Benjamin Franklin Bache's Attack on George Washington

It is common knowledge that during his second administration George Washington was severely attacked by radical opposition journalists. Serious attacks on the President began with Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality in 1793 and increased with the Genêt affair of that year, but did not reach a crescendo until after Washington had signed and defended the Jay Treaty in 1795. In the year before Washington's retirement the attacks had become so extreme that "the President was assailed with a virulence such as few of his successors have suffered."¹

The attacks were as varied as they were virulent. Included in the catalog of Washington's alleged shortcomings, failures, and crimes were: his cold, aloof, arrogant manner; his lack of intelligence and wisdom; and his love of luxury and display. According to his critics, he was both incompetent and unRepublican. He had been a poor general and a lukewarm patriot; he was ungrateful to France; he had conspired to destroy American liberty through a new alliance with Great Britain; and he had attempted to promote his own infallibility while disregarding the sovereign will of the people.

Surprisingly, historians of the era and biographers of Washington have not made the most of the colorful details of these attacks. Early writers on Washington, occupied with making Washington into the national demigod, were perhaps too imbued with the sensibilities and delicate proprieties of their romantic age to trouble themselves with recitations on the violent abuse directed against their hero. Jared Sparks, for example, dealt with the attacks by simply noting that Washington was assaulted "with a perseverance,

and sometimes with an acrimony, for which the best of causes could hardly afford an apology." Twentieth-century commentators have been less sensitive, but even they, while attempting to focus on Washington the man rather than Washington the myth, have failed to do more than mention the attacks in some cursory fashion. Almost all writers have dismissed the attacks by claiming that they were the banal work of extremists and by implying that the words "invective," "diatribe," and "scurrility" tell us all we really have to know about the attacks and the attackers.

The unwillingness of writers to risk exciting or provoking their readers with résumés of the attacks is understandable, however, given the perspectives from which Washington's presidency has usually been viewed. The standard view, whether directly stated or subtly implied, has been simple. Washington, we are told, was the object of abuse because he was above partisanship, above petty political quarrels; he was the keeper of the nation's long-term interests. He had resisted the conflict and strife of partisan division by pursuing, with high-minded determination, the establishment of a nation united in its opposition to foreign entanglements. Although many recent writers have reminded us that Washington was not entirely above partisanship and did indeed become a Federalist, such things as Washington's achievements in establishing presidential responsibility, his attempt to reconcile the differences between Hamilton and Jefferson, and his plea for unity in the Farewell Address have created an image of the man that hardly allows the partisan charge to make much impression.

3 Rather than undertake an extensive bibliographic analysis of Washingtoniana, it should be adequate to say that the most extensive coverage of the attacks on Washington are to be found in John Bach McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1936), II, a work that contains some extensive quotations from the newspaper attacks, and John Alexander Carroll and Mary Wells Ashworth, *George Washington. First in Peace* (New York, 1957). The latter is the seventh volume of Douglas Southall Freeman's excellent and comprehensive biography of Washington. Carroll and Ashworth seldom dwell on any attack for more than a few lines nor do they editorialize on the attacks. The attacks are generally referred to by them as filled with "invective" and "slanders."
4 Among early biographers, John Marshall, Mason Weems, and Washington Irving either stated that Washington was above partisanship or implied that he was. John Marshall, *The Life of George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1807); Mason L. Weems, *The Life of Washington,
In contrast to the disinterested patriot and demigod Washington, we have then been presented with a profile of his attackers, men who were mean, narrow, self-interested partisans. At least until recent times the gap between Washington and his assailants was as great as that between a Calvinist God and the unregenerate sinner. But even modern writers have seldom been willing to say more than that Washington's critics were mere politicos and party hacks who had no principles aside from their desire to drive Washington from office and get their own man into the presidency. The idea that the attacks emanated from base, almost perverted, minds was further encouraged when perpetrators of the Washington myth claimed that Washington's desire for national unity, his hatred of political strife, and his noble rightness had led him to remain aloof from the attacks. It is now admitted that Washington was bothered by them, although he avoided the ignominy of publicly rebutting his assailants, and that they sealed his determination to resign in 1797.

In some respects, it is difficult to argue with the conclusions made by these historians. After all, the attacks were abusive and libelous; they were employed as a means to drive Washington from office;


5 The following, taken from John C. Miller, The Federalist Era, 1789-1801 (New York, 1960), 233, is typical of the statements writers have used in characterizing Washington's attackers: "In their efforts to turn the Washington and Adams administrations out of office, Republican journalists had freely used lies, canards, and misrepresentations; nothing was too scurrilous to serve as grist for their propaganda mills." Miller objectively charges some Federalists with acting in the same way against their opponents.

6 Many early biographers tended to ignore Washington's sensitivity to political attacks. McMaster's History is an early work that acknowledges how the attacks deeply bothered Washington. Henry Cabot Lodge, George Washington (Boston, 1898), II, another relatively old work, seems to imply that Washington should have been less troubled than he was by the attacks since they were simply political assaults, in Lodge's opinion, and not conspiratorial. Nathan Schachner, The Founding Fathers (New York, 1954), 396, simply states that Washington was "thin-skinned"; most modern scholars would probably agree.
and the attackers were committed partisans. Many of the charges made against the President were so patently false and ludicrous that we might almost forgive those who have offered us dimensionless summaries or superficial analyses of the attacks.

In fact, however, it is a mistake to cast aside the assaults on Washington as nothing more than colorful but inconsequential examples of the extremes of journalistic rhetoric. Newspaper abuse was admittedly common in the 1790s, and we might easily think that Washington was only receiving his natural share of that abuse. But the truth is that Washington received much more than his share; much of the invective of the decade was consciously and concertedly directed at him. In addition, because newspaper abuse was common, we have come to regard that abuse as little more than a literary trademark and style of newspapers of the age. We have too often forgotten that the shrill editorials of the 1790s reveal the serious political polarities of the decade. Conflict over basic political principles and policies, not consensus, characterized the era. Journalists were not trying to better each other in some trite competition for the most sensational or novel editorials. John Fenno, William Cobbett, Philip Freneau, Benjamin Franklin Bache and others were committed to definite political principles; the extremist editorials appearing in their newspapers were part of unrestrained campaigns by these men to have their principles prevail in a world that appeared to be at an important crossroad. For the attackers of Washington, the choice at the crossroad was between republicanism and democracy or despotism and slavery. The campaign against Washington was not a sideshow; it was part of the main ideological struggle of the decade, and for this reason it demands more attention than it has received.

Fortunately it is unnecessary to investigate the motives of dozens of independent journalists and critics in order to reach some understanding of the nature of the assault on Washington. It is unnecessary because one man alone—Benjamin Franklin Bache—either wrote or published a vast majority of the attacks. Although Bache has long been the acknowledged leader among Washington’s vilifiers, the pervasiveness of Bache’s activities and influence are not well known. It has been assumed, for example, that Philip Freneau, editor of the National Gazette, led the attack on Wash-
ington. But Freneau's *Gazette* folded in late 1793, at the time that the attacks were just beginning. After the collapse of the *Gazette*, Bache's newspaper, the Philadelphia *General Advertiser and Aurora* (the name *Aurora* was added in late 1794 and the paper was generally known by that name after that time), became the chief vehicle for the early, mild campaign against the President and the later hysterical campaign in which Bache hoped to destroy Washington completely. *Aurora* editorials attacking Washington ranged from small, two-line attacks to the massive serialized assault by the "Calm Observer" (John Beckley), who successfully showed, in 1795, that Washington had overdrawn his presidential salary. Nor did Bache restrict himself to the *Aurora*'s columns. As Washington's presidency drew to a close, Bache eagerly printed and distributed Paine's pathetic and vicious *Letters to Washington* (1796), and the long discredited spurious letters of Washington which, according to Washington's worst enemies, proved the President's lack of enthusiasm for the American Revolution. To conclude the attack, Bache then wrote and published a rambling eighty-four-page pamphlet entitled *Remarks Occasioned by the Late Conduct of Mr. Washington . . .*, which summarized Washington's weaknesses, failures, and crimes.

Although invective directed against Washington was obviously Bache's trademark in 1796 and 1797, Bache's attacks on the President did not begin with the appearance of the first issue of the *General Advertiser* in 1790. Like most other journalists of the early 1790s, Bache enthusiastically placed his faith in a new American consensus—a consensus that he thought would be built upon the strengthening of republicanism, democracy, and equality as well as on the material growth of the new republic. Two months after beginning publication of the *General Advertiser*, Bache revealed his political innocence by declaring that

A new, a happy series of years commences. Justice descends from the skies, where too man had compelled her to take refuge. The hands of the manufacturer are beneficially employed. Our ports abound in our own

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7 McMaster, who relied on newspaper sources heavily, incorrectly placed great emphasis on Freneau's role in the attacks and was quite wrong in saying that Freneau's "abuse of Washington makes that afterward poured out by Benjamin Franklin Bache seem almost decent." McMaster, *History*, II, 53.
vessels. Agriculture is encouraged. A WASHINGTON presides over us with as much dignity & wisdom as man is capable of exerting. The sound policy of ADAMS shall again be manifested; & the distinguished talents of JEFFERSON advantageously displayed.

With these prospects, which rest on as much security as humanity can effect, what evils have we to fear?—or rather what blessings may we not hope for?

For the next two years, evidence suggests that Bache did his best to believe in his naively utopian description of America's future. Unwilling to be bothered by the fact that Washington sometimes seemed more like an old world aristocrat than a new homespun republican, Bache continued to support and praise the President, and made no effort to resist the growing Washington myth. Two days after the President's birthday in 1791, Bache wrote a complimentary account of the splendid celebration and was generous in his praise of the President. Later in the year he printed a sonnet which set Washington above all the patriotic heroes of Greece and Rome. When Washington celebrated his sixtieth birthday in 1792, the General Advertiser predicted that, "As long as Americans feel the blessings of Liberty, & of pure republican government this day will be remembered as one of the most auspicious in their calendar." And, on the eve of the presidential election in 1792, Bache admitted with no apparent unhappiness that no one would oppose "our valuable first magistrate." The only cloud visible on the horizon came from a correspondent in 1791 who delivered the curt warning that excessive praise of the President on his birthday possessed "too strong a tincture of Monarchy to be adopted by Republicans."

Admiration and respect for the President, however, were not in character for Bache. These editorials may have represented the general conciliatory mood of the country in the early 1790s as well as Bache's shaky status as a journalist more than they reflected Bache's real views. During these first years of the decade, Bache

8 General Advertiser (Philadelphia), Nov. 27, 1790.
9 Ibid., Feb. 24, 1791.
10 "Sonnet" by Dr. Aitken, Ibid., Nov. 14, 1791.
11 Ibid., Feb. 22, 1792.
12 Ibid., Nov. 8, 1792.
was seeking security in the face of a highly uncertain future. He was young and unestablished in his occupation as a newspaper man. In 1790 his grandfather, Benjamin Franklin, had died and, because Bache had relied so completely on Franklin, he found it difficult to adjust to his loss. In 1791, Bache married Margaret Markoe, thereby incurring the responsibility of supporting a wife. To make matters worse, newspaper publishing was an exceptionally risky business. Given these circumstances, it was not unnatural for him to imitate other journals and to join the chorus of praise being sung by the public to the new nation and its government.\textsuperscript{14}

But in temperament and personality, the real Benjamin Bache was not timid, conciliatory, and cautious; he was brash, adventurous, impetuous and pretentious. Some of these character traits may be attributed to Bache’s youthfulness; he was only in his mid-twenties during the years he attacked Washington. But not all young men are radical and reckless. The source of Bache’s extremist attacks are better traced to his atypical childhood experiences than they are to his youth.

Bache’s childhood was different from the childhoods of his contemporaries and peers in almost every way. In 1776, at the age of seven, Bache was placed under the sole guardianship of his grandfather and was sent off with Franklin to live in France. From 1776 to 1785, Bache lived first in a French boarding school near Passy (Franklin’s home near Paris), then attended a boarding school “college” in Geneva for a few years, and finally resided at Passy toward the end of this period, helping Franklin prepare for the return to America and learning the typefounding craft from expert French teachers.

The effects of these years in Europe were various. First, Franklin became the entire focus of Bache’s youth; Franklin was his mainstay, the source of his economic and moral support, the object of Bache’s filial love and devotion. Until Franklin’s death in 1790, young Bache followed his grandfather’s guidance and advice worshipfully, learning and entering the trades that Franklin selected

\textsuperscript{14} Descriptions of Bache’s life, thought, and career, which are presented in this article in a summary fashion, are discussed in much greater detail in James D. Tagg, “Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia \textit{Aurora}” (Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1973).
for him, attending the University of Pennsylvania as Franklin instructed. Even considering Bache's peculiar circumstances and the century in which he lived, his devotion to Franklin was perversely absolute. It is not hard to believe that Bache became wedded to the consistent republican and democratic tendencies in Franklin's thought, and more particularly to Franklin's pious moral pronouncements on simplicity, frugality, and industry. The inheritance of these views, coupled with his attachment to Franklin, did not make it difficult for Bache to grow resentful of Washington, the Virginia planter and aloof aristocrat, the man who had usurped Franklin's rightful place in the hearts and minds of Americans as America's true patriot and hero.

Pretence, the chief characteristic of Bache's personality and the one which gave him the audacity to attack Washington was also an effect of Bache's close identification with Franklin. "So it is to have had a philosopher for a grandfather," declared a perceptive Federalist at the time of Bache's death, "for that idea was the food of much of his extravagance of mind, and placed him in a state of pretence where he was obliged to act a part for which he had not talents."

But Bache's pretentiousness must not be blamed on Franklin's influence alone. Unlike other young people, Bache witnessed European culture and society in its varied forms, from the asceticism of Geneva to the opulence of the French court. Given the commotion and excitement of life at Franklin's Passy residence, and the comings and goings of the rich and influential, Bache might have easily acquired a familiarity with and taste for the social pretences of the French upper class. Washington, a parochial Virginia aristocrat, would hardly be seen as an awesome figure possessing special wisdom or inherent talent to a young man who had dined with the European aristocracy. Bache might have even seen himself as a man more worldly, more sophisticated than Washington.

It would be wrong, however, to think that Bache was hopelessly in love with the style and luxury of European society; luxury and foppery did not ruin Bache as they did Franklin's other grandson,

Temple, who lived with Bache and Franklin at Passy. Bache sometimes showed an interest in aristocratic entertainments and pastimes such as the theatre and dances, but he was too imbued with Franklinian morals, and too much the product of his strict Calvinist teachers in Geneva to be an aspiring member of elite society. The paradox is that Bache, while possibly inclined to hold Washington in contempt for being a weak imitator of the European aristocrat, was generally moved to attack Washington for adopting such aristocratic and un-republican manners and morals. Bache had seen the degeneracy of the French aristocracy; he had in fact become familiar enough with it to hold it in contempt by the early 1790s. Yet what did Bache see when he looked at Washington, not the republican saint or Revolutionary hero but an aloof, pretentious aristocrat who symbolized in no way the rustic American republicanism that Bache probably expected to find when he returned to his homeland in 1785.

From 1785 to 1790 Bache quietly adjusted to life in America, unsuccessfully sought a profitable career in printing and type-founding, and dutifully served his grandfather in Franklin’s last years. In 1790, when he began publication of the General Advertiser, Bache was just entering manhood and his early editorials, as has been noted, suggest Bache’s insecurity rather than his candid opinions. Considering Bache’s rich and interesting childhood, these years must have been frustrating for him. Although he was the grandson of one of America’s famous men, and although he was acquainted with and accustomed to the richness of life in Europe, he was merely another unsuccessful American printer, leading a dull, obscure life, trapped by the mundane demands of the printing trade. Attacking Washington brought adventure and excitement into his life, and allowed him to give free play to his own pretensions. Whether he was conscious of it or not, the attacks on Washington were a means whereby he could tell the country that he was better acquainted with European politics and society than Washington, and when he declared in 1797 that Washington was “but a man, and certainly not a great man,” he was delivering an opinion of himself as much as ridiculing the President.  

16 Bache’s denial of Washington’s greatness is in Benjamin Franklin Bache, Remarks Occasioned by the Late Conduct of Mr. Washington as President of the United States (Philadelphia, 1797), 34.
Bache's attack began in December, 1792, one month after he had welcomed Washington's re-election and several months before the first rift in Franco-American relations had appeared. Although Bache periodically included some feigned or mocking admiration for Washington in his editorials after this time, he never retreated from his basic anti-Washington position. The first, comparatively mild, stage of Bache's assault began with the opening shots being fired in a series of political satires by "Mirabeau." The first of these, entitled "Forerunners of Monarchy and Aristocracy," was made up of a list of ten vices practiced by the Washington administration which might destroy republicanism: the use of titles, the introduction of levees, birthday celebrations given for public servants, arrogance in government, pomp, exaggerated status for department heads, high government salaries, "proficiency" in public servants, public servants monopolizing the management of society, and an "irredeemable debt." In January, 1793, Bache followed with a satirical advertisement for a national "poet laureate." To qualify for the position, the poet had to demonstrate, among other things, "dexterity in composing birthday odes," and had to be good at writing about such "Monarchical prettinesses" as "LEVEES, DRAWING ROOMS, STATELY NODS INSTEAD OF SHAKING HANDS, TITLES OF OFFICES, SECLUSION FROM THE PEOPLE, &c., &c." Above all, the applicant had to proclaim the

17 Bache attempted to maintain a pose of impartiality in his newspaper through the first half of 1793, and occasionally thereafter. From early 1793 on, however, no one could mistake the editor's political views. Everything indicates that Bache kept firm editorial control of the Advertiser throughout his career. There can be little doubt that by the mid-1790s the opinions stated by Bache's correspondents were consistently in accord with Bache's own opinions and that administration supporters were denied editorial space.

"Communications" and editorials written by "correspondents" or those employing a pseudonym are so labelled in the footnotes to this article. Undesignated or unsigned editorials are assumed to be Bache's own (although some of them may not have been in fact). Bache never developed a true editorial column as we now know it but he came closer to such a device than any of his contemporaries, and the unsigned editorials found in that section of Bache's newspaper were clear representations of Bache's opinions.

18 "Forerunners of Monarchy and Aristocracy," by "Mirabeau," General Advertiser, Dec. 7, 1792. "Mirabeau's" letters were carried in both Freneau's and Bache's papers. This relatively famous editorial was first printed by Bache, with Freneau reprinting it in the National Gazette (Philadelphia) on Dec. 12. "Mirabeau's" list of vices was expanded by "Condorcet," General Advertiser, Dec. 15, 1792.
majesty of the government and the superiority of the governors over the people.\textsuperscript{19} Up to this point, Bache's attack was neither extensive nor harsh, being as much an attack on those who would mold the presidency to monarchical forms as it was a personal assault on Washington. But from early, 1793, to August, 1795, the use of ridicule, mockery, and satire was intensified. Most of the criticism was aimed at Washington's aristocratic manners. The presidential levees—the name given to Washington's cold, formal twice-weekly meetings with the public—were attacked for their formality and the way in which they seemed to resemble receptions at European courts.\textsuperscript{20} Washington's love of opulence was also ridiculed. One satirist told of a farmer who, coming home from Philadelphia, reported he had seen Prince Edward in a cream colored coach drawn by six bay horses. His friend, the narrator, traveled to Philadelphia to see this novel sight but instead, "I met the coach, and to my utter surprize and disappointment, who should it be but the President of the United States:—Ah! thought I to myself the times are changed, and have changed with them the plain and republican General Washington into a being which my neighbour Tribble took to be a Prince."\textsuperscript{21} Another writer compared Washington and Franklin, and decided that Franklin, as a simple, consistent republican, would have rejected the "farce of birthdays" and other typically "childish things."\textsuperscript{22}

It was, in fact, Washington's birthday which drew most of the \textit{General Advertiser}'s criticism. Washington's birthday symbolized for Bache and others the dangerous infection of antirepublican manners and hero worship in American society. When the public was not being ridiculed in an attempt to dissuade them from cele-

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 2, 1793. To add to republican fears, "Mirabeau" then disclosed that Thomas Jefferson, the "colossus of opposition to monarchical deportment, monarchical arrogance, and monarchical splendor," was planning to resign from the administration. \textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 5, 1793

\textsuperscript{20} Criticism of the levee can be found in \textit{ibid.}, Jan. 23, 26, and Feb. 4 ("Sidney"), 1793; Feb. 5 and 18 ("Equality"), 1793.

\textsuperscript{21} "A Farmer," \textit{ibid.}, Jan. 29, 1793.

\textsuperscript{22} "A Subscriber," \textit{ibid.}, Feb. 16, 1793. Other editorials, directed especially against Washington's opulent life style, can be seen in \textit{ibid.}, Feb. 5 ("Franklin"), 18 ("A Democrat"), 21 (letter), April 3 ("Hortesius"), 1793. Bache sometimes printed token letters of criticism against opponents of the administration. See "A Constant Whig," \textit{ibid.}, June 17, 1793.
brating the event, the *Advertiser* was trying to educate the public in the political immorality of the celebrations. One writer put the *Advertiser* position well: "If the birth day of the President is to be commemorated, that day ought to be chosen, that auspicious day, when nine States ratified the Constitution, and gave birth to the President, and every other branch of our government. The celebration of any other would be the celebration of an individual and not that of the first officer of our government."^{23}

The general fear was that Washington's name and opinions would be held up as infallible and unimpeachable, thereby allowing the enemies of republicanism to manipulate policies through the use of the President's good name. As early as 1794, a writer was complaining that "opinion has so far consecrated the President, as to make it hazardous to say that he can do wrong. Several acts of his have been incompatible with the spirit of free government and yet these acts have been regarded as right."^{24} Washington was also accused of fostering secrecy and withholding information from the people in order to hide weaknesses and mistakes.^{25} When a writer in Noah Webster's *American Minerva* suggested giving the executive more discretionary powers during the crisis with England in 1794, Bache quickly charged the *Minerva* with proposing "a visual king in our President."^{26}

Yet in bizarre, almost comical fashion, Bache sometimes acted as if he had had nothing to do with editorials attacking the pomp of Washington's birthday celebrations. In 1794, he published accounts of public celebrations on the President's birthday, and even printed an editorial which stated that these celebrations "evince that increasing years have added to the general sentiment of respect and veneration in the minds of our citizens, for the father of his country and friend of man."^{27} A year later, Bache further astounded every-

^{23} "Correspondent," *ibid.*, Feb. 5, 1794. For other criticisms of celebrations of Washington's birthday between the years 1793-1795 see *ibid.*, Feb. 18 ("A Democrat"), 21, 1793; Feb. 14 ("Correspondent"), 21 ("A Militia Man"), 1794; Feb. 18 ("A Courtier"), 21 ("An Officer"), 27, 1795.

^{24} "Gracchus," *ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1794.

^{25} *ibid.*, Mar. 5 ("Correspondent"), 7 ("Correspondent"), 1794.

^{26} *ibid.*, Mar. 31, 1794. See also, "Correspondent," *ibid.*, June 2, 1794. The *Minerva* writer denied that he was a monarchist. Letter, *American Minerva* (New York), Apr. 2, 1794.

one by acting as manager of the birthday ball for Washington given by the City Dancing Assembly. Bache may have felt obliged, as a long-time member of the Assembly, to undertake the task. But Bache was also impish and audacious. It must have occurred to him that his management of the ball might lead the President to worry that Bache was only further mocking and insulting him. Fisher Ames, commenting on this strange turn of events, hardly knew whether to be amused or angry. In a light mood, he told a fellow Federalist, "At the birthright ball, Ben. F. Bache acted as manager. Yet his paper teems with daily abuse of courtly sycophancy. The poor creature should not be brought into the danger of suffering by contact with courts." 

No one was deceived by Bache's feigned friendship for the President. Washington was complaining as early as July, 1793, that "Freneau's and Beeches [sic] papers are outrages on common decency; and they progress in that style, in proportion as their pieces are treated with contempt, and are passed by in silence, by those at whom they are aimed." Although Washington remained silent for some time, Bache must have guessed that the President was sensitive to criticism. In April, 1795, for example, Bache shamelessly goaded the President by inviting Washington to a civic festival in honor of French victories in Holland. Washington was not amused and wrote the following terse comment on Bache's unanswered invitation: "Intended as an Insult It is presumed."

Although administration supporters did not go to great lengths before 1795 to retaliate against Bache, Federalists did begin to attack him in return and, for many years to come, tried to explain why Bache had come out against the administration. As early as 1793, John Fenno, editor of the Gazette of the United States, said that Washington's attackers were self-seeking intriguers and politicians. In order to hurt Bache and explain why the General Advertiser had turned against Washington, Fenno turned Bache's comparison of

30 Ibid., XXXIV, 174n.
31 Gazette of the United States (Philadelphia), Feb. 13, Mar. 6, 1793.
Franklin and Washington around. “If your venerable Grandsire views from his abode the mockery of Patriotism exhibited in your paper, it may console him for the follies which He committed, the servility and sycophancy He practised at the court of France; and for the disappointment He met with in not being able to place an idle sing song [Richard Bache] at the head of the Post-Office.”

This editorial had some bite since Bache revered his grandfather, and since the “idle sing song” was Bache’s father, a man who had failed to satisfy Congress with his conduct of the Post Office in the 1780s and had then unsuccessfully applied for the new postmaster generalship in 1789.

Appointments and patronage fitted largely into Federalist explanations of Bache’s attack on Washington. William Cobbett, the most vicious journalist of the age and editor of Porcupine’s Gazette, charged Bache with having sought employment in the federal government himself but, failing in that, turning his abuse against Washington. “He was born a hireling,” Cobbett claimed in 1797, and being unable to “obtain employ in one quarter, he sought it in another,” in the pay of Genêt and France. Cobbett was wrong; Benjamin Bache had never sought patronage from the federal government.

In 1800 a similarly inaccurate conclusion was drawn in John Ward Fenno’s Gazette of the United States. In a two-part article analyzing Bache’s career, the Gazette writer claimed that Bache had, in his first year as a journalist, published a mediocre newspaper which, because it was ordinary, grew at a gradual and “tardy pace.” About a year after the Advertiser appeared, this writer went on, Bache’s father had been relieved from the Postmaster General’s office and Benjamin’s cousin, Temple Franklin, seeking patronage from the federal government as well, had been refused employment. This allegedly influenced Bache to publish abuse against the President. The rapid progress of the French Revolution, the author concluded, then cemented Bache’s affection for France in opposition to the policies of the Washington administration.

33 Porcupine’s Gazette (Philadelphia), Nov. 16, 1797.
The *Gazette* article had some merit. It was true that Bache’s attachment to the French Revolutionary cause excited his hatred for Washington. But this explains only the later attack since Bache began his criticisms in late 1792, before the Proclamation of Neutrality, the Genêt affair, and the Jay Treaty controversy. Although the *Gazette* was wrong on the date of Richard Bache’s dismissal from the Post Office, we do have reliable evidence to suggest that the entire Richard Bache family was angry at the President because Richard had not been appointed Postmaster General in 1789.\(^{35}\) In this case, however, Richard’s disappointment had come some time before Benjamin began publication of the *Advertiser*. Familial antagonisms may have simmered through the early 1790s as Bache awaited an opportunity to attack Washington, but such antagonisms hardly seem to provide an explanation for the timing of Bache’s attacks.

More consideration might be given to the Federalist argument that Bache was getting nowhere by supporting the administration and had decided, therefore, to attract attention and boost subscriptions through shocking attacks upon it. Timothy Pickering, a sour and cynical member of the Cabinet under both Washington and Adams, believed that Bache had consciously adopted such a course and had successfully increased his profits.\(^{36}\)

Pickering and Bache’s other political opponents obviously wasted little time analyzing Bache’s motives. The economic self-interest argument seems incomplete, for example, since the *Advertiser* was apparently an unprofitable newspaper from beginning to end—although it would be dangerous to deny that Bache did not see the notoriety he gained from the attack as a profit. We can only guess why Bache came out against Washington when he did. He may have felt that he had nothing to lose; he may also have been simply

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\(^{35}\) Unbiased evidence for Bache family antagonisms can be found in the journal of Julian Niemcewicz, Apr. 17, 1798. Niemcewicz, a Polish traveler in America, was a house guest of Richard’s family at Settle, the Bache family estate outside Philadelphia. Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree, Travels through America in 1797-1799, 1805 with some Further Account of Life in New Jersey*, trans. Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, N. J., 1965), 61.

bored with publishing a run-of-the-mill newspaper, one hardly distinguishable from at least fifty others. Observing Freneau's example, Bache may have seen the exciting prospects in adopting a similar course to Freneau's. Or, Freneau's attack joined with Washington's conduct may have simply awakened Bache, who had already developed a consistent radical republican philosophy, to the supposition that Washington was morally and politically bankrupt.

No matter how we explain the timing of the origins of Bache's attack, it is a fact that the *Advertiser* was a bolder newspaper after late 1792. Editorials were more spirited, and the cautious platitudes evident in earlier editorials were seen less frequently. Yet, before August, 1795, the attack on Washington remained relatively mild. Criticisms of the President's formality and aloofness as well as his love of luxury and unrepulican life style were generally reasonable. The main thrust of the attack continued to be the warning against Americans establishing a presidential court similar to monarchical courts, and the suggestion of the inherent danger in Americans accepting Washington as an infallible leader.

After August, 1795, however, Bache began a far different assault. In the new campaign, he was unrelenting, unsatisfied with anything short of driving Washington from office and forever fostering in the memory of Americans the belief that Washington had conspired to destroy republicanism. The issue of importance to Bache and his fellow assailants was Washington's signing the Jay Treaty. For Bache, the Treaty was a pact with the devil. He believed it would produce re-enslavement by Great Britain, American abandonment of France, and the creation of a perverse American alliance with despotism rather than republicanism. No man worked harder for the Treaty's defeat, and no man was more bitterly angry and frustrated by its ratification than was Benjamin Bache.

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37 Much of this boldness, after May, 1793, must be seen in the context of the arrival of the French Minister, Edmund Genêt, and Bache's being caught up in the exciting course of events surrounding Franco-American relations. It must also be remembered that several other newspapers became more outspoken after 1793 as well.

38 Bache's important role in the Jay Treaty fight is detailed in Tagg, "Bache," 430-502. Bache's hatred of the Treaty's supporters and his fear of the consequences of the Treaty were clear. On June 25, 1796, he claimed that the Federalists "would divide the Union tomorrow, overthrow the constitution, bring us under British domination, or establish a monarchy if they could, rather than live under a republican administration." Bache followed this with a eulogy to lost American liberty on July 4, 1776.
The *Aurora*’s protest of Washington’s ratification was loud and massive. Led by “Hancock,” “Valerius,” “Belisarius,” “Atticus,” and “Pittachus,” *Aurora* writers blasted Washington from every angle, endlessly repeating their accusations. After it had become shockingly clear that Washington had signed the Treaty, none of these writers acted with restraint. The chief charge against the President, which must have been presented in a hundred different ways, was that he had ignored the opposition to the Treaty expressed by a majority of Americans in petitions and protest meetings, and had acquiesced to the view of self-interested Tory merchant supporters of the Treaty. Washington had, in short, undemocratically put himself above the will of the people. One of the first correspondents to comment on Washington’s actions wrote:

The President has rewarded the people of the United States for their confidence and affection by violating their constitution, by making a treaty with a nation that is their abhorrence, and by treating their applications to him against the treaty with the most pointed contempt. Louis XVI, in the meridian of his power & his splendor never treated his subjects with as much insult, on a respectful application to him, as the President did the citizens of Boston and Philadelphia when they applied to him against the treaty.

Washington acted more like “the omnipotent director of a seraglio” than “the first magistrate of a free people,” the writer added. “He thunders disdain upon the people with as much confidence, as if he sat upon the throne of Indostan, & was the keeper of our consciences, as well as our rights.” Since the President had treated the people with “disrespect,” he could “no longer be viewed as a saint,” nor could he “expect a blind devotion to his will.” Washington’s “new character,” this writer concluded, “ought to awaken us to our situation, and teach us to shake off the fetters that his name has

39 The real names of the persons writing under these pseudonyms have not been determined, although Hamilton and other Federalists were eager to find out who they were. It would be hard to believe that John Beckley, who wrote the *Aurora*’s “Calm Observer” attacks on Washington, was not involved in writing some of these letters.

40 At first, Bache claimed that he could not believe that Washington had really ignored the general will of the people. *Aurora*, Aug. 15, 18 (“A Federalist”), 21, 1795.

41 The best examples are ibid., Aug. 21 (“Hancock”), 22 (“Valerius”), 31 (“An Old Soldier of 1776”), Sept. 3 (“Hancock”), 7, 8 (“Hancock”), 11, 18 (“Pittachus”), 21 (“Atticus”), 28 (“Pittachus”), 1795.
hitherto imposed upon the minds of freemen." A short time later, Bache added that a "new Era" had commenced, one in which "blind confidence" in the President was "preached up" in opposition to "the constitution, to reason and republicanism."

When Noah Webster, editor of the Minerva, dared to say that the President had been right in signing the Treaty and that the people were "duped by their artful leaders," Bache retorted that Webster had thereby conceded that a majority of Americans opposed the Treaty but that Webster had still proceeded "in his usual dogmatic stile to proclaim, as false, what 20,000 citizens of America [through meetings and petitions] have sanctioned as true. . . . This is called a government of the people, framed by the people. The question now occurs who is to be understood by this we the people? The Editor of the Minerva explains it, it is now on a tour to Mount Vernon with the constitution." "Hancock" added that Washington simply did not understand how the common man and all of society had a stake in governmental decisions.

Again and again Washington was portrayed as a man of modest intelligence and political ability, who, deluded by sycophantic praise and the trappings of royalty, had succumbed to the protreaty side. Washington did not know the needs and desires of the people. Writers implied that he did not understand that in a republic, reason, ability, merit, and equality prevailed. In fact, claimed some, the Federalists had begun a campaign to set the President above the Constitution, and to create a cult of Washington's infallibility.

43 Ibid., Aug. 27, 1795.
44 Ibid., Sept. 11, 1795. Bache worked hard, of course, to rally public opposition to the Treaty. He was the first person to reveal the contents of the Jay Treaty to the public; he printed the Treaty in pamphlet form and distributed it from New England to Charleston; and he participated in the three major protest meetings against the Treaty in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.
45 "Hancock," ibid., Sept. 12, 1795.
46 Editorials dealing with these arguments in varying ways are in ibid., Aug. 20 ("Correspondent"), 22, Sept. 1 (unsigned editorial and "Valerius"), 2 ("Correspondent"), 8, 11 ("Belisarius"), 12 ("Millions" from the Independent Chronicle), 14 ("Pittachus" and Bache), 15 ("Belisarius"), 23 ("Pittachus"), Oct. 1 ("An Observer"), 8 ("Valerius"), 9 ("Pittachus"), 12 (letter), 21 ("Valerius"), 22 ("Atticus"), 26 ("Pittachus"), Dec. 9 ("Cincinnatus"), 1795. Noah Webster denied that Washington was infallible, but believed that the President had made few mistakes and would be backed by the people. Minerva, Sept. 3, 15, 1795; Feb. 4, 1796.
Alleged monarchical tendencies in Washington's character and behavior especially drew the *Aurora'*s fire. "Valerius" reminded readers that Caesar, Cromwell, George III, Louis XVI and Robespierre had all earned public gratitude at some state in their lives, but as rulers they had become depraved and corrupt. "Portius" claimed that Washington cared for nothing but his own fame, and had, therefore, sought in the early years of independence to gratify his ambition by using the army and the Society of Cincinnati to establish a monarchy. According to "Pittachus," "The President began his political career as if he had inherited a kingdom, his port has been that of a Monarch, and the customs which he introduced are those of a Sovereign." Pageantry was to accomplish what directness could not, "Pittachus" added, and pageantry was merely "a substitute for sterling worth and real dignity" that deluded vulgar men, helped cause wars, and destroyed natural happiness.

*Aurora* writers were also determined to show that Washington had no right to appeal for public gratitude for past services in order to shield himself from criticism. "We know what he was in seventy-five," one writer claimed, "but we are likewise entitled to enquire what he is in ninety-five." "Pittachus" claimed that if Washington's actions were virtuous and just his supporters would not need to prop him up with their demands for gratitude. At least two writers did not believe that Washington even deserved credit for his services in the Revolution. "Portius" attributed American success in the Revolution to a long list of factors having nothing to do with Washington, and claimed that correspondence indicated that Washington was never warmly attached to the idea of indepen-

47 "Valerius," *Aurora*, Oct. 21, 1795.
48 "Portius," *ibid.*, Sept. 30, 1795. For other spirited attacks on this topic see "Timothy Turn-Penny," from *Jersey Chronicle*, reprinted in *ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1795, and "Cosca," from *Petersburgh Gazette*, reprinted in *ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1796. Almost any praise or adulation of Washington was anathema to the *Aurora*. The Senate, after it had replied politely to the President's December, 1795, address to Congress, was accused of being a mere "echo" of the President and more like the English House of Lords than a republican institution. *Ibid.*, Dec. 23 ("Pittachus" and "A Querist" from New York *Argus*), 1795.
49 "Pittachus," *ibid.*, Nov. 23, 1795.
50 "Correspondent," *ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1795. See also *ibid.*, Sept. 11 ("Belisarius"), 14 ("Correspondent"), 1795.
Valerius,” emphasizing Washington’s mediocre talents, even said that Washington had been neither Tory nor Whig but neutral in the Revolution. 53

Bache and his Aurora writers did not ignore any issue that might be used against the President. The Gazette of the United States attacks on Virginia slaveholders were turned against Washington; if he were infallible, why did he own slaves? 54 Washington’s appointments were deemed partisan and bad. “No sooner had you taken the seat of office,” “Valerius” charged, “than you called to your confidential council men who had rendered themselves hated by their enmity to the pure principles of republicanism”; Jefferson was the only Republican appointee, yet he had been forced to withdraw when Washington never took his advice. 55

Washington was also accused of hating France and the French Revolution. The proclamation of neutrality and Jay’s mission were devices to divorce the United States from France, averred “Gracchus” and “Pittachus”. 56 It was argued that French royalists received better treatment from the President than did French republicans. 57 When Washington received a new French flag from Minister Adet in a ceremony before Congress, and then deposited that flag in the archives of the United States rather than display it

52 “Portius,” ibid., Sept. 24, 1795.
53 “Valerius,” ibid., Oct. 21, 1795. Bache admitted that Washington had been born in a land of freedom, “but it has become a problem whether he received his education in it.” Ibid., Apr. 4, 1796. See also “Cosca,” ibid., Apr. 29, 1796.
54 Ibid., Oct. 21, Dec. 29 (“Correspondent” and a communication from Boston), 1795; Apr. 11 (“Consistency”), 1796.
55 “Valerius,” ibid., Nov. 11, 1795. Hamilton believed that the Federalists could use this letter to reveal clear designs by the Republicans to contrast Jefferson with the President and thereby try to elevate Jefferson in public esteem. Hamilton to Wolcott, Nov. 12, 1795, George Gibbs, ed., Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams, Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury (New York, 1971), I, 262–263. Other editorials attacking Washington’s appointment policies include Aurora, Sept. 9 (“Plain Truth” from Vermont Gazette), Nov. 19 and Dec. 1 (“Valerius”), 1795.
56 “Gracchus,” from Petersburgh Intelligencer, reprinted in ibid., Sept. 18, 1795; Jan. 1 and 13 (“Pittachus”), 1796. In these letters, “Pittachus” relied heavily on Edmund Randolph’s Vindication for reference to Washington’s anti-French attitudes and statements. Randolph had been forced to resign his Secretary of State post because Washington believed that Randolph had conspired with the French Minister against American interests. The Randolph affair was the chief catalyst in moving Washington to sign the Jay Treaty.
57 “Pittachus,” ibid., Nov. 5, 1795.
in Congress, the *Aurora* used the affair to prove Washington's dis-
affection for France.\(^5^8\) Washington was subsequently attacked for
making no mention of America's affection for or ties with France in
his state of the union address to Congress in December, 1795.\(^5^9\)

A few writers tried to write encyclopedic essays cataloging all of
Washington's crimes. "Valerius" claimed that in "domestic trans-
actions" alone, Washington was guilty of appointing men who
"forfeited or ceased to possess the confidence of the people," and
had given preference to "tories and officers of the late army" in his
appointments; of sanctioning the hereditary structure of the Society
of the Cincinnati; of spending taxes lavishly on the new city of
Washington; of opposing French "liberty"; supporting French
aristocrats and ignoring his own citizens; and of attacking the
Democratic Societies, withholding information from the House of
Representatives, and abusing his power to pardon criminals.\(^6^0\)

Probably the most famous of these catalogs was "The Political
Creed of 1795." The following are some of the points in that creed
directed specifically at Washington:

4. I believe that a man who holds his fellow citizens at an awful dis-
tance, in private life, must hold them in contempt, if by accident he finds
himself for a time placed above them.

5. I believe that man wants to be a king who chooses the advocates for
kingly government as his first councillors and advisers. . . .

8. I believe that man wishes to be a despot, who makes alliances with
despots in preference to freemen and Republicans.

9. I believe proclamations no better than Pope's Bulls; that as far as
they respect religious ceremonies; they are contrary to the freedom of
conscience; that as they respect government, they either counteract the

had been presented to the French National Convention earlier by Joshua Barney and had
subsequently been hung in a place of prominence in that chamber. For details on the exchange
of flags, see Alexander De Conde, *Entangling Alliance: Politics and Diplomacy under George

\(^{59}\) *Aurora*, Dec. 15 ("An Old Soldier," "Pittachus," and "1776" from New York *Argus*),
1795; Mar. 30, Apr. 12, 1796. Webster and Fenno both claimed that the President ignored
France in his message because no new developments in Franco-American relations had taken

\(^{60}\) "Valerius," *Aurora*, Dec. 1, 1795. For an earlier long catalog see "Cosca," from *Peters-
burgh Intelligencer*, reprinted in *ibid.*, Oct. 16, 1795.
force of law, or in the vanity of government, pretend a superior skill as to its meaning. . . .

14. I believe that a blind confidence in any men who have done services to their country, has enslaved, and ever will enslave, all the nations of the earth.

15. I believe that a good joiner may be a clumsy watchmaker; that an able carpenter may be a blundering tailor; and that a good General may be a most miserable politician. 61

Several *Aurora* contributors believed that Washington should either resign or be impeached. "Pittachus" admitted that impeachment would not succeed because the Senate was as guilty in regard to the Treaty as the President, but he claimed impeachment could be instituted for Washington's failure to seek senatorial advice on the Jay mission, for the President overdrawing his salary, and for his keeping the militia in the West during the Whiskey Rebellion beyond its nine-month enlistment time. 62 "Scipio" asked Washington to "retire immediately; let no flatterer persuade you to rest one hour longer at the helm of state. You are utterly incapable to steer the political ship into the harbour of safety. If you have any love for your country, leave its affairs to the wisdom of your fellow citizens; do not flatter yourself with the idea that you know their interests better than other men; there are thousands amongst them equal you in capacity, and who excel you in knowledge." 63

Almost all of the *Aurora* 's attacks published during the Treaty controversy were simply scorned or rebuked by the Federalists as the work of men disappointed by the Treaty's ratification. One extended attack did, however, produce apprehension and anxiety among the President's supporters. The issue was his salary. When Washington assumed office in 1789, he had refused the $25,000 yearly salary granted him by Congress. Instead, the President adopted the habit, with acquiescence from Congress and the Treasury, of having his private secretaries withdraw household and living expenses from funds appropriated for his salary. From the start, these withdrawals always consumed the entire annual appropriation made by Congress. In 1793, Congress further regularized

61 "The Political Creed of 1795," *ibid.*, Nov. 23, 1795.
62 "Pittachus," *ibid.*, Nov. 18, 26, 1795.
63 "Scipio," *ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1795.
the issuance of these monies by directing the Treasury to dispense this appropriation in quarterly installments. Congress apparently intended, though the principle was never stated outright, to facilitate Washington's expense withdrawals rather than force the President to wait until the end of each year to receive any funds.

Because few people had access to the Treasury records, the President's salary had seldom been a subject of criticism. John Beckley, clerk of the House and an unrelenting partisan and enemy of the Treaty, did see the records and attempted to use them to damage the President's public reputation. The method he used was a series of letters which he submitted to the *Aurora* in October and November under the pseudonym "A Calm Observer." "A Calm Observer" opened the attack on October 23, charging Secretaries of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr. and Alexander Hamilton with malfeasance. Specifically, the Treasury Department was accused of overpaying the President in the fiscal years of 1790-1791, 1792-1793, and in the first quarter of the year beginning in March, 1793. By the end of his first term, the letter added, Washington had overdrawn his salary by $1,037; by early June, 1793, this sum had increased to a total of $5,787. "Will not the world be led to conclude that the mask of political hypocrisy has been alike worn by a CAESAR, a CROMWELL and a WASHINGTON?," he concluded.

Bache was delighted with such seemingly solid evidence of administrative corruption. Federalists had long attacked the *Aurora* for "trivial" criticisms of the President, Bache noted, but the "Observer's" attacks were different. "Coaches and six are not there the theme; but breaches of the laws, of the constitution and of a solemn oath are there talked of. The subject deserves the serious consideration of the Free Citizens of America, if their Constitution, the safeguard of their liberties is worth preserving." On October 26, Secretary Wolcott disclosed the serious effects of these charges in a public reply which was printed in the *Aurora*.

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66 Ibid., Oct. 24, 1795.
According to Wolcott, "not one dollar has been advanced at any time for which there was not an existing appropriation by law." But Wolcott failed to offer statistics, and did not deny that the President had received advances on appropriated sums which exceeded the quarterly limitations of a given yearly appropriation. Wolcott ended on a bitter note, demanding an explanation for the *Aurora*'s continual abuse of the government.  

Wolcott's reply satisfied no one and merely reopened the attack. "A Calm Observer" claimed that Wolcott had not refuted the charges. Was it not a violation, he asked, for the President to receive more than $6,250 a quarter, or more than $25,000 a year, or more than $100,000 in four years? "One of the People" reiterated these charges and demanded that Wolcott reveal the Treasury records. Wolcott denied "evasion" in another letter, and repeated that no advances had exceeded any existing appropriation. But, "A Calm Observer," in two more letters, repeated his charges, stating that the Treasury had illegally anticipated the President's salary in several different years and quarters. Other writers jumped on the bandwagon. Emphasis was placed on the large sums that had been overdrawn; paying an employee for services not yet rendered was attacked as corrupt and dangerous; and Wolcott was ridiculed for trusting Washington's private secretaries without checking the records, for failing to reveal the records, and for failing to give a satisfactory answer to the charges.

The salary attack backed Federalist printers against the wall. The *Gazette* avoided the issue and, as Bache predicted, turned to invective against the *Aurora*. Webster defended the Treasury, not only by claiming that the President could legally draw a quarter's

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67 "Oliver Wolcott," *ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1795. Bache, in response to Wolcott's accusation about attacks on the government, simply said that the *Aurora* would "remain free, unbiased by the smile, and unawed by the frowns of any man or set of men." *Ibid.*


69 "One of the People," *ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1795.

70 "Oliver Wolcott," *ibid.*


73 See the *Gazette of United States* for October and November, 1795, and *Aurora*, Oct. 30 ("Correspondent" and unsigned editorial), 1795.
salary in advance but by alleging that advances had been made in the same way to the Speaker of the House and other government officials. The *Aurora* categorically denied Webster's arguments; members of Congress received salaries only after they had earned them; the President was the only one to receive an advance, even though most people had been led to believe that he had refused any compensation whatsoever.

In the meantime, Wolcott and Hamilton hurriedly compared notes. Although Washington avoided direct entanglement, Hamilton saw the need to offer a spirited and convincing reply to the "vile insinuations." In their correspondence, Hamilton and Wolcott decided that the President had received advances of money not yet earned, although Wolcott denied that these ever extended beyond a yearly appropriation; they apparently agreed that congressmen had never received advances; and they decided that Beckley, with former Secretary of State Edmund Randolph's aid, had written the "Calm Observer" letters. Hamilton, at the same time, asked Wolcott for all pertinent Treasury materials on the subject so that a strong response could be made to the *Aurora*.

On November 18, after the furor had begun to subside, Hamilton published an exhaustive defense of the President and the Treasury. In general, Hamilton argued that the spirit of the Constitution and the laws had not been violated by advancing Washington money before it had been earned and, he added, all advances had come under some appropriation. In fact, Hamilton declared, by October, 1795, the government actually owed the President $846. But, relying on published Treasury records, Hamilton was unable to hide the fact that the President had frequently overdrawn his salary in previous years. The records showed, for example, that by March 31, 1795, Washington had been advanced $6,154 more than he had earned.

74 Minerva, Oct. 29, 1795.
75 Aurora, Nov. 2, 1795.
78 "Alexander Hamilton," from *Gazette of United States*, reprinted in *Aurora*, Nov. 18, 19, 20, 21, 1795.
“Pittachus” immediately charged Hamilton with trying to “destroy liberty” and “extend the sceptre of despotism over the earth.” As the issue played itself out in the following week, the Aurora attacked Hamilton’s charges of “sinister aims” against the Republicans, and ridiculed Hamilton’s sophistry in claiming the President was merely “compensated” for services not yet rendered. For one of the few times in its six-year history, the Aurora held the upper hand throughout a political controversy and through the use of completely accurate facts had embarrassed the administration.

By mid-1796, with the failure of the Republicans to stop implementation of the Jay Treaty through House of Representatives action, the tactic of preventing the Treaty through attacks on Washington was no longer needed. Yet, without politically sound reasons to continue, Bache intensified his bitter campaign of abuse. Although Washington had shown remarkable patience in ignoring the Aurora’s attacks before, the continuation of Bache’s assault began to worry him. Regarding attacks upon himself as the same thing as attacks to destroy ordered government, he commented in 1796 that, “Mr. Bache will continue his attacks on the Government, there can be no doubt, but that they will make no Impression on the public mind is not so certain, for drops of water will Impress (in time) the hardest Marble.”

Washington had had good reason to be worried about Bache’s continued campaign. In late May, 1796, “Paulding” had opened a potentially destructive attack on Washington’s policies toward France. “Paulding” had accused Washington of ignoring Genêt’s request in 1793 for a new Franco-American treaty, and of falsely

79 “Pittachus,” ibid., Nov. 21, 1795.
80 Ibid., Nov. 21 (“Correspondent”), 24 (“Camillus Simplex”), 28 (“Longinias,” and reply to the Minerva), 1795.
81 Many Aurora editorials repeated previous charges although the language of ridicule and contempt increased as the campaign grew old. For examples of Aurora editorials assaulting the President after mid-1796 see ibid., June 24 (“A Comet”), July 23, Dec. 17 (communication), 23 (“Correspondent”), 27 (“Queries”), 31 (“Jasper Dwight”), 1796. Washington’s birthday in 1797 provided opportunity for further Aurora ridicule of monarchical praise of the President. See ibid., Mar. 9, 1797. One day after Washington’s birthday Bache noted that no birthday ode had yet been written for Washington and then added, “Few people are fond of worshipping the setting sun.” Ibid., Feb. 23, 1797.
82 Washington to Secretary of the Treasury, July 6, 1796, Fitzpatrick, ed., Writings, XXXV, 125-126.
telling Genêt that no negotiation could proceed with the Senate out of session (as it was at the time of Genêt's request). A few days later, after noting that Fauchet was also refused a treaty at the same time that Jay was negotiating in England, "Paulding" published the entire text of thirteen questions submitted by Washington to his Cabinet in 1793. Because Washington, in these questions, appeared to doubt the validity of the 1778 treaty with France as well as the wisdom of receiving French Minister Edmund Genêt as France's rightful minister, the revelation of this state document threatened to do real damage to Washington's reputation. According to "Paulding," "The text [of the questions] needs no commentary. It has stamped upon its front in characters brazen enough for idolatry itself to comprehend, perfidy, and ingratitude. To doubt [the validity of the treaty of 1778] in such a case was dishonorable, to proclaim those doubts treachery. For the honor of the American character and of human nature, it is to be lamented, that the records of the United States exhibit such a stupendous monument of degeneracy." In subsequent editorials, "Paulding" accused Washington of hating the French Revolution and the French Republic, of hoping to break the 1778 alliance, and of transforming the Cabinet into an unconstitutional advisory council.

The Cabinet questions issue embittered, angered, and depressed the President. Soon after "Paulding's" disclosure, Washington began to complain of press attacks on his character. He told Hamilton that every act by the President was "misrepresented" and "tortured." One reason he wanted to resign, he said, was to stop being "buffeted [sic] in the public prints by a set of infamous scribblers." In a communication to James McHenry, he complained that the Aurora "arraigned" all executive acts. He described the Aurora's and "Paulding's" attacks as "indecent as they are void of truth and fairness." According to Washington, Bache was trying

84 For the text of these questions see Fitzpatrick, ed., Writings, XXXII, 419-420.
85 "Paulding," Aurora, June 9, 1796. Bache claimed the document uncovered a "nefarious conspiracy" against republicanism.
86 "Paulding," ibid., June 15, 18, 22, and July 22, 1796.
See also Washington to David Humphreys, June 12, 1796, ibid., 91-92.
88 Washington to Secretary of War, July 1, 1796, ibid., 110.
to prove the government was both "unfriendly" and "unjust" toward France. Denying any unfriendliness, Washington asked Pickering to consider some means of giving-the-lie to Bache's "misrepresentation and mutilated authorities." 89

Jefferson, apparently shocked by the lack of restraint in Paulding's disclosure, hurriedly assured Washington that he, Jefferson, had not been the source of the Aurora's information on the Cabinet questions. 90 Washington told Jefferson that he had never doubted his former Secretary's innocence; then the President plunged into a discourse of self-pity, charging his vilifiers with having no scruple for truth in their attacks, and claiming that he had never been a party man himself. 91

Washington's final address to Congress, given on December 7, 1796, revived Aurora charges that the President was partial to England and opposed to France. The address did not mention British relations but Washington did draw Congress' attention to difficulties with France. Washington's pledge "to maintain cordial harmony and a perfect friendly understanding" with France, only convinced Aurora writers that Washington had the audacity to say what he did not truly feel. 92 Bache accused Washington of being calm and mild when the British seized American ships; but when the French assaulted American commerce, "he swaggers and struts the hero," posing in a warlike stance of firmness. The President's "professions" of warmth for France meant nothing, Bache added.

Profession costs nothing, and it will be remembered that the present administration has been an administration of profession only; the profession of republicanism, but the practice of monarchy and aristocracy; the profession of sympathy and interest for a great nation and an ally

89 Washington to Secretary of State, July 18, 1796, ibid., 144-145.
92 Eighth Annual Address, Dec. 7, 1796, in James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents (New York, 1897), I, 195. For Aurora disgust with the replies of the Senate and the House, see Aurora, Dec. 14, 15, 17, 1796; Jan. 6 ("Semper Idem"), 1797.
struggling for liberty, but a real devotion to the cause of the combined despots; the profession of a neutral character, cold and indifferent to the warring power, but a warm and sincere attachment to Great Britain... in a word the profession of honor, justice, candor, dignity and good faith, when dishonor, injustice, treachery, meanness and perfidy have given a hue to our public proceedings. What an eight years glorious administration!!

A correspondent, in one of the best remembered diatribes directed against Washington, helped Bache close the year on a contemptuous note by declaring, "If ever a nation was debauched by a man, the American nation has been debauched by WASHINGTON. If ever a nation was deceived by a man, the American nation has been deceived by WASHINGTON. Let his conduct then be an example to future ages. Let it serve to be a warning that no man may be an idol, and that a people may confide in themselves rather than in an individual. Let the history of the federal government instruct mankind, that the masque of patriotism may be worn to conceal the foulest designs against the liberties of a people."

Aurora editorials did not remain Bache's only method for attacking Washington. In late 1796, after the presidential election had been decided, Bache published a pamphlet containing several bitter, abusive letters written by Thomas Paine to the President. The pamphlet was the end product of Paine's trials and tribulations in France. In late 1793, with the fall of Brissot's party, Paine had been imprisoned. Until Monroe arrived in France, Paine had failed to convince American Minister Gouverneur Morris, or the Washington administration that he was an American citizen and, therefore, eligible for release. Monroe reclaimed Paine as a citizen in late 1794, and took the ill revolutionary into his home. Throughout 1795, Paine worked on his Dissertation on First Principles of Government and completed The Age of Reason; he then commissioned Bache to

93 Ibid., Dec. 17, 1796. Other editorials were almost as harsh.
95 John Adams believed Paine's letters were the weakest writings ever published by Paine, and claimed Bache had held back their publication until late 1796 because they would do nothing to aid the Republican cause in the election. Adams to Mrs. Adams, Dec. 8, 1796, Charles Francis Adams, ed., Letters of John Adams Addressed to His Wife (Boston, 1841), II, 233. Adams even noted that Bache had taken out a "patent" for the "exclusive privilege of publishing the pamphlet." Adams to Mrs. Adams, Dec. 4, 1796, ibid., 232.
be the sole American distributor of both works. Meanwhile, Paine's wounds and his hatred of Washington continued to fester. On February 22, 1795, he wrote a bitter letter to the President which Monroe persuaded him not to send. On September 20, he wrote another and sent it to Washington indirectly through Bache. Receiving no reaction, he composed a new letter on July 20, 1796, attached his earlier letters and some additions, and sent the entire package off to Bache for publication.

Published in late 1796, the pamphlet was a rambling tirade against the President. Washington was accused of treachery for keeping Paine in a French prison and for refusing Paine's rightful claim to American citizenship. "I cannot understand your silence upon this subject upon any ground, than as a connivance at my imprisonment," Paine claimed. According to him, Washington had ignored his pleas for release in order to "gratify the English government," to create the opportunity to "exclaim the louder against the French Revolution," or, through Paine's absence from America, to have "less opposition in mounting up the American government."

Moving far afield from his personal grievances, Paine attacked Washington's character, politics, and policies. The Virginian was accused of doing nothing in the American Revolution and of sleeping away his time in the field. Upon assuming the presidency, Washington, though ignorant of policies and ideas on government, accepted gross adulation, encouraged monarchy, and fostered a British style of government. The administration had never practiced neutrality, Paine added, and Jay's mission was "contemptible"; Jay was a "sharper" and an idiot; the British Treaty violated the alliance with France and destroyed French friendship; and Washington was a hypocrite for pledging his friendship for France. Although Washing-

96 Bache had extensive business dealings with Paine in this period. See Paine to Bache, July 13, Sept. 20, 1795, Benjamin Franklin Bache Papers, Transcripts of Manuscripts in the possession of Mrs. J. Manderson Castle, Wilmington, Del.; and, Paine to Col. John Fellows, Jan. 20, 1797, Philip S. Foner, ed., The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine (New York, 1945), 1384.


98 Material in this and the following paragraph is taken from Thomas Paine, Letters to George Washington (Philadelphia, 1796).
ton attempted to portray his own character as "a sort of non-describable,ameleon-coloured thing, called prudence," Paine claimed that the President's entire administration was marked by perfidy and deceit.

Washington calmly avoided responding to Paine, except to complain that the letters were part of a general plan to "knock" him down.99 Oliver Wolcott believed the letters were intended "to destroy the public confidence in the friends of government or 'Washington's faction,'" while Webster called the public's attention to Bache's copyright on this piece of virulent abuse.100 Bache claimed, however, that Paine's letters told "galling truths" about the President which could not be countered by "vulgar abuse" from the Federalists.101

Washington was probably more troubled by another maneuver by Bache. In 1795, Bache republished the forged or "spurious" letters attributed to Washington in the Revolution.102 These letters, allegedly written by Washington to his wife, Lund Washington, and a few others, were first published in the winter of 1777–1778 in England, and were reprinted shortly thereafter in New York.103 In general, the letters portrayed Washington as a lukewarm patriot, a loyal subject of George III, and a skeptic concerning independence. A few Aurora writers, stimulated by the new publication, began to attack Washington once again. "Pittachus," for example, remarked on Washington's allegedly saying, "I love my king," and added that the letters proved Washington's "frigidity" in regard to independence.104

99 Washington to David Stuart, Jan. 8, 1797, Fitzpatrick, ed., Writings, XXXV, 354. Washington also said that William Cobbett's attack on Paine in the Political Censor of December, 1796, was "not a bad thing." Ibid., 360, 360n.


101 Aurora, Dec. 22, 1796; Feb. 22, 1797.

102 See Letters from General Washington to Several of His Friends, in June and July, 1776 (Philadelphia, 1796). Bache was not the only one to revive these letters; the New York Daily Gazette also reprinted and declared the authenticity of the letters in November, 1795. Carroll and Ashworth, Washington, 321.

103 Details concerning the twenty-year history of the forged letters can be found in Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington: A Biography (New York, 1951), IV, 582, 582n; and, Carroll and Ashworth, Washington, 321, 435–436, 439.

104 "Pittachus," Aurora, Nov. 13, 1795.
When Washington denied the authenticity of the letters in 1797, *Aurora* writers dropped the issue. But the denial stimulated another charge. A writer claimed that Washington, while a young officer fighting the French in 1754, fired on a small group of French soldiers, killing a French officer named Jumonville; in short, Washington was accused of murder. Webster immediately ridiculed the weak and wretched charge. “To what a desperate ebb must a man be reduced,” asked Webster rhetorically, “to ransack the musty French Journals of 1755, to find lies to wound the reputation of General Washington: One would think he might find an ample supply of lies of a more recent date.”

The gross abuse of the President resulting from the forged letters embittered Washington and his friends. John Marshall believed that no partisan effort “marked more strongly the depravity of that principle which justifies the means by the end” than the republication of the forged letters. In a private letter written in 1797, Washington reviewed the history of the forged letters, completely denied their authenticity, and charged the *Aurora* with “malignant industry, and perservering [sic] falsehoods . . . in order to weaken, if not destroy, the confidence of the Public.” In one of his last acts as President, Washington made his denial public and official by sending a deposition to the Secretary of State. In subsequent references to the forged letters, Washington revealed his anger at Bache’s meanness. “This man [Bache] has celebrity in a certain way,” he told a correspondent upon his retirement, “for His calumnies are to be exceeded only by his Impudence, and both stand unrivalled.”

Washington’s retirement brought on the final stage of Bache’s

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105 Letter, *ibid.*, Mar. 13, 14, 1797. This writer tried to prove Washington’s guilt by quoting a vague and prejudicial surrender document which was written by the French and which Washington was forced to sign.
106 *Minerva*, Mar. 17, 1797.
defamation campaign. Before the retirement was announced, the *Aurora* did nothing more than ridicule Federalists for believing that "the salvation of the country" depended on Washington remaining in office.\(^\text{111}\) The Farewell Address itself drew little editorial attention in the *Aurora*. Bache’s main denunciation of the Address came through his publication of a pamphlet entitled *A Letter to George Washington*. The pamphlet, written by William Duane under the pen name Jasper Dwight, severely criticized the Address and Washington’s policies.\(^\text{112}\) Duane spoke of "incalculable [sic] evils" in the Address, and found that some of Washington’s measures had "an alarming and pernicious tendency" and were "repugnant to the purest maxims of liberality, wisdom and morals." Astonished at the silence which had followed publication of the Address, Duane objected to what he considered the President’s vagueness on the permanency and indivisibility of the union, to Washington’s attitude toward parties and civil liberties, and to the President’s statements on foreign policy. More specifically, Washington was attacked for lacking "candor" in the British Treaty affair; ever since the President’s promulgation of the Treaty, he added, "the enemies of Liberty in your Country called you their own, and the name of WASHINGTON sank from the elevated rank of SOLON and LYCURGUSES to the insignificance of a Venetian Doge or a Dutch Stadtholder!" He noted at great length how Washington had adopted a narrow, unrepUBLICAN attitude toward parties, free speech, and dissent. Finally, he claimed that Washington had already abandoned his own advice on nonentangling alliances by ratifying the Jay Treaty and violating America’s treaty with France.

As the new year opened and Washington’s retirement approached,

\(^\text{111}\) *Aurora*, June 30, 1796. See also, "Veritas," *ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1796.

\(^\text{112}\) Charles Evans, *American Bibliography* . . . (New York, 1941–1959), XI, 71–72, contains two entries for the *Letter to Washington*. One entry attributes the pamphlet to a Polish bookseller named Treziulney; the other listed William Duane as the author. Duane’s biographer claims that all of the "Jasper Dwight" letters were Duane’s work and that Bache agreed to print the *Letter* and sell it for twenty-five cents. See Kim Tousley Phillips, "William Duane, Revolutionary Editor" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1968), 49–52; and, William Duane, *A Letter to George Washington . . . Containing Strictures . . . by Jasper Dwight* (Philadelphia, 1796). Although Duane may not have been employed by Bache at this time, the latter came to be Bache’s chief assistant. Shortly after Bache’s death, Duane became the editor of the *Aurora* and later married Bache’s widow.
the *Aurora* added a few other charges. Hamilton was accused of writing the entire Address and being the President's president; Washington's illiberal attack on party spirit was noted; and, one writer even mockingly suggested that the long winter season might be attributed to Washington's long awaited resignation.\(^{113}\)

The worst attack was written by a correspondent on March 4 and printed two days later. Blaming Washington for "all the misfortunes of our country," this writer said, "If ever there was a period for rejoicing this is the moment—every heart, in unison with the freedom and happiness of the people ought to beat high with exaltation, that the name of WASHINGTON from this day ceases to give currency to political iniquity; and to legalize corruption." He added that Washington's administration had destroyed republicanism and enlightenment, and, therefore, "this day ought to be a jubilee in the United States."\(^{114}\)

Federalists were disgusted with this last attack. Bache had forgotten the virtues of his grandfather, Fenno declared, and allowed his paper to become the "pestilential retailer of sedition."

It seems that Mr. Bache would wish to be thought the leader of that party which is unceasingly endeavoring to sap the foundation of our government, and sow discord among us. Dead to every normal sentiment that ought to animate the soul—he seems to take a kind of hellish pleasure in defaming the name of WASHINGTON.

That a man who was born in America, and is part of the great family of the United States, could thus basely aim his poisoned dagger at the FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY is sorely to be lamented.\(^{115}\)

Webster believed the attack "exceeds in virulence all the blackness and infamy, that have stained the annals of republican ingratitude. Even France, in the murderous history of Jacobinism, exhibits nothing more spiteful." The attack was, he concluded a "libel which amounts to a charge of high treason."\(^{116}\)

But Bache was not finished. The attack was ultimately capped by a long disorganized pamphlet written by Bache himself. It is sig-

\(^{113}\) *Aurora*, Jan. 26 ("Correspondent"), Mar. 4 ("E."), Apr. 19 ("Correspondent"), 1797.
\(^{114}\) "Correspondent," *ibid.*, Mar. 6, 1797.
\(^{115}\) *Gazette of United States*, Mar. 7, 1797.
\(^{116}\) *Minerva*, Mar. 9, 1797.
significant that this pamphlet, the only extensive political review ever written by Bache, was an analysis of those political subjects which Bache believed were most significant in shaping America’s future. Specifically, he discussed Washington’s character and conduct, the Jay Treaty, relations with France and the nature of republican government.\[117\]

In his introductory comments, Bache offered a rather elaborate set of reasons for undertaking a critique of Washington’s character and policies. After alluding to the Jay Treaty, Bache warned Americans against the tendency of young nations to imitate old, established governments. Aristocratic and monarchical usurpation of power was habitual in Europe, he argued, and American aristocrats had already moved to imitate Europe by conspiring to make Washington an infallible monarch. Although Washington had not consciously participated in this design, the President had aided the antidemocratic cause by accepting flattery, behaving in a haughty manner, encouraging pomp, exciting ingratitude toward France, and forming a party. Americans were safe from such bad tendencies as long as property, numbers, and knowledge were arrayed on the side of democracy, he added. But, undue praise of the President and quiet acquiescence to his policies “renders it incumbent to recall the generous loan of public attachment from one, who has been averse to pay for it [with] even the slender interest of neutrality.”

Bache then began a long, often tedious, review of Washington’s personal shortcomings. Washington was first charged with waging a stupid policy of delaying tactics in the Revolution; he had blundered at Long Island and was responsible for the loss of Fort Washington and Fort Lee; his achievements at Trenton and Princeton were “microscopic” and his conduct had allowed the war to linger on for seven years against “some of the most inefficient generals in Europe.” Clinging tenaciously to his post as commander, Washington was too timid, Bache claimed, to display any of the talents found among French officers in the French Republic’s war against Europe. Compared to these French commanders, Washington “would be like a puny shrub in the midst of a stupendous forest.”

Washington’s contributions after the Revolution were no better,

\[117\] Material in the next three paragraphs is taken from Bache, Remarks Occasioned.
according to Bache. He had encouraged the aristocratic Society of the Cincinnati, promoted funding at a high interest rate, favored speculators, crushed a “petty insurrection” of excise protestors, timidly submitted to British depredations and policies, and ratified a treaty which “disgraced the American character in politics . . . and made national interests subservient to his little passions.” Washington might have had some private virtues, Bache later admitted; he had been “firm” and sometimes “brave” in the Revolution. But, altogether, Washington was merely “A Virginia planter by no means the most eminent, a militia-officer ignorant of war both in theory and useful practice, and a politician certainly not of the first magnitude.” Claiming that Washington was dull, uninspiring, and wedded to authority, order, and pomp, Bache concluded, as previously noted: “He is but a man, and certainly not a great man.”

The assault on Washington ended with Bache’s pamphlet. Perhaps there was nothing left to say by this time. Bache and his accomplices had accused Washington of everything from arrogance to stupidity to villainy to murder. Because of the assault, Bache’s reputation as the most scurrilous Republican journalist of the Federalist era was firmly established. Even Elizabeth Hewson, a friend of the Bache family, was unable to understand or accept the change in Bache’s character. In 1796 she remarked that, “At the time of Dr. F[ranklin]’s death Ben was universally beloved and esteemed and now he is as much despised even by some who are warm democrats.” Eight months later she added that Bache “is now considered in the most despicable light by the most respectable part of his fellow citizens, and by almost every one whom he might formerly have considered as his particular friends.”

Why is it then that Bache so willingly embraced the seemingly impossible task of defaming Washington? What were the important motivations behind the attacks? The traditional answer has been that Bache attacked Washington for simple partisan reasons:

118 Elizabeth Hewson to Thomas T. Hewson, Oct. 24, 1796; June 5, 1797, Hewson Family Papers, American Philosophical Society.

119 It must be remembered that Bache had no way of knowing in the 1790s, that Washington would become, shortly after his death in 1799, the unassailable father of his country. The creation of the mythical Washington is reviewed in William Alfred Bryan, George Washington in American Literature, 1775–1865 (New York, 1952).
to drive the President from office and to aid the Republican cause. This was one of Bache's motives. Several *Aurora* editorials contained candid statements of the need to rid the government of Washington, and once Washington retired few attackers continued the assault. But the traditional explanation reveals Bache's motives only in part. As a practical political tactic Bache's attack was neither very harmful to the Federalists and Washington nor helpful to the Republicans (no evidence exists to show that the Republican leadership supported or encouraged Bache's campaign). The violent and extreme charges made by Bache and his associates do not appear, to the modern reader, to be the work of deft practical politicians interested in wooing voters to the Jeffersonian-Republican side.

Economic self-interest, mentioned earlier in regard to Bache's change of heart in late 1792, warrants some attention. By 1793, he had already failed as a typefounder and book printer and seller, and one gets the impression that Bache may have seen himself as a young man who had nothing to lose yet possibly something to gain from a sensational assault on America's leading patriot. As noted earlier, since Philip Freneau had successfully drawn the public's attention by attacking Washington, Bache may have decided that he should risk following Freneau's lead on the chance that it would increase his newspaper business. On the other hand, Bache had, by virtue of his grandfather's fame and his father's financial inheritance, some claims to upper-class respectability. He must have known the price he would pay in trading that respectability for popular notoriety through an attack on Washington.120

But it is too simple and superficial an explanation if, like Bache's enemies, we dismiss Bache as a mere calculating party hack or as an indiscriminate entrepreneur. Even without the Republican Party cause or supposed economic incentives, Bache hated Washington too passionately and enjoyed the opportunity to attack too much to restrain himself. The *Aurora's* columns and pamphlets printed by Bache are testimonials to the zeal and delight Bache brought to

120 Suggestions of Bache's meager profits may be found in *Aurora*, June 5, 1798; and, Elizabeth Hewson to Thomas T. Hewson, June 20, 1798; May 10, 1799, Hewson Family Papers.
the campaign. The sheer volume of anti-Washington material flow-
ing from Bache’s presses speaks for itself.

Bache’s campaign was more analogous to a religious crusade than
anything else. Like the religious zealot, Bache possessed two things:
a dogmatic commitment to certain moral and ideological beliefs, and
a temperament and personality peculiarly suited to pushing these
beliefs relentlessly. It was Bache’s brashness, impetuosity, and pre-
tentiousness that allowed him to attack Washington in the first
place. As time passed, his brashness turned into hardness; his im-
petuosity produced incredible exaggeration; and his pretence soured
into scorn and contempt. But Bache’s character and personality
were not the chief causes of the attack on Washington; they only
helped to define the rhetoric, tone, and style of his campaign.

The prime reason for Bache’s attacks was his consistent faith in
radical republican and democratic principles, and his belief that
Washington had undermined those principles. It is hard to describe
accurately either the source or precise nature of Bache’s radical
republican and democratic beliefs. Perhaps he simply interpreted
Franklin’s liberal platitudes literally, forging his grandfather’s glib
and simple republican aphorisms into articles of political faith.
Perhaps he was also influenced by European enlightenment ideas,
although republicanism and democracy were concepts appreciated
by only a small minority of vigorous liberals in the societies he en-
countered in Geneva and France. No matter what the source, Bache
did become an avid republican and democrat. Editorials in the
Aurora suggest that he had some knowledge of enlightenment litera-
ture, in particular the work of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Con-
dorcet. At first glance, in fact, Bache’s concept of democracy appears
to be Rousseauian since Bache frequently referred to the primacy
of the general will. But Bache’s general will implied only the right
of the majority to do as it pleased; Rousseau did not hold such
simple majoritarian views. Bache occasionally argued that funda-
mental law acted as a check on the majority, but not often. Unlike
Jefferson, Bache rarely encouraged the proposition that the minority
should be protected from the majority. Bache’s majoritarian views
were a corruption of Rousseau, therefore, and, in language and
emphasis, Bache fell closer to Thomas Paine than anyone else.

It is important that Bache adopted this radical republican faith
before he opened his attack on Washington. In 1791 he declared, "The only principle upon which government founded on reason and not coercion can stand, is that it shall be established and carried on agreeably to the opinion of the majority." By 1792, Bache was clearly devoted to the enlightenment belief that the chains of despotism, monarchy, aristocracy, ignorance, and superstition had to be removed for man to become virtuous and educated, for man to be prepared for improvement and progress. At first, Bache believed that the United States was removing these chains and leading the world toward improvement. But Bache later revised his views. In his pamphlet attack on Washington he criticized the American system of government, especially the power lodged in the Senate and Executive branches and applauded the French plural executive concept. Already in the early 1790s, Bache became convinced that France was the keeper of the keys to world reformation and progress. "Can you seriously suppose," he asked rhetorically in 1792, "that the present struggle of that nation [France] is not the beginning of that universal reformation which is about to take place in the world for the general benefit of the human race, and which will unfold itself into successful reality?" Bache never lost his romantic hope that the French Revolution would eventually reform the world, and he also hoped, even until the bitter end, that America would aid in the reform. But Bache met cruel reality in Washington. At the outset of the attack on Washington, Bache was only mildly upset at the President's un-republican manners. The attack was not even stepped up very much as a result of the Genêt affair or after Washington's castigation of the Democratic Societies. Up to that time the President had not totally abandoned France; he had not implemented any harsh measures against republicanism. The tidal wave of attack did not come until Washington signed the Jay Treaty. In that signature, Bache saw Washington set republicanism back several steps. Bache rightly believed that this marked the end of Franco-American friendship and ties that had bound the two countries together since

121 General Advertiser, Mar. 24, 1791.
122 See especially Bache, Remarks Occasioned, 35–39.
123 General Advertiser, July 17, 1792.
1778. Henceforth, Bache reasoned, the forces for republicanism would be divided at the very time when the despotic nations were uniting. Even worse, the United States had joined the league of despots in coming to terms with Great Britain. Because Bache had been so active in the anti-Treaty movement he was also convinced that a majority of Americans opposed the Treaty. Washington’s deed thereby became doubly nefarious; he had ruined relations with the only other truly progressive republican country in the world and signed a pact with despotism, and he had flagrantly ignored the general will of the people in the most critical issue of the new nation’s history.

It is impossible to imagine a man who could have been more anathema to Bache than was Washington. Time and circumstance, temperament and personality, economic motives and partisan allegiance all played a part. But the attack on Washington was primarily the work of an embittered republican visionary whose criticisms of Washington might have remained within the bounds of political sanity and reason if the Jay Treaty had not been ratified. After its ratification, Bache found words inadequate to convey the depths of his disgust and hatred. The attack was not chiefly an attempt to rally republican sentiment; it was a black campaign of despair and frustration, of defeat and revenge. For Bache, bitterness and contempt remained the main features of his politics right up to his premature death in the yellow fever epidemic of 1798.