as rational beings only in a free government. In a monarchy . . . they will be considered as valuable members of a society, only in proportion as they are capable of being mothers for soldiers, who are the pillars of crowned heads.”<sup>10</sup> American women were more than mothers to soldiers; they were mothers to liberty.

Historians have used the term **Republican Motherhood** to describe the early American belief that women were essential in nurturing the principles of liberty in the citizenry. Women would pass along important values of independence and virtue to their children, ensuring that each generation cherished the same values of the American Revolution. Because of these ideas, women’s actions became politicized. Republican partisans even described

women's choice of sexual partner as crucial to the health and well-being of both the party and the nation. "The fair Daughters of America" should "never disgrace themselves by giving their hands in marriage to any but real republicans," a group of New Jersey Republicans asserted. A Philadelphia paper toasted "The fair Daughters of Columbia. May their smiles be the reward of Republicans only."<sup>11</sup> Though unmistakably steeped in the gendered assumptions about female sexuality and domesticity that denied women an equal share of the political rights men enjoyed, these statements also conceded the pivotal role women played as active participants in partisan politics.<sup>12</sup>



*The artist James Peale painted this portrait of his wife Mary and five of their eventual six children. Peale and others represented women as responsible for the health of the republic through their roles as wives as mothers. Historians call this view of women Republican Motherhood. Wikimedia.*

## 7.5 – The Louisiana Purchase

In a move that became the crowning achievement of his presidency, Jefferson authorized the acquisition of **Louisiana** from France in 1803 in what is considered the largest real estate deal in American history. France had ceded Louisiana to Spain in exchange for West Florida after the Seven Years' War decades earlier. Jefferson was concerned about American access to New Orleans, which served as an important port for western farmers. His worries multiplied when the French secretly reacquired Louisiana in 1800. Spain remained in Louisiana for two more years while the U.S. minister to France, Robert R. Livingston, tried to strike a compromise. Fortunately for the United States, the pressures of war in Europe and the slave insurrection in Haiti forced **Napoleon** to rethink his vast North American holdings. Rebellious slaves coupled with a yellow fever outbreak in Haiti defeated French forces, stripping Napoleon of his ability to control Haiti (the erstwhile home of profitable sugar plantations). Deciding to cut his losses, Napoleon offered to sell the entire Louisiana Territory for \$15 million—roughly equivalent to \$250 million today. Negotiations between Livingston and Napoleon's foreign minister, Talleyrand, succeeded more spectacularly than either Jefferson or Livingston could have imagined. Jefferson made an inquiry to his cabinet regarding the constitutionality of the Louisiana Purchase, but



he believed he was obliged to operate outside the strict limitations of the Constitution if the good of the nation was at stake, as his ultimate responsibility was to the American people. Jefferson felt he should be able to “throw himself on the justice of his country” when he facilitated the interests of the very people he served.<sup>13</sup>

Even before the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson had planned an expedition into the western part of the continent in search of diplomatic connections with Native Americans and the hypothetical Northwest Passage (an all-water route to the Pacific Ocean). In the spring of 1804, a company led by Captain Meriwether Lewis and Lieutenant William Clark, began an 8,000-mile exploratory journey from St. Louis, Missouri to the Pacific Northwest and back again. The “Corps of Discovery,” as Lewis and Clark’s company was known, consisted of about four dozen men and was charged with making scientific observations about the climate, waterways, soil, flora and fauna, and cultures of the western continent. The company was also instructed to make contact with Native American societies they encountered in the form of council meetings, military parades, trade and treaty promises, and gifts such as flags and peace medals. Although some nations (like the Lakota, in present-day South Dakota) already had trade agreements with the British and were hostile to American competition, many Native American nations in the Plains and Northwest welcomed the diplomatic and trading opportunities with the United States that Lewis and Clark offered.

After wintering at Fort Mandan, their camp near what is now Bismarck, North Dakota, the expedition continued up the Missouri River with two new interpreters, French Canadian trapper Toussaint Charbonneau and his Shoshone wife, Sacagawea. In their company the expedition continued all the way to the Pacific coast in present-day Oregon in November 1805. The following spring, the expedition split into several groups to explore more [tributaries](#) of the Missouri River, and returned to St. Louis on September 23, 1806. Their expedition was celebrated as a rounding success, and all Corps of Discovery members were rewarded with double pay and public land. Jefferson also made Lewis the governor of Upper Louisiana Territory and appointed Clark to be an Indian agent. Although the Corps of Discovery were not the first white men to explore the region, and while Lewis and Clark’s expedition ultimately failed to find the fabled Northwest Passage, the expedition contributed significant geographic and scientific knowledge of the West, aided the expansion of the American fur trade, and strengthened the nation’s claims to the Pacific Northwest.

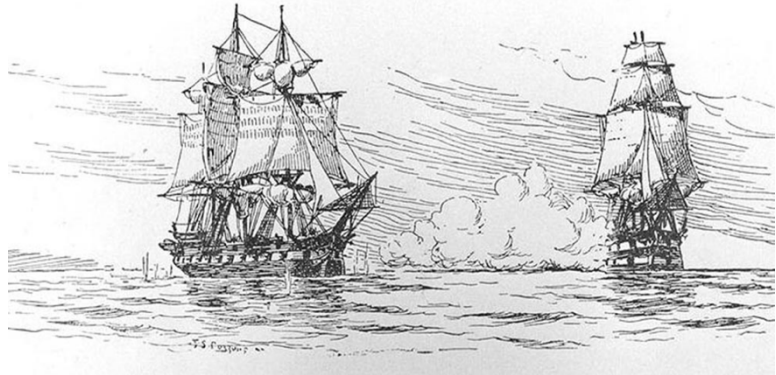
## 7.6 – Jefferson’s Foreign Policies and their Dissenters

Jefferson’s foreign policy, particularly the Embargo Act of 1807, elicited the most outrage from his Federalist critics. As Napoleon Bonaparte’s armies moved across Europe, Jefferson wrote to a European friend that he was glad that God had “divided the dry lands of your hemisphere from the dry lands of ours, and said ‘here, at least, be there peace.’”<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the Atlantic Ocean soon became the site of Jefferson’s greatest foreign policy test, as England, France, and Spain refused to respect American ships’ neutrality. The greatest offenses came from the British, who resumed the policy of impressment, seizing thousands of American sailors and forcing them to fight for the British navy.

Many Americans called for war when the British attacked the USS *Chesapeake* in 1807. The president, however, decided on a policy of “peaceable coercion” and Congress agreed. Under the Embargo Act of 1807, American ports were closed to all foreign trade in hopes of avoiding war. Jefferson hoped that an embargo would force European nations to respect American neutrality. Historians have long disagreed over the wisdom and efficacy of peaceable coercion. At first, withholding commerce rather than declaring war appeared to be the ultimate means of nonviolent conflict resolution. In practice, the embargo hurt the United States economy, and even Jefferson’s personal finances

suffered as a result. When Americans resorted to smuggling their goods out of the country, Jefferson expanded governmental powers to try to enforce their compliance, leading some to label him a “tyrant.”

Criticism of Jefferson’s policies reflected the same rhetoric his supporters had used earlier against Adams and the Federalists. Federalists attacked the American Philosophical Society and the study of natural history, believing both to be too saturated with Democratic Republicans. Some Federalists lamented the alleged decline of educational standards for children. Moreover, James Callender published accusations that Jefferson was involved in a sexual relationship with Sally Hemings, one of his slaves; those allegations were much later proven credible by DNA evidence from Jefferson’s descendants.<sup>15</sup> Callender referred to Jefferson as “our little mulatto president,” suggesting that sex with a slave had somehow compromised Jefferson’s racial integrity.<sup>16</sup> Callender’s accusation joined previous Federalist attacks on Jefferson’s racial politics, including a scathing pamphlet written by South Carolinian William Loughton Smith in 1796 that described the principles of Jeffersonian democracy as the beginning of a slippery slope to dangerous racial equality.<sup>17</sup>



*The attack on the Chesapeake caused such furor in the hearts of Americans that even eighty years after the incident, an artist sketched this drawing of the event. Fred S. Cozzens, “The incident between HMS Leopard and USS Chesapeake that sparked the Chesapeake-Leopard Affair,” 1897. Wikimedia.*

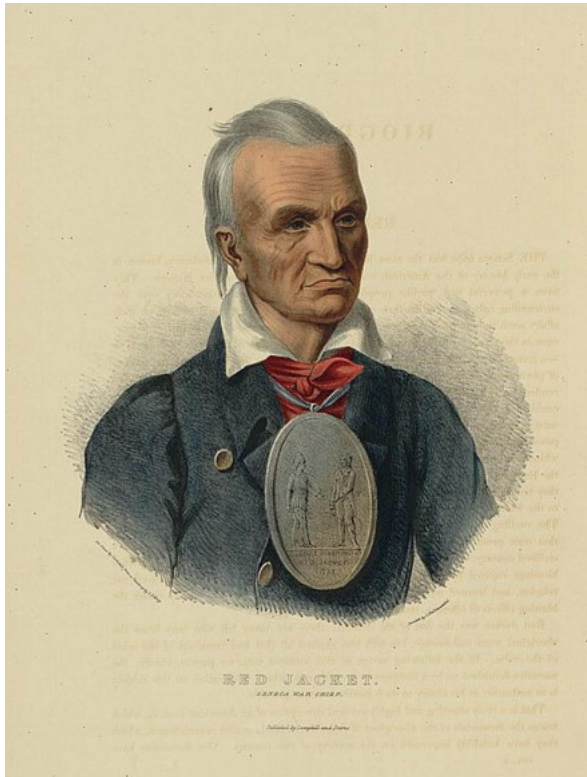
Arguments lamenting the democratization of America were far less effective than those that borrowed from democratic language and alleged that Jefferson’s actions undermined the sovereignty of the people. When Federalists attacked Jefferson, they often accused him of acting against the interests of the very public he claimed to serve. This tactic represented a pivotal development. As the Federalists scrambled to stay politically relevant, it became apparent that their ideology—rooted in eighteenth-century notions of virtue, paternalistic rule by wealthy elite, and the deference of ordinary citizens to an aristocracy of merit—was no longer tenable.

The Federalists’ adoption of republican political rhetoric signaled a new political landscape in which both parties embraced the direct involvement of the citizenry. The Republican Party rose to power on the promise to expand voting and promote a more direct link between political leaders and the electorate. The American populace continued to demand more direct access to political power. Jefferson, James Madison, and James Monroe sought to expand voting through policies that made it easier for Americans to purchase land. Under their leadership, seven new states entered the Union. By 1824, only three states still had rules about how much property someone had to own before he could vote. Never again would the Federalists regain dominance over either Congress or the presidency; the last Federalist to run for president, Rufus King, lost to Monroe in 1816.

## 7.7 – Native American Power and the United States

The Jeffersonian rhetoric of equality contrasted harshly with the reality of a nation stratified along the lines of gender, class, race, and ethnicity. Diplomatic relations between Native Americans and local, state, and national governments offer a dramatic example of the dangers of those inequalities. Prior to the Revolution, many Indian nations had balanced a delicate diplomacy between European empires, which scholars have called the Play-off System.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in many parts of North America, indigenous peoples dominated social relations.

Americans pushed for more land in all their interactions with Native diplomats and leaders, but boundaries were only one source of tension. Trade, criminal jurisdiction, roads, the sale of liquor, and alliances were also key negotiating points. Despite their role in fighting on both sides, Native American negotiators were not included in the diplomatic negotiations that ended the Revolutionary War. Unsurprisingly, the final Treaty of Paris omitted concessions for Native allies. Even as Native peoples proved vital trading partners, scouts, and allies against hostile nations, they were often condemned by white settlers and government officials as “savages.” White ridicule of indigenous practices and disregard for indigenous nations’ property rights and sovereignty prompted some Native American societies to turn away from white practices.



*Shown in this portrait as a refined gentleman, Red Jacket proved to be one of the most effective middlemen between Native Americans and United States officials. The medal worn around his neck, apparently given to him by George Washington, reflects his position as an intermediary. Campbell & Burns, “Red Jacket. Seneca war chief,” Philadelphia: C. Hullmandel, 1838. Library of Congress.*

In the wake of the American Revolution, Native American diplomats developed relationships with the United States, maintained or ceased relations with the British Empire (or with Spain in the South), and negotiated their relationship with other Native nations. Formal diplomatic negotiations included Native rituals to reestablish relationships and open communication. Treaty conferences took place in Native towns, at neutral sites in Indian-American borderlands, and in state and federal capitals. While chiefs were politically important, skilled orators (such as Red Jacket), intermediaries, and interpreters also played key roles in negotiations. Native American orators were known for their use of metaphorical language, command of an audience, and compelling voice and gestures.

Throughout the early republic, diplomacy was preferred to war. Violence and warfare carried enormous costs for all parties—in lives, money, trade disruptions, and reputation. Diplomacy allowed parties to air their grievances, negotiate their relationships, and minimize violence. Native diplomacy testified to the complexity of indigenous cultures and their role in shaping the politics and policy of American communities, states, and the federal government. Yet white attitudes, words, and policies frequently relegated Native peoples to the literal and figurative margins as “ignorant savages.” Violent conflicts arose when diplomacy failed. Poor treatment like this inspired hostility and calls for pan-Indian alliances from leaders of distinct Native nations.

An earlier coalition fought in Pontiac’s War. Neolin, the Delaware prophet, influenced Pontiac, an Ottawa (Odawa) war chief, with his vision of Native independence, cultural renewal, and religious revitalization. Through Neolin, the Master of Life—the Great Spirit—urged Native peoples to shrug off their dependency on European goods and technologies, reassert their faith in Native spirituality and rituals, and cooperate with one another against the “White people’s ways and nature.”<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Neolin advocated violence against British encroachments on Indian lands, which escalated after the Seven Years’ War. His message was particularly effective in the Ohio and Upper Susquehanna Valleys, where **polyglot** communities of indigenous refugees and migrants from across eastern North America lived together. When combined with the militant leadership of Pontiac, who took up Neolin’s message, the many Native



peoples of the region united in attacks against British forts and people. From 1763 until 1765, the Great Lakes, Ohio Valley, and Upper Susquehanna Valley areas were embroiled in a war between Pontiac’s confederacy and the British Empire, a war that ultimately forced the English to restructure how they managed Native-British relations and trade.

In the interim between 1765 and 1811, other Native prophets kept Neolin’s message alive while encouraging indigenous peoples to resist Euro-American encroachments. These individuals included the Ottawa leader “the Trout,” also called Maya-Ga-Wy; Joseph Brant of the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee); the Creek headman Mad Dog; Painted Pole of the Shawnee; a Mohawk woman named Coocoochee; Main Poc of the Potawatomi; and the Seneca prophet Handsome Lake. Once again, the epicenter of this pan-Indian resistance and revitalization originated in the Ohio Valley and Great Lakes regions, where from 1791 to 1795 a joint force of Shawnee, Delaware, Miami, Iroquois, Ojibwe, Ottawa, Huron, Potawatomi, Mingo, Chickamauga, and other indigenous peoples waged war against the American republic. Although this “Western Confederacy” ultimately suffered defeat at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, this Native coalition achieved a number of military victories against the republic, including the destruction of two American armies, forcing President Washington to reformulate federal Indian policy.

## 7.8 – Tecumseh’s Confederacy

Shawnee leader **Tecumseh** and his brother, **Tenskwatawa**, the Prophet, helped envision an alliance of North America’s indigenous populations to halt the encroachments of the United States. They created pan-Indian towns in present-day Indiana, first at Greenville, then at Prophetstown, in defiance of the Treaty of Greenville (1795). Tecumseh traveled to many diverse Indian nations from Canada to Georgia, calling for unification, resistance, and the restoration of sacred power. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa’s pan-Indian confederacy was the culmination of many movements that swept through indigenous North America during the eighteenth century. Tecumseh’s experiences as a warrior against the American military at the Battle of Fallen Timbers probably influenced his later efforts to generate solidarity among North American indigenous communities.

Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa articulated ideas and beliefs similar to their eighteenth-century predecessors. In particular, Tenskwatawa pronounced that the Master of Life entrusted him and Tecumseh with the responsibility for returning Native peoples to the one true path and to rid Native communities of the dangerous and corrupting influences of Euro-American trade and culture. Tenskwatawa stressed the need for cultural and religious renewal, which coincided with his blending of the tenets, traditions, and rituals of indigenous religions and Christianity. In particular, Tenskwatawa emphasized his apocalyptic visions that he and his followers would usher in a new world and restore Native power to the continent. For Native peoples who gravitated to the Shawnee brothers, this emphasis on cultural and religious revitalization was empowering and spiritually liberating, especially given the continuous American assaults on Native land and power in the early nineteenth century.



*Tenskwatawa as painted by George Catlin, in 1831. Catlin acknowledged the prophet’s spiritual power and painted him with a medicine stick. Wikimedia.*

Tecumseh’s confederacy drew heavily from indigenous communities in the Old

Northwest and the festering hatred for land-hungry Americans. Tecumseh attracted a wealth of allies in his adamant refusal to concede any more land. Tecumseh proclaimed that the Master of Life tasked him with the responsibility of returning Native lands to their rightful owners. In his efforts to promote unity among Native peoples, Tecumseh also offered these communities a distinctly “Indian identity” that brought disparate Native peoples together under the banner of a common spirituality, together resisting an oppressive force. In short, spirituality tied together the resistance movement. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa were not above using this pan-Indian rhetoric to legitimate their own authority within indigenous communities at the expense of other Native leaders. This manifested most visibly during Tenskwatawa’s witch hunts of the 1800s. Those who opposed Tenskwatawa or sought to accommodate Americans were labeled witches.

While Tecumseh attracted Native peoples from around the Northwest and some from the Southeast, the Red Stick Creeks brought these ideas to the Southeast. Led by the Creek prophet Hillis Hadjo, who accompanied Tecumseh when he toured throughout the Southeast in 1811, the [Red Sticks](#) integrated certain religious tenets from the north and invented new religious practices specific to the Creeks, all the while communicating and coordinating with Tecumseh after he left Creek Country. In doing so, the Red Sticks joined Tecumseh in his resistance movement while seeking to purge Creek society of its Euro-American dependencies. Creek leaders who maintained relationships with the United States, in contrast, believed that accommodation and diplomacy might stave off American encroachments better than violence.

Additionally, the Red Sticks discovered that most southeastern indigenous leaders cared little for Tecumseh’s confederacy. This lack of allies hindered the spread of a pan-Indian movement in the southeast, and the Red Sticks soon found themselves in a civil war against other Creeks. Tecumseh thus found little support in the Southeast beyond the Red Sticks, who by 1813 were cut off from the North by **Andrew Jackson**. Shortly thereafter, Jackson’s forces were joined by Lower Creek and Cherokee forces that helped defeat the Red Sticks, culminating in Jackson’s victory at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. Following their defeat, the Red Sticks were forced to cede an unprecedented fourteen million acres of land in the Treaty of Fort Jackson. As historian Adam Rothman argues, the defeat of the Red Sticks allowed the United States to expand west of the Mississippi, guaranteeing the continued existence and profitability of slavery.<sup>20</sup>

Many Native leaders refused to join Tecumseh and instead maintained their loyalties to the American republic. After the failures of pan-Indian unity and loss at the **Battle of Tippecanoe** in 1811, Tecumseh’s confederation floundered. The War of 1812 between the United States and Britain offered new opportunities for Tecumseh and his followers.<sup>21</sup> With the United States distracted, Tecumseh and his confederated army seized several American forts on their own initiative. Eventually Tecumseh solicited British aid after sustaining heavy losses from American fighters at Fort Wayne and Fort Harrison. Even then, the confederacy faced an uphill battle, particularly after American naval forces secured control of the Great Lakes in September 1813, forcing British ships and reinforcements to retreat. Yet Tecumseh and his Native allies fought on despite being surrounded by American forces. Tecumseh told the British commander Henry Proctor, “Our lives are in the hands of the Great Spirit. We are determined to defend our lands, and if it is his will, we wish to leave our bones upon them.”<sup>22</sup> Not soon thereafter, Tecumseh fell on the battlefields of Moraviantown, Ontario, in October 1813. His death dealt a severe blow to pan-Indian resistance against the United States. Men like Tecumseh and Pontiac, however, left behind a legacy of pan-Indian unity that was not soon forgotten.

## 7.9 – The War of 1812

Soon after Jefferson retired from the presidency in 1808, Congress ended the embargo and the British relaxed their policies toward American ships. Despite the embargo's unpopularity, Jefferson still believed that more time would have proven that peaceable coercion worked. Yet war with Britain loomed—a war that would galvanize the young American nation. The War of 1812 stemmed from American entanglement in two distinct sets of international issues. The first had to do with the nation's desire to maintain its position as a neutral trading nation during the series of Anglo-French wars, which began in the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1793. The second had older roots in the colonial and Revolutionary era. In both cases, American interests conflicted with those of the British Empire and British leaders showed little interest in accommodating the Americans.

Impressment—the practice of forcing American sailors to join the British Navy—was among the most important sources of conflict between the two nations. Driven in part by trade with Europe, the American economy grew quickly during the first decade of the nineteenth century, creating a labor shortage in the American shipping industry. In response, pay rates for sailors increased and American captains recruited heavily from the ranks of British sailors. As a result, around 30 percent of sailors employed on American merchant ships were British. As a republic, the Americans advanced the notion that people could become citizens by renouncing their allegiance to their home nation. To the British, a person born in the British Empire was a subject of that empire for life, a status they could not change. The British Navy was embroiled in a difficult war and was unwilling to lose any of its labor force. In order to regain lost crewmen, the British often boarded American ships to reclaim their sailors. Of course, many American sailors found themselves caught up in these sweeps and impressed into the service of the British Navy. Between 1803 and 1812, some six thousand Americans suffered this fate. The British would release Americans who could prove their identity, but this process could take years while the sailor endured harsh conditions and the dangers of the Royal Navy.

In 1806, responding to a French declaration of a complete naval blockade of Great Britain, the British demanded that neutral ships first carry their goods to Britain to pay a transit duty before they could proceed to France. Despite loopholes in these policies between 1807 and 1812, Britain, France, and their allies seized about nine hundred American ships, prompting a swift and angry American response. Jefferson's embargo sent the nation into a deep depression and drove exports down from \$108 million in 1807 to \$22 million in 1808, all while having little effect on Europeans.<sup>23</sup> Within fifteen months Congress repealed the Embargo Act, replacing it with smaller restrictions on trade with Britain and France. Although efforts to stand against Great Britain had failed, resentment of British trade policy remained widespread.

Far from the Atlantic Ocean on the American frontier, Americans were also at odds with the British Empire. From their position in Canada, the British maintained relations with Native Americans in the Old Northwest, supplying them with goods and weapons in attempts to maintain ties in case of another war with the United States. The threat of a Native uprising increased after 1805 when Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh built their alliance. The territorial governor of Illinois, William Henry Harrison, eventually convinced the Madison administration to allow for military action against the Native Americans in the Ohio Valley. The resulting Battle of Tippecanoe drove the followers of the Prophet from their gathering place but did little to change the dynamics of the region. British efforts to arm and supply Native Americans, however, angered Americans and strengthened anti-British sentiments.

## 7.10 – Waging the War

Republicans began to talk of war as a solution to these problems, arguing that it was necessary to complete the War for Independence by preventing British efforts to keep America subjugated at sea and on land. The war would also



represent another battle against the Loyalists, some 38,000 of whom had populated Upper Canada after the Revolution and sought to counter the radical experiment of the United States.<sup>24</sup>

In 1812, the Republicans held 75 percent of the seats in the House and 82 percent of the Senate, giving them a free hand to set national policy. Among them were the [War Hawks](#), whom one historian describes as “too young to remember the horrors of the American Revolution” and thus “willing to risk another British war to vindicate the nation’s rights and independence.”<sup>25</sup> This group included men who would remain influential long after the War of 1812, such as Henry Clay of Kentucky and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Convinced by the War Hawks in his party, Madison drafted a statement of the nation’s disputes with the British and asked Congress for a war declaration on June 1, 1812. The Republicans hoped that an invasion of Canada might remove the British from their backyard and force the empire to change their naval policies. After much negotiation in Congress over the details of the bill, Madison signed a declaration of war on June 18, 1812. For the second time, the United States was at war with Great Britain.

While the War of 1812 contained two key players—the United States and Great Britain—it also drew in other groups, such as Tecumseh and the Indian Confederacy. The war can be organized into three stages or theaters. The first, the Atlantic Theater, lasted until the spring of 1813. During this time, Great Britain was chiefly occupied in Europe against Napoleon, and the United States invaded Canada and sent their fledgling navy against British ships. During the second stage, from early 1813 to 1814, the United States launched their second offensive against Canada and the Great Lakes. In this period, the Americans won their first successes. The third stage, the Southern Theater, concluded with Andrew Jackson’s January 1815 victory outside New Orleans, Louisiana.

During the war, the Americans were greatly interested in Canada and the Great Lakes borderlands. In July 1812, the United States launched their first offensive against Canada. By August, however, the British and their allies rebuffed the Americans, costing the United States control over Detroit and parts of the Michigan Territory. By the close of 1813,

the Americans recaptured Detroit, shattered the Indian Confederacy, killed Tecumseh, and eliminated the British threat in that theater. Despite these accomplishments, the American land forces proved outmatched by their adversaries.

After the land campaign of 1812 failed to secure America’s war aims, Americans turned to the infant navy in 1813. Privateers and the U.S. Navy rallied behind the slogan “Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights!” Although the British possessed the most powerful navy in the world, surprisingly the young American navy extracted early victories with larger, more heavily armed ships. By 1814, however, the major naval battles had been fought with little effect on the war’s outcome.



As pictured in this 1812 political cartoon published in Philadelphia, Americans lambasted the British and their native allies for what they considered “savage” offenses during war, though Americans too were engaging in such heinous acts. William Charles, “A scene on the frontiers as practiced by the “humane” British and their “worthy” allies,” Philadelphia, 1812. Library of Congress.

With Britain's main naval fleet fighting in the Napoleonic Wars, smaller ships and armaments stationed in North America were generally no match for their American counterparts. Early on, Americans humiliated the British in single ship battles. In retaliation, Captain Philip Broke of the HMS *Shannon* attacked the USS *Chesapeake*, captained by James Lawrence, on June 1, 1813. Within six minutes, the *Chesapeake* was destroyed and Lawrence mortally wounded. Yet the Americans did not give up as Lawrence commanded them, "Tell the men to fire faster! Don't give up the ship!"<sup>26</sup> Lawrence died of his wounds three days later, and although the *Shannon* defeated the *Chesapeake*, Lawrence's words became a rallying cry for the Americans.

Two and a half months later the USS *Constitution* squared off with the HMS *Guerriere*. As the *Guerriere* tried to outmaneuver the Americans, the *Constitution* pulled along broadside and began hammering the British frigate. The *Guerriere* returned fire, but as one sailor observed, the cannonballs simply bounced off the *Constitution*'s thick hull. "Huzzah! Her sides are made of iron!" shouted the sailor, and henceforth, the *Constitution* became known as "Old Ironsides." In less than thirty-five minutes, the *Guerriere* was so badly damaged that it was set aflame rather than taken as a prize. In 1814, Americans gained naval victories on Lake Champlain near Plattsburgh, preventing a British land invasion of the United States and on the Chesapeake Bay at Fort Mchenry in Baltimore. Fort Mchenry repelled the nineteen-ship British fleet, enduring twenty-seven hours of bombardment virtually unscathed. Watching from aboard a British ship, American poet Francis Scott Key penned the verses of what would become the national anthem, "The Star Spangled Banner."

Impressive though these accomplishments were, they belied what was actually a poorly executed military campaign against the British. The U.S. Navy won their most significant victories in the Atlantic Ocean in 1813. Napoleon's defeat in early 1814, however, allowed the British to focus on North America and blockade American ports. Thanks to the blockade, the British were able to burn Washington, D.C., on August 24, 1814 and open a new theater of operations in the South. The British sailed for New Orleans, where they achieved a naval victory at Lake Borgne before losing the land invasion to Major General Andrew Jackson's troops in January 1815. This American victory actually came after the United States and the United Kingdom signed the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814, but the Battle of New Orleans proved to be a psychological victory that boosted American morale and affected how the war would be remembered.



The artist shows Washington D.C. engulfed in flames as the British troops set fire to the city in 1813. "Capture of the City of Washington," August 1814. Wikimedia.

### 7.11 – Political Outcomes of the War of 1812

But not all Americans supported the war. In 1814, New England Federalists met in Hartford, Connecticut, to try to end the war and curb the power of the Republican Party. They produced a document that proposed abolishing the three-fifths rule that afforded southern slaveholders disproportionate representation in Congress, limiting the president to a single term in office, and most importantly, demanding a two-thirds congressional majority, rather than a simple

majority, for legislation that declared war, admitted new states into the Union, or regulated commerce. With the two-thirds majority, New England's Federalist politicians believed they could limit the power of their political foes.

Contemplating the possibility of secession over the War of 1812 (fueled in large part by the economic interests of New England merchants), the Hartford Convention posed the possibility of disaster for the still-young United States. England, represented by the figure John Bull on the right side, is shown in this political cartoon with arms open to accept New England back into its empire. William Charles Jr., "The Hartford Convention or Leap No Leap." Wikimedia.



These proposals were sent to Washington, but unfortunately for the Federalists, the victory at New Orleans buoyed popular support for the Madison administration. With little evidence, newspapers accused the **Hartford Convention's** delegates of plotting secession. The episode demonstrated the waning power of Federalism and the need for the region's politicians to shed their aristocratic and Anglophile image. The next New England politician to assume the presidency, John Quincy Adams, would, in 1824, emerge not from within the Federalist fold but having served as secretary of state under President James Monroe, the leader of the Virginia Republicans.

The Treaty of Ghent essentially returned relations between the United States and Britain to their prewar status. The war, however, mattered politically and strengthened American nationalism. During the war, Americans read patriotic newspaper stories, sang patriotic songs, and bought consumer goods decorated with national emblems. They also heard stories about how the British and their Native allies threatened to bring violence into American homes. For examples, rumors spread that British officers promised rewards of "beauty and booty" for their soldiers when they attacked New Orleans.<sup>27</sup> In the Great Lakes borderlands, wartime [propaganda](#) fueled Americans' fear of Britain's Native American allies, whom they believed would slaughter men, women, and children indiscriminately. Terror and love worked together to make American citizens feel a stronger bond with their country. Because the war mostly cut off America's trade with Europe, it also encouraged Americans to see themselves as different and separate; it fostered a sense that the country had been reborn.

## 7.12 – The American System

Former treasury secretary Albert Gallatin claimed that the War of 1812 revived "national feelings" that had dwindled after the Revolution. "The people," he wrote, were now "more American; they feel and act more like a nation."<sup>28</sup> Politicians proposed measures to reinforce the fragile Union through capitalism and built on these sentiments of [nationalism](#). The United States continued to expand into Indian territories with westward settlement in far-flung new



states like Tennessee, Ohio, Mississippi, and Illinois. Between 1810 and 1830, the country added more than six thousand new post offices.

In 1817, South Carolina congressman John C. Calhoun called for building projects to “bind the republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals.”<sup>29</sup> He joined with other politicians, such as Kentucky’s powerful Henry Clay, to promote what came to be called an **American System**. They aimed to make America economically independent and encouraged commerce between the states over trade with Europe and the West Indies. The American System would include a new Bank of the United States to provide capital; a high protective tariff, which would raise the prices of imported goods and help American-made products compete; and a network of “internal improvements,” roads and canals to let people take American goods to market.

These projects were controversial. Many people believed that they were unconstitutional or would increase the federal government’s power at the expense of the states. Even Calhoun later changed his mind and joined the opposition. The War of 1812, however, had reinforced Americans’ sense of the nation’s importance in their political and economic life. Even when the federal government did not act, states created banks, roads, and canals of their own. Furthermore, increasingly aggressive incursions from Russians in the Northwest, ongoing border disputes with the British in Canada, the remote possibility of Spanish reconquest of South America, and British abolitionism in the Caribbean all triggered an American response. In a speech before the U.S. House of Representatives on July 4, 1821, Secretary of State Adams acknowledged the American need for a robust foreign policy that simultaneously protected and encouraged the nation’s growing and increasingly dynamic economy.

America . . . in the lapse of nearly half a century, without a single exception, respected the independence of other nations while asserting and maintaining her own . . . She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. . . Her glory is not dominion, but liberty. Her march is the march of the mind. She has a spear and a shield: but the motto upon her shield is, Freedom, Independence, Peace. This has been her Declaration: this has been, as far as her necessary intercourse with the rest of mankind would permit, her practice.<sup>30</sup>

Adams’s great fear was not territorial loss. He had no doubt that Russian and British interests in North America could be arrested. Adams held no reason to antagonize the Russians with grand pronouncements, nor was he generally called upon to do so. He enjoyed a good relationship with the Russian ambassador and stewarded through Congress most-favored trade status for the Russians in 1824. Rather, Adams worried gravely about the ability of the United States to compete commercially with the British in Latin America and the Caribbean. This concern deepened with the valid concern that America’s chief Latin American trading partner, Cuba, dangled perilously close to outstretched British claws.

### 7.13 – The Monroe Doctrine

What may have been the boldest declaration of America’s postwar pride came in 1823. President James Monroe issued an ultimatum to the empires of Europe in order to support several wars of independence in Latin America. The **Monroe Doctrine** declared that the United States considered its entire hemisphere, both North and South America, off-limits to new European colonization. Although Monroe was a Jeffersonian, some of his principles echoed Federalist policies.

Whereas Jefferson cut the size of the military and ended all internal taxes in his first term, Monroe advocated the need for a strong military and an aggressive foreign policy. Since Americans were spreading out over the continent, Monroe authorized the federal government to invest in canals and roads, which he said would “shorten distances and, by making each part more accessible to and dependent on the other . . . shall bind the Union more closely together.”<sup>31</sup>

The expansion of influence and territory off the continent became an important corollary to westward expansion. The U.S. government sought to keep European countries out of the Western Hemisphere and applied the principles of manifest destiny to the rest of the hemisphere. As secretary of state for President James Monroe, John Quincy Adams held the responsibility for the satisfactory resolution of ongoing border disputes between the United States, England, Spain, and Russia. Adams’s view of American foreign policy was put into clearest practice in the Monroe Doctrine, which he had great influence in crafting. As Federalists had attempted two decades earlier, Republican leaders after the War of 1812 advocated strengthening the government to strengthen the nation. Cabinet debates surrounding establishment of the Monroe Doctrine and geopolitical events in the Caribbean focused attention on that part of the world as key to the future defense of U.S. military and commercial interests, the main threat to those interests being the British. Expansion of economic opportunity and protection from foreign pressures became the overriding goals of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> But despite the philosophical confidence present in the Monroe administration’s decree, the reality of limited military power kept the Monroe Doctrine as an aspirational assertion.

## 7.14 – Conclusion

Monroe’s election after the conclusion of the War of 1812 signaled the death knell of the Federalists. Some predicted an “era of good feelings” and an end to party divisions. The War had cultivated a profound sense of union among a diverse and divided people. Yet that “era of good feelings” would never really come, and political divisions continued to grow. Though the dying Federalists would fade from political relevance, a schism within the Republican Party would give rise to Jacksonian Democrats. Political limits continued along class, gender, and racial and ethnic lines. At the same time, industrialization and the development of American capitalism required new justifications of inequality. Social change and increased immigration prompted nativist reactions that would divide “true” Americans from dangerous or undeserving “others.” Still, a **cacophony** of voices clamored to be heard and struggled to realize a social order compatible with the ideals of equality and individual liberty. As always, the meaning of democracy was in flux.

## 7.15 – Reference Material

This chapter was edited by Nathaniel C. Green, with content contributions by Justin Clark, Dea Boster, Adam Costanzo, Stephanie Gamble, Dale Kretz, Julie Richter, Bryan Rindfleisch, Angela Riotto, James Risk, Cara Rogers, Jonathan Wilfred Wilson, and Charlton Yingling.

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