

The World Turned Upside Down: Revolutionary Politics, Fries' and Gabriel's Rebellions, and the Fears of the Federalists

Simon Newman
University of Glasgow

Citizens of the early American republic lived in a world ablaze with rebellions and revolutions. Two years after Shays' Rebellion, their new federal government was inaugurated against the backdrop of the outbreak of the French Revolution. Then, while Haitian slaves revolted against their French masters, George Washington's administration was tested by the Whiskey Rebellion, which stretched from the Carolinas deep into Pennsylvania. Washington was succeeded by John Adams, who saw French armies spreading revolution around Europe while facing yet more insurrections at home: in 1798 John Fries and other German farmers in Pennsylvania mobilized to oppose a new federal tax, and in 1800 the enslaved artisan Gabriel met the dawning of the new century with an abortive slave uprising in Virginia.¹

Historians have tended to treat Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions as discrete and unconnected sectional events, isolated from one another and from the revolutionary transformations underway outside of the United States.² Yet such a view would have made little sense to early national Americans, who were well aware that their nation was at the heart of an age of revolution. Many believed that their French allies had returned from the American war for independence imbued with a spirit of liberty that had sparked the revolution of 1789. As the wars of the French Revolution spread the contagion of liberty to Haiti, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Poland, Greece, Ireland, and even the British royal navy, Americans were not slow to connect the insurrections in Pennsylvania in 1798 and in Virginia in 1800, and to place them in the context of revolutionary transformations in North America, Europe, and the Caribbean.³

Two centuries later it is all but impossible for us to recapture the excitement, the confusion, and the sheer terror inspired by rebellion and insurrection in a world turned upside down. Yet this is what we must do, for we cannot fully comprehend Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions and American reactions to them unless we interpret them in the manner of contemporaries, as domestic insurrections that were connected to one another and to those occurring abroad. This sense of pervasive revolution infused and informed the politics of the new republic. The Federalists, the self-styled friends of order and good government, interpreted Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions as part of the deadly democratization of republican revolution heralded by Thomas Paine

and championed by godless French radicals. Presidents Washington and Adams, together with their Federalist supporters, believed that first the Shaysites and the Whiskey Rebels and then Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions represented the logical culmination of the oppositional political culture of their Republican opponents, the domestic 'Jacobins' who threatened liberty and republicanism with rampant democracy.

In contrast, the Republicans, rapidly mobilizing behind Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, believed that the Federalists were counter-revolutionaries guilty of betraying the spirit and ideals of the American Revolution, and they proclaimed themselves champions of the spirit of 1776. Yet while their oppositional rhetoric and political culture celebrated revolutionary ideals, they too were disturbed by revolutionary transformations that tainted their claim to stand for a free government based on life, liberty, and property. As the nineteenth century approached, with the two parties locked in combat for control of the national government, the Republicans found themselves championing the rhetoric and ideals of the American Revolution, while yet trying to distance themselves from the all too radical revolutions of Europe and the Caribbean, and the insurrections and slave rebellions that surrounded them at home.

The events of Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions are relatively simple to relate. Largely as a result of the Anglo-American Jay Treaty of 1795, diplomatic relations between France and the United States had by 1798 deteriorated into an undeclared naval war. In order to provide for defense and fund the nation's first peacetime standing army, President Adams and the Federalist majority in Congress created a new Direct Tax on land, houses, and slaves. At the same time, in order to protect the nation against subversive elements at home and abroad, the Federalists created the Alien and Sedition Acts. As tax assessors made their way across rural Pennsylvania in the fall of 1798, German Americans, some of them revolutionary war veterans who thought the tax unconstitutional and a dangerous infringement upon their liberties, opposed them. When some of the protesters were imprisoned for refusing to submit to the Direct Tax, the rebels mobilized and released their brethren. As rebellions go, however, this was hardly a violent affair, and in the face of a sizable Federal army in no mood to negotiate, resistance evaporated.

Gabriel's Rebellion was, both in intent and resolution, a rather bloodier affair. Gabriel was a skilled blacksmith who lived and worked in Richmond, away from the plantation of his owner, Thomas Henry Prosser. A literate and deeply politicized man, Gabriel planned an insurrection that was markedly different from other slave rebellions. Accepting the Republicans' contention that the political and economic hegemony of the Federalists was inimical to liberty, Gabriel sought a rebellion that would end slavery in and around the city, wrenching property and control of skilled and unskilled workers away from the Federalist elite. Although Gabriel and his followers were most cer-

tainly attacking slavery, theirs was a rebellion that can be seen in class and political as much as racial terms, for they regarded as enemies both elite Federalists and slaveholders, and they identified poorer and propertyless whites as potential allies.

The rebellions of 1798 and 1800 had much in common. The beliefs, objectives, and actions of both sets of rebels illustrated that they were thinking and operating in the larger context of the revolutionary fervor sweeping through Europe and the Caribbean, as well as in the traditions and ideals of America's own revolutionary experience. Both in Pennsylvania and Richmond, the rebels sought to secure and protect liberties that they believed were being trampled by Adams' Federalist administration. The Fries rebels, a good number of whom had served in the war for independence, envisioned themselves as zealous defenders of local liberties, and they interpreted the Direct Tax and the Alien and Sedition Acts as dangerous assaults on their freedom. As good republican citizens, they believed it their duty to take a stand against unjust government and laws.⁴

The manner of their rebellion says much about its ideology, for the Fries rebels appropriated the rhetoric and rites of resistance employed by patriots in 1765 against the Stamp Act, and to a lesser extent by the Whiskey Rebels of 1795. Harassing tax collectors, freeing fellow protesters imprisoned for their failure to pay the tax, and gathering for ritual affirmation of their republican ideals around liberty poles all placed the Fries Rebels in the patriot tradition. One such liberty pole harkened back to the Whiskey Rebellion and even further to the Stamp Act crisis with the inscription

Tone the Tinkerer, author.

Liberty and No Excise and No Stamp Act.

Mr. Wells you are a cheating son of a Bitch.

Huzza for Liberty and No Excise and No Stamp Act.

This Liberty Pole is erected by Tone the Tinkerer and

whoever cuts it down or demolishes it shall have his house
torn down and demolished.⁵

Yet their actions also placed the Fries Rebels in the context of European rebellion and revolution in the 1790s. Some wore French liberty caps or red, white and blue cockades, emblems that had been reinvigorated and indeed transformed by the French Revolution. To wear these caps or cockades in 1798 was to identify oneself as a supporter of the ideals first championed in America but then taken up by France. Given that the Direct Tax was intended to finance a war against revolutionary France, these emblems spoke loudly of a belief that the Federalist government was betraying liberty and its just defenders in France, and as such they could appear as treasonous.⁶

Gabriel's Rebellion was similarly linked to the ideals and rites of the American and French Revolutions, as well as to the uprising in Haiti. Douglas Egerton has illustrated that the political culture and rhetoric of the Republicans and their assault on the Federalists had a profound effect upon Gabriel and his supporters.⁷ With their toasts to liberty and equality, their celebration of the Painite and Jeffersonian ideals of 1776, and their fervent opposition to a Federalist administration that they believed was bent on denying and destroying liberty, the Republicans in the taverns and workshops of Richmond spoke a language that resonated among Gabriel's followers. Foreign revolution loomed equally large in their consciousness: two white Frenchmen were alleged to have played a role in planning the uprising, while Gabriel spoke often of the help that the rebels might expect from the Haitian rebels who were creating the first black republic in the western hemisphere.

It is only by placing the Pennsylvania and Virginia rebellions in this larger context of late-eighteenth century revolutionary transformation that we can understand why the Federalists reacted to them as they did. It is tempting, perhaps, to see these as the opening years of a great national adventure, symbolized by the Louisiana Purchase and the heroic Lewis and Clark expedition. Yet such a focus obscures the fact that many Americans were looking eastward rather than westward, and that they regarded revolutionary Europe and domestic insurrections on the eastern seaboard as far more pressing concerns than the trans-Appalachian west.

To Federalists, this was a world gone made, and they sought with increasing desperation to keep the United States immune from the contagion of revolutionary liberty. Unlike their Republican counterparts, the Federalists were loath to assume that humans were naturally virtuous. From the earliest stages of the American Revolution, conservatives with a firm belief in the natural depravity of humankind had believed the republic to be vulnerable to destruction by its own citizens, and the revolutionary chaos of the 1790s led many to turn to the Federalist "friends of order". The very existence of partisan opposition to Federalist policies—whether expressed in Congressional speeches, in political festivals and toasts, in symbolic and ceremonial forms, or in crowd actions—encouraged the Federalists to view social and political disintegration as being as much of a threat within the United States as in Europe. With a cyclical view of history, the Federalists believed that the early success of the American republic was bound to be followed by decline and fall, as the histories of all other republics illustrated—including, by 1800, revolutionary France. It was all too easy for the friends of order to interpret attacks on their government and its policies as the beginning of the end of their great republican experiment.⁸

These attitudes gave the Federalists a starkly different view of liberty and equality than that championed by the Republicans. While the latter empha-

sized the rights of the individual against the state, the Federalists countered that strong government and the rule of law furnished the most effective means of protecting the republic and the rights and liberties of the citizenry. As one writer in Boston's Federalist *Palladium* suggested in 1801,

The democrats have no idea that there can be liberty if it is controuled [sic]. [They believe that the] controul [sic] of laws is all the worse because it is the perversion and usurpation of the very powers that proceed from the people... For with them the *power* of individuals is their *liberty*, whereas, in truth, there can be no liberty unless the power of individuals is restrained by law.⁹

Federalists employed the 'myth' of popular sovereignty to strengthen their position, using it to validate their claims that the citizens of a republic should obey the laws passed by their elected representatives and enforced by a strong central government. The Federalist jurist Francis Dana pointed out that the Republicans "must hold the principle *That all legitimate authority is derived from the people.*" Whatever "forms of government" and laws were subsequently created in such a republic, they "demand, and ought to receive our ready obedience and firm support," since they emanated from a republican government whose authority was derived from the people.¹⁰

When the Federalists labeled their Republican opponents 'Democrats,' they intended the term as an insult. Arguing that in a true democracy "legislative powers are exercised directly by all the citizens," Federalists regarded real democracy as an impossibility. Should all of the citizens of the United States attempt to exercise direct control over their society, the Federalists reasoned, chaos and the loss of freedom would inevitably result. Accordingly they were extremely wary of crowd actions and the mobilization of large numbers of citizens for political feasts, festivals and parades, especially when people gathered to oppose the policies of a Federalist administration elected by a majority of the American electorate. (As one Federalist commented in 1796, the "*cause of liberty, the rights of man, the happiness of the people*" are "very clever words, to collect a mob.") When Republicans mobilized their opposition forces with the rallying cries of "liberty and equality," many Federalists saw only an unrepresentative crowd capable of destroying popular government and liberties. Fisher Ames believed that "the progress of mob equality is invariably to despotism," while Noah Webster gloomily predicted that "popular governments have always been destroyed by the people themselves."¹¹

Federalists were horrified by the large-scale celebrations of the new French republic mounted by Republicans.¹² With typical acerbity William Cobbett observed that it was "a sarcasm on republicanism" to describe France as a republic, concluding that if indeed one described France in that way, then a republic by definition included "all that is ruinous, tyrannical, blasphemous

and bloody.” With an eye to the activities of pro-French Republicans in the United States, Cobbett went on to state that “if ever our happy and excellently constituted Republic should be overturned, it will be done under the mask of republicanism.” From the comparative calm of Hanover, New Hampshire, Dartmouth College president John Wheelock wondered how any individual could in 1800, “remain attached” to revolutionary France, since it had become abundantly clear “that it is a government of men, & not of laws.” Throughout most of the 1790s, there was general agreement among the Federalists that France did not represent republicanism and liberty, for the French Revolution had perverted these values, and now threatened their continued health and existence in the United States and elsewhere. As Pennsylvania Federalist Alexander Addison noted, the French concept of “Liberty was that every man should be free from all law, and be a law to himself.”¹³

The social violence of the French Revolution horrified the Federalists. As Noah Webster noted in his *American Minerva*, the people of France had pursued liberty and equality but had destroyed any who they believed endangered this quest. “Now in reality,” he concluded, “where the people have the power of doing this, there is *no* liberty.” In the French people’s search for “*liberty & equality*. . . [they] have run into despotism” by which the crowds and their chosen rulers had destroyed those very values.¹⁴ Fisher Ames recorded how the “doctrines of equality, and the rights of man, and the uncontrolled power of the people” had held sway in France during most of the 1790s. Once the French Revolution was underway, nobody had any

Power but the people. They had all the power and of course unbounded Liberty. How little is it considered that arbitrary power, no matter whether of Prince or people, makes tyranny; and that in salutary restraint is liberty. . . There is no condition of a state in which it is more impossible that liberty Should subsist. . . than after order has been overthrown, and popular Licentiousness triumphs in its stead.¹⁵

By the end of the decade, with Franco-American relations at their lowest ebb, Federalists broadened their attack on the French Revolution. William Cobbett’s publication of *The Cannibal’s Progress*, a vehemently francophobe assault on the French Revolution, may have sold as many as two thousand copies when first released in Philadelphia. Cobbett boasted that the hundred copies he sent to New York sold out in a matter of hours, and that he had since received an order for twelve-hundred more. Even allowing the partisan printer’s exaggeration, it is clear that the work was extremely popular. Tens of thousands of Federalists read this and similar works, or extracts from them in the Federalist press, and their fears of the French Revolution and its American supporters were both confirmed and reinforced.¹⁶

For Federalists one of the most frightening aspects of both the French Revolution and American celebrations of it was the prominence of extralegal crowd actions. As early as 1790, American newspapers were recording that crowds were pressuring the French king and National Assembly into making certain decisions: as one Federalist correspondent pointed out,

This may be a *democratical* government—but surely it is not a *free* Government.—*Query*, who governs France? The national Assembly; The people *they* represent; the national troops; or the mob of Paris?¹⁷

When Alexander Hamilton allegedly exclaimed during a dinner conversation—“Your people, sir,—your people is a great beast!” he colorfully expressed the Hobbesian nature of Federalist fears of the population running wild. By 1792 the friends of order were bemoaning the “deplorable state of France,” where all legitimate authorities—including both the King and the National Assembly—were at the mercy of “the Constitution, which places legislative power in a single body of men, unchecked and uncontrolled.” The Parisian crowds attracted enormous criticism from Federalist commentators, who believed that “the mob of Paris have acquired the power of dictating to the national legislature, and with impunity, of deluging the streets with blood!”¹⁸

Republican celebrations of the victories and civic holidays of revolutionary France, accompanied as these were by pointed criticisms of the Federalist government and its policies, suggested to Federalists that America might go the way of France. Many writers began comparing the worst crowd violence of the French Revolution with Republican policies and activities at home. One Federalist correspondent slid easily from an attack on the “cruel and unjust *assassination*” of Louis XVI to an assault on the “unprincipled slanderers” in America who were undermining the Federalist administration. “The views of this Government defaming-cabal,” he continued,

seem extended only to the promotion of anarchy and confusion—every blow aimed at real good order and rational liberty, is trumpeted by them as a deed of patriotism. . . [and] is celebrated with all the *pomp* and *parade of levelling eloquence*. . .¹⁹

In the columns of the *Gazette of the United States* a Federalist attacked the Republicans as “our anarchy-men,” complaining that their weakening of “government, or bringing the laws into general abhorrence, is manifestly an attack on the liberty of the people.” More frightening than the Republican crowds and festivals were the leaders who inspired them, the “highfliers [who] use every means to make the people abhor the laws, the constitution, Congress, and the executive officers.” Two years later “A Farmer” wrote in the same

newspaper that America was lucky in not having a rabble as large as those in Paris and London, composed of people suffering under “vice, ignorance, idleness, and the rod of depression.” However, America did have a “corps of officers to lead” a domestic rabble, and these Republicans were plotting “to bring about a state of what the Jacobins term *sovereign insurrection* and *permanent revolution*.”²⁰ Many years later, John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson recalling the “terrorism” of Shays’ Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the Fries Rebellion, and

the terrorism excited by Genet, in 1793, when ten thousand people in the streets of Philadelphia, day after day threatened to drag Washington out of his house, and effect a revolution in the government, or compel it to declare war in favor of the French revolution and against England.²¹

While Adams may have been characteristically heated in his description of late-eighteenth century crowd actions, most Federalists shared his fear of “terrorism”. The Boston lawyer Francis Dana believed that Federal and all state constitutions had been created “with all that jealousy for the Rights of Man, which an attachment to Civil Liberty. . . will never fail to inspire.” However, he continued,

lest we should use our Liberty as a Cloak for Licentiousness, it should Ever be remembered that the right of resisting the Powers that be—of pulling down and setting up Governments—of changing altering and amending them from time to time, belongs to the Community alone. . . [And that] it is the indispensable Duty of Individuals to submit to the authority and Laws in being, to this general Will of the Community, as long as they continue Members of it.²²

While the Republicans emphasized the rights of the people against their governments, and while Jefferson himself mused about the desirability of a revolution every generation, the Federalists believed that their republican frame of government protected the liberties of the citizens of the United States, and that as such this government deserved the allegiance and obedience of all Americans. “Counter-revolutionary conservatives” like the Federalists did not recognize any serious social causes behind the French Revolution, an event which Republicans interpreted as a great step forward in the human quest for liberty. Rather, by the mid-1790s, Federalists could see only conspiracy—against republican government in general and themselves in particular—as the motivating forces behind the French Revolution and its American supporters. As a result, it became a political and ideological necessity for the Federalists to attack the principles and the supporters of the American Revolution.²³

By 1797 many Federalist commentators were openly welcoming British victories over France. Cobbett complained that Philadelphia's church bells had been rung throughout the early 1790s to announce French military victories, but that during the waning years of the decade they were never rung to celebrate British victories over France. He condemned this as unjust, arguing that it was inappropriate that "the bells of a *neutral* country should ring on *one side only*." A year later another Federalist claimed that Americans should be "compelled to acknowledge that Sir HORATIO NELSON and Lord HOWE have fought our battles," and a week later another noted that these French defeats were clearly "favorable to the United States." Writing from Richmond, Virginia, William Ellery Channing claimed to be exulting at the superiority of the British and another defeat for revolutionary France.²⁴

Throughout much of the 1790s the Federalists had feared that the French Revolutionary principles were gaining ground in the United States, for they had found themselves surrounded by popular expressions of support and affection for the French Revolution and the ideals it represented. When Democratic-Republicans wore tri-colored cockades, took part in liberty pole ceremonies, or attended meetings to protest the Jay Treaty between the United States and Great Britain, Federalists saw these badges and rites as a threat to the American republic itself.²⁵ Since the Republicans had taken to wearing the tri-colored cockade as a symbol of their support for revolutionary France, Federalists assumed that those who wore the cockade supported the most radical positions favored in France, including those that betrayed the spirit of the revolution. As he saw liberty and republicanism rapidly disappearing from France, Noah Webster pointed out that there was no connection between the reality of liberty and the cockades, poles, and caps used in France and America to symbolize it. Angrily he declared that if "Frenchmen worship red caps and cockades, why half the town must stick a French cockade in their hats, and a red cap must be stuck upon a pole in all public places."²⁶

Federalists regarded tri-colored cockades as badges of affiliation with the crowds who wore them in Paris, the crowds that appeared to be destroying all order and rank in society and government. Crowd rule, little better than anarchy and a dire threat to the health of the republic, terrified the Federalists. John Adams was not alone in his reaction to the "terrorism" of Republican crowds in the 1790s. For all of Adams's exaggeration and paranoia, such fears were common among federalists, and few of them were surprised when those who did rebel against Federal authority wore red, white, and blue ribbons. A French tricolor was flying above the courthouse in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, when a Federal force took control of the town away from the Whiskey rebels. Five years later, during the trial of John Fries, Jacob Eyerly recalled how dozens of the "rebels" he had seen in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, wore "three colored cockades," while many members of an even larger band that he spotted

just outside Upper Milford also "had French cockades in their hats, red, blue, and white."²⁷

As the century drew to a close, and as Napoleon consolidated his position in Europe, Federalist fears for the American republic mounted. Their beliefs led them to expect that irresponsible and devious rabble-rousers would naturally attempt to exploit the people to gain power. Popular uprisings such as Shays' Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion had been dangerous enough, but when respected political leaders mobilized crowds to protest government policy, the very foundations of liberty were threatened. In a letter defending the Jay Treaty, addressed to the editors of *The Mercury*, one Federalist asked

Can any one doubt of the determination of the Antifederalists to overthrow the Federal Government. What do they mean when they call themselves '75 men, and speak of the spirit of '75 times? Why this must be their obvious meaning, that as they pulled down a foreign government that was usurped over them, they have the same right to pull down the American government, notwithstanding the people themselves established it in a time of profound peace.²⁸

By the end of the 1790s, Federalists felt justified in identifying any opposition to their government, whether in the Fries rebellion, in Republican crowd actions, or in newspaper editorials as subversive and dangerous. The Quasi War prompted a brief resurgence in Federalist popularity, allowing them to employ the Alien and Sedition Acts and a large standing army to attempt the destruction of the Republican party and this oppositional political culture. One correspondent in the *Massachusetts Mercury* defended the Alien and Sedition Acts by railing against the Republicans who had made such laws necessary.

No people on earth was ever more completely cursed than this is and has been by a set of parricidal miscreants, who have been preying on the vitals of the country, and who, by their unceasing abuse of the best Government and the best Administration which any nation is blest with. . . have brought us into the situation which we have so much reason to deplore. The *open* enemies of our country have never taken half the pains to render our Government and our rulers infamous and contemptible in the eyes of the world, than these wretches have, who call themselves Americans, patriots and Republicans. It is high time that a stop should be put to their career, and that they should be made to feel the resentment of an injured country.²⁹

Their blanket attacks on all popular opposition to the federal government required the Federalists to distance themselves from the American revo-

lutionary heritage, and by 1797 William Cobbett was quite comfortable dismissing Thomas Paine as "a traitor." As early as 1793 another Federalist had dismissed the 1770s as "the times of anarchy and confusion," concluding that the Republicans who "profess to venerate the Congress of '76" were actually intent on destroying the laws and liberties that America's patriots had secured.³⁰

As the French Revolution and republic disintegrated, Federalist suspicions of any and all revolutionary ideology increased. They complained that "the character of our revolution [is] disgraced, by being compared in its principle with that of the French." Alexander Hamilton did "not like the comparison," and as early as 1793 he asserted that "there is no real resemblance between what was the cause of America & what is the cause of France." As far as Federalists were concerned, the American revolution "was a revolution not only of right, but of the strictest necessity," in which Americans "did not renounce their allegiance, till their monarch became their enemy," at which point Americans "rejoiced to become peaceable citizens of a free government, enjoying the tranquillity of subordination without its oppressions." Increasingly fearful that French revolutionary republicanism would invade and corrupt the United States, providing Republicans with the wherewithal to undermine the Federalist governments of the 1790s, more and more Federalists repudiated the ideals that had inspired their own revolution, taking the revolution out of American independence.³¹

By 1798 Federalists believed their world to be at the edge of a great abyss. Great Britain, the only nation strong enough to stave off revolutionary anarchy, was on the verge of collapse. The Bank of England had halted cash payments, government bonds had lost most of their value, and much of the British navy had mutinied at Spithead, Nore, and on the open seas. A major revolt was brewing in Ireland, the new French alliances with Spain and Holland threatened Britain's naval supremacy, and Napoleon was assembling an armada to invade England. Given that Federalists saw Great Britain as the only barrier between France and world domination, it is hardly surprising that they reacted so strongly against those Americans who had identified themselves with France and against the Federalists.³²

This, then, was the larger context in which Federalists reacted to Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions. Their struggle to hold the line against France in 1798, the Direct Tax and the Alien and Sedition Acts were all informed by their desperate desire to preserve liberty and republicanism as they understood them. The uprisings in Pennsylvania and Virginia appeared to them as further evidence that the contagion of a rebellious spirit, antithetical to all that they had fought for in the war for independence, had spread to the United States. Ironically, however, Federalist fears and even paranoia may have helped motivate the very rebellions they sought to avoid. During most of the 1790s the Federalists had ruled Pennsylvania with a coalition that had avoided real and vehe-

ment conservatism by allowing a good deal of self government to the diverse ethnic and religious communities of the countryside. But in enforcing the Direct Tax of 1798, designed to fund an army to protect the nation against foreign and perhaps even domestic revolutionaries, the Adams administration mistakenly appointed Irish, Quaker, and Moravian tax assessors and collectors, many of whom were deeply offensive to the Pennsylvania German "church people," most of whom had happily voted Federalist when allowed to govern themselves. These appointments, followed by the suppression of the Fries Rebellion, shattered the Federalist coalition in Pennsylvania, for they recast the Federalists as a party of elite privilege and dominative central government. In 1799 Pennsylvania elected Thomas McKean as the state's first Republican governor, and a year later the state was crucial in electing Thomas Jefferson as the nation's first Republican president.³³

In Virginia, too, an extremely negative image of the Federalists contributed to the very rebellions the friends of order sought to forestall. To the white workers, free blacks and slaves who conspired in the bars and back alleys of Richmond, the city's Federalist mercantile elite were an unscrupulous lot who cheated honest workers and exploited bound laborers with ruthless greed. Against the backdrop of the presidential election, Gabriel led a Republican rebellion against the Federalist rulers of Richmond in his very own "revolution of 1800."³⁴ It is perhaps the greatest irony of early national Federalism that the party's fears of revolutionary insurrection helped fuel the very rebellions that the friends of order most feared.

Yet the fears of the Federalists were not entirely groundless. Their Republican opponents had celebrated the same rhetoric and ideals of radical revolution that had inspired the rebels in Pennsylvania and Virginia, and although Republican leaders distanced themselves from the Fries rebels and destroyed Gabriel and his supporters, in a very real way rebellion was something that the Republican leadership were more than willing to countenance. Thomas Jefferson's defeat of John Adams in the presidential election of 1800 long has been regarded as a peaceful revolution, yet it might all too easily have become a real and bloody revolution had Adams remained as president, even though the House vote that decided the election might quite constitutionally have kept Adams in the White House. In a letter to Jefferson, Pennsylvania Governor Thomas McKean outlined the actions he would have taken had such an eventuality occurred. He would have begun by issuing a proclamation "enjoining obedience [to Jefferson] on all officers civil and military and the citizens of the state"; a resolution approving this measure would have been passed by the Republican majority in the Pennsylvania lower house and the minority in the upper house; the "Militia would have been warned to be ready, [and] arms for upwards of twenty thousand" prepared. Finally, McKean would have ordered "the arresting and bringing to justice" of all Federal and state officials who refused to acknowledge the new Republican administration.³⁵

Jefferson regarded McKean's plans as "highly acceptable," and he responded that Governor James Monroe of Virginia would have followed a similar course had a Federalist become president, concluding that "on two such massive columns as Pensva. and Virga., nothing could be feared." The militias of Pennsylvania and Virginia, containing many of the men who organized and participated in Republican political culture, might have been employed to effect a more serious breach of the Constitution than any for which the Federalists might have been found guilty.³⁶

While the Republicans were all too willing to countenance the language of revolution in their political culture and armed rebellion in their search for power, Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions horrified them. However much the Pennsylvania rebels built upon Jeffersonian and Republican ideology, their actions embarrassed the Republicans and threatened their political ambitions. Even worse was the slave uprising in Virginia, which too had built upon the ideological foundations of the American and French Revolutions celebrated by the Republicans. While Governors McKean and Monroe prepared for armed rebellion in support of Jefferson's bid for the presidency, they condemned similar ideology and actions when employed by German farmers and by black slaves and freemen. Monroe isolated the slave rebels from the media and destroyed many of the records surrounding the uprising, thereby allowing the Republicans to recast the event as nothing more than a bloody slave rebellion, rather than a deeply politicized urban rebellion of both free and enslaved men that was infused with the ideology of the Republican party.

Frie's and Gabriel's rebellions were deeply immersed in the political ideology and culture of the revolutionary world of the late-eighteenth century world. Mounting Federalist fears of revolutionary assaults against duly constituted republican government encouraged the friends of order to pursue repressive policies that helped fuel the very rebellions they most feared; on the other hand, Republicans were far less willing to countenance truly revolutionary assaults against property than the Federalists imagined, yet were more than willing to consider a coup d'etat in the name of the people. If we are to fully understand the reaction of both Federalists and Republicans to the rebellions that closed out the eighteenth and opened the nineteenth centuries, we must recapture once again a sense of the power, the wonder, and the fear that the age of revolution inspired in late-eighteenth century America.

Notes

Simon Newman is Director of the Andrew Hook Centre for American Studies at the University of Glasgow. He presented an earlier version of this paper at the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association in November 1997, and is grateful to all those present for their ideas and suggestions, particularly Owen Ireland.

1. For many years the standard sources for the Fries Rebellion were Thomas Carpenter, *The Two Trials of John Fries, on an Indictment for Treason* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1800); and W. W. H. Davis, *The Fries Rebellion*, (Doyleston, 1899). More recent studies include Peter Levine, "The Fries Rebellion: Social Violence and the Politics of the New Nation," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 40 (1973): 241-258; Jane Schaffer Elsmere, "The Trials of John Fries," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 103 (1979), 432-435; and most notably Paul Douglas Newman, "Fries Rebellion and American Political Culture, 1798-1800," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 119 (1995), 37-73. Historians of Gabriel's rebellion have found it somewhat easier to place that uprising in a larger context. See, for example, Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); and Douglas R. Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy and the Election of 1800," *Journal of Southern History*, 56 (1990), 191-124, and *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

2. The best recent example of the tendency to treat Fries' and Gabriel's rebellions as completely dissimilar and therefore unrelated events is James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 209-210, 198, 241, 242. Such an approach is echoed in most textbooks. See, for example, the treatment of the rebellions in John M. Murrin, et. al., *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*, Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1996), I, 293-294, 278-280. For the best evocation of this era of revolu-

tion, see R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America*, 2 vols., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959-64).

4. See Newman, "Fries Rebellion and American Political Culture."

5. *Oracle of Dauphin* (Harrisburg), 6 March 1799, 13 March 1799; Adam Boyd Hamilton, "Notes on Fries Rebellion," Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. "Tom the Tinker" had appeared during the Whiskey Rebellion, and these rites of resistance dated back to the Stamp Act crisis of 1765. I am very grateful to Paul Douglas Newman for sharing these references.

6. Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 146-163.

7. See Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*.

8. Many historians have examined Federalist theory and philosophy. In particular, see Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 177-183, 194-195, 202, 123-124; Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism*, 135-139; Elisha P. Douglass, "Fisher Ames, Spokesman for New England Federalism," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103 (1959): 696-699. See also Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*; John S. Malsberger, "The Political Thought of Fisher Ames," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (1982): 1-20; Ronald Formisano, "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789-1840," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974): 473-487.

9. *New-England Palladium*, 22 May 1801.

10. Francis Dana, "Grand Jury Change, November Term, 1796," Dana Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. For a discussion of the 'myth' of popular sovereignty, see Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988).

11. The definition of a democracy appears in a letter from Noah Webster to Joseph Priestly, 20 January 1800, in *Letters of Noah Webster*, ed. Harry R. Warfel (New York: Library Publishers, 1953), 207; *Gazette of the United States*, 31 December 1796; Fisher Ames, "Equality No. VI," in Fisher Ames, *Works of Fisher Ames. Compiled By a Number of His Friends. To Which Are Prefixed, Notices of His Life and Character*,

- (Boston: T. B. Wait and Company, 1809), 251; *American Minerva*, 30 July 1795.
12. For a discussion of French Revolutionary festivals in the United States, see Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 120-151.
13. Peter Porcupine [William Cobbett], *A Bone to Gnaw, For the Democrats. . .* (Philadelphia: Thomas Bradford, 1795), 54; Porcupine, *The Bloody Buoy Thrown Out As A Warning to the Political Pilots of America. . .* (Philadelphia: for Benjamin Davies, 1796), 234-235; John Wheelock to Jonathan Freeman, Hanover, 20 February 1800, General Manuscripts Collection, Dartmouth College Library; and Alexander Addison, *Rise & Progress of Revolution: A Charge to the Grand Juries of the County Courts of the Fifth Circuit of the State of Pennsylvania, At December Sessions, 1800* (Philadelphia: William Young, 1801), 7-8.
14. "Revolution in France," *American Minerva*, 3 November 1796.
15. [Fisher Ames], "Equality No. V," *New-England Palladium*, 11 December 1801.
16. Anthony Aufreere, *The Cannibal's Progress: Or, The Dreadful Horrors of French Invasion, As Displayed by the Republican Officers and Soldiers, In Their Perfidy, Rapacity, Ferociousness, And Brutality, Exercised Towards the Innocent Inhabitants of Germany. Translated from the German, by Anthony Aufreer, [sic] Esq.*, (Philadelphia: William Cobbett, 1798); "Cannibal's Progress," *Porcupine's Gazette*, 23 June 1798. In an attempt to increase the circulation of the pamphlet still further, Cobbett gave his permission to other publishers to reprint the work as they pleased. His edition sold for six cents, and it was clearly intended as a popular work.
17. *Gazette of the United States*, 13 April 1793.
18. For Hamilton's comments, see Theophilus Parsons, *Memoir of Theophilus Parsons, Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts; With Notices of Some of His Contemporaries. By His Son Theophilus Parsons*, (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1859), 109-110; *Connecticut Courant*, 8 October 1792.
19. *Gazette of the United States*, 13 April 1793.
20. *Gazette of the United States*, 31 October 1792, 11 February 1794.
21. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 30 June 1813, in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J. Cappon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), II, 346-347.
22. Francis Dana, "Charge to the Grand Jury, 1791," Dana Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
23. See R. R. Palmer, *The World of the French Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), II, 94, and Gary B. Nash, "The American Clergy and the French Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3d. ser., 22 (1965), 403-406.
24. *Porcupine's Gazette*, 21 December 1797; *Massachusetts Mercury*, 13, 23 November 1798; William Ellery Channing to William Smith Shaw, 28 November 1798, William Ellery Channing Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
25. For an analysis of European opposition to the liberty cap and tri-colored cockade, see Aileen Ribeiro, *Fashion in the French Revolution*, (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1988), 53, 56, 85, 147.
26. Noah Webster, *The Revolution in France, Considered in Respect to its Progress and Effects*, (New York: George Bunce, 1794); *Massachusetts Mercury*, 11 September 1798; Webster, *The Revolution in France*, 23; *American Minerva*, 24 January 1795.
27. Alexander Graydon, *Memoirs of a Life, Chiefly Passed in Pennsylvania, Within the Last Sixty Years*, (1811), (Edinburgh: George Ramsay and Company, 1822), 392; Carpenter, *The Two Trials of John Fries*, 46, 49. For more on the place of tri-colored cockades in American political culture see Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 146-147, 154-163.
28. "A Federalist," *The Mercury*, 11 August 1795.
29. *Massachusetts Mercury*, 12 June 1798.
30. [William Cobbett], *The Life of Thomas Paine, Interspersed With remarks and reflections by Peter Porcupine, Author of the Bloody Buoy, Etc. Etc.*, (Philadelphia: 1797), 30-31; *Gazette of the United States*, 1 June 1793.
31. James Savage, *An Oration Delivered July 4, 1811, at the Request of the Selectmen of Boston, In Commemoration of American Independence*, (Boston: John Eliot, Jr., 1811), 7; Alexander Hamilton to unknown recipient, 18 May 1793, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed., Harold C. Syrett, et. al., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 14, 473, 476; Andrew Ritchie, Jr., *An Oration, Pronounced July 4, 1808, At the Request of the Selectmen of the Town of Boston, In Commemoration of the*

Anniversary of American Independence (Boston: Russell & Cutler, 1808), 6-7; Elisha P. Douglass, "Fisher Ames, Spokesman for New England Federalism," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 103 (1959): 699.

32. See Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War With France, 1797-1801*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 63-64, and R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), II, 459-505.

33. Kenneth W. Keller, "Rural Politics and the Collapse of Pennsylvania Federalism," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 72 (1982), 7, 26, 40, 55-56.

34. Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy," 194-195, 199-202.

35. Thomas McKean to Thomas Jefferson, 21 March 1801, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. I am grateful to John Catanzariti and the late Gene Sheridan for showing me a copy of this letter held at the Thomas Jefferson Papers office at Princeton University. For discussion and analysis of this incident, see Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 268-271.

36. Thomas Jefferson to Thomas McKean, 9 March 1801, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress. Thanks are again due to John Catanzariti and Gene Sheridan for showing me a copy of this letter.