Inventing the Patriot President: Bache’s Aurora and John Adams

During the first decade of nationhood under the Constitution, two of our most vital institutions emerged—the presidency and political parties. Only slightly less significant, a partisan press, which had been largely quiescent during the debate over the Constitution in 1787-88 (most newspapers supported the new form of government), reached maturity during the 1790s. These journals elucidated public issues and personalities and nurtured the violent conflict that erupted between our first political parties, the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans. They played a crucial role in the evolution of American democracy.¹

The most important opposition newspaper of the 1790s, when popular animosity developed to President Washington and his Federalist “prime minister,” Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, was Benjamin Franklin Bache’s Philadelphia General Advertiser. Founded in October 1790, this newspaper, better known by the title Aurora which it adopted in 1794, was the Jeffersonian daily of greatest circulation, with some

The author dedicates this article to the memory of his parents, Belle and Saul Scherr, and to the memory of his friend Martin Rosenberg


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1700 subscribers at a time when average daily journals attracted only about 500.\(^2\) The *Aurora* carried the most reliable transcribed reports of congressional debates, which were often reprinted by its competitors. Free copies circulated extensively in taverns and under the postal frank of Republican congressmen. Young Bache (1769-1798), Benjamin Franklin’s grandson, composed stirring editorial rhetoric and further attested his devotion to Enlightenment thought by printing the works of Paine, Condorcet, Joseph Priestley, Edmund Charles (“Citizen”) Genet, and other radicals. Most scholars agree with Donald H. Stewart, author of a massive study of Republican journalism, that after 1793, when Philip Freneau’s *National Gazette* failed, the *Aurora* “was in all likelihood the most influential newsheet in the country.”\(^3\) James Morton Smith considers Bache’s paper “the leading Republican journal,” and the dean of historians of American journalism, Frank L. Mott, calls the *Aurora* “the chief Republican organ.”\(^4\)

Although scholars recognize the *Aurora’s* importance, they tend to underrate Bache’s rational self-control as well as his concern for national stability. Instead they depict him as a fanatical ideologue, “embittered republican visionary,” “rabid partisan,” and the “most vitriolic” of the anti-Washington editors.\(^5\) Commenting on the *Aurora’s* abuse of Wash-


\(^5\) These are the respective views of Miller, *Crisis*, 26; Tagg, “Benjamin Franklin Bache’s
ington after he signed the unpopular, pro-British Jay Treaty in 1795, an expert on Bache invidiously concludes: "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." He implies that Bache's vituperative style undid any of his meaningful contributions to America's republican political culture.

Even historians more favorably disposed toward Bache have largely ignored or discounted his newspaper's ostensibly high-minded, patriotic and nonpartisan efforts to rally Republican voters behind Federalist John Adams (whom he had formerly opposed) after the unique presidential election of 1796. Adams won the presidency but, because of the lack of distinct ballots for the two offices, Republican standard-bearer Thomas Jefferson won the second highest number of electoral votes (68 to Adams's 71) and garnered the vice presidency, his rival's former post. This essay will examine the *Aurora*'s view of Adams in the period between his election and his message to a special session of Congress on May 16, 1797, in which the president unveiled the new administration's hostile policy toward the revolutionary French republic. In recurring to Aristotelian and "classical republican" ideals of independent leadership, the *Aurora*, albeit briefly, implicitly maintained its compatibility with a government that rested on popular sovereignty and the primacy of majority rule.

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8 Tagg, *Bache and the Aurora*, 137-41, and Smith, *Franklin and Bache*, 123-25, discuss Bache's
Though Bache’s paper had been somewhat critical of Adams’s “aristocratic” views during the elections of 1792 and 1796 and had denounced his *Discourses on Davila* (1790) during the controversy between “Publicola” (John Quincy Adams) and Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man* in the summer of 1791, the Aurora’s observations on him for six months after his presidential victory stressed his identification with the Enlightenment ideal that good government rested on political man’s free, uncoerced use of his independent reason. The Aurora’s commentary on Adams during this brief truce in party warfare was also greatly influenced by the intellectual legacy of ancient Greek thinkers like Aristotle; English “classical republicans” like James Harrington; and eighteenth-century British “Country Party” writers Henry St. John (Viscount Bolingbroke) and John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon. Bolingbroke had been editor of *The Craftsman*, and Trenchard and Gordon were the authors of *Cato’s Letters* (1721) and editors of the antimonarchical newspaper the *Independent Whig*. These “eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen,” as historian Caroline Robbins calls them, represented a motley array of urban artisans

enthusiasm for popular sovereignty and majoritarianism. Bache’s first biographer, Fay, though generally sympathetic, nevertheless agrees with critics’ view that he was an inveterate extremist, “the man who first gave its form to radical opinion in the United States and fashioned the Democratic Party.”


and rural gentry. They had opposed Prime Minister Robert Walpole, who used bribes, pensions, and patronage to secure majorities in the House of Commons favorable to his policies. Abhorring "factions" and "parties" for their danger to community well-being and social stability, they instead espoused the concept of a "patriot king," an independent statesman who decided national policy issues solely on the basis of morality, justice, and the public welfare. As Bolingbroke expressed it in *The Idea of a Patriot King* (1738): "Instead of abetting the divisions of his people, he will endeavor to unite them, and to be himself the center of their union; instead of putting himself at the head of one party in order to govern his people, he will put himself at the head of his people in order to govern, or more properly to subdue, all parties." Bolingbroke's views were respected by many American leaders, including Jefferson and Adams.

Without sufficient confirmatory evidence, the *Aurora*'s writers could

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11. Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion*, applies the "Court-Country" analogy to the conflict between Federalists and Republicans in the 1790s

merely hope that Adams would reverse the Washington administration’s Anglophilic policies. “An American” cautiously predicted: “I rather believe that he [Adams] will conquer his affection for Great Britain and his dislike to democratic republicanism, and seeing that the tranquility and prosperity of the country depend, in a great degree upon preserving a good understanding with the French Republic, departing from the line of conduct which has hitherto stampt our executive administration British, he will pursue a line of conduct more worthy of a free people.”

British depredations on American commerce, impressment of American seamen, and arrogance toward their former colonies constituted a potential danger to national sovereignty, Republicans argued; while the French Revolution, despite its violence and instability, in the long run would increase the happiness and prosperity of all peoples. Therefore the public good and the success of representative government would be advanced if Adams altered his predecessor’s policies.

In the expectation that Adams would reverse these policies, the *Aurora* emphasized Jeffersonian admiration for the new president’s talents and insisted that they would cheerfully accept his election. Despite his preference for Jefferson, one writer praised Adams as “a man of abilities, virtue and patriotism.” The author believed that Adams’s respect for public opinion and the Constitution overrode “speculative opinions” in his books in favor of aristocracy. He would “make us a good republican President,” acknowledge previous “errors,” and join the “stream” in support of popular government, “in preference to persevering in error, thro’ obstinacy.”

An adaptable statesman, Adams could be expected to use his reason to lead the new nation toward a freer, happier future.

At this juncture in party conflict the newspaper’s columnists stressed the Enlightenment concept that each man was competent to independently exercise his reason without political coercion from any other. They professed to deplore parties and factions as impediments to objectivity. When one joined a “faction,” they warned, he became the unthinking tool of its leaders and would inevitably unwittingly lose his freedom of action at their hands. Bache went so far as to charge that monarchy and aristocracy had evolved out of selfish factions. In his editorial column, “Philadel-

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"Philadelphia," he explained, "The instrument by which extensive mischiefs have in all ages been perpetuated, has been the principle of many men being reduced to mere machines in the hands of the few. Man, while he consults his own understanding, is the ornament of the universe," but "when he surrenders his reason, and becomes the partisan of implicit faith and implicit obedience, is the most mischievous of all animals." Fearing to exert his will to depart from rules laid down by others, the party man's servile quality seemed prima facie immoral. "Depravity would have gained little ground . . . if every man had been in the exercise of his independent judgment," Bache declared. "Ceasing to examine every proposition that comes before him for the direction of his conduct," he warned, the partisan "is no longer the capable subject of moral instruction; he is, in the instant of submission, the blind instrument of every nefarious purpose of his principal." The party man's abnegation of his free will and reason made him, in a sense, a slave. Other Republican writers similarly exhorted, "Let reason prescribe bounds to enthusiasm, and differences in opinion cease to be considered as proofs of base principles and sinister designs!"

Bache's violent denunciation of partisanship made it seem logical for his newspaper to follow the Commonwealthmen in concluding that the republic needed a president who, like Bolingbroke's "patriot king," applied principles of reason to the conduct of government and acted like an enlightened, independent statesman. Moreover, Adams's writings, notably his voluminous *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* (1787-1788), had glorified the idea of an independent executive who rose above conflicts between the rich aristocracy and poor commoners, and mediated their disputes in accord with the "public good." Bache appears to have welcomed this perspective.

The ideal of the president as a benign, paternalistic figure still resounded strongly with the voters. It was one of the reasons why Washington's popularity persisted despite public disapproval of many of his policies. The *Aurora* could manipulate these "affections" to rally the support of the Republican rank and file behind Adams and gain political leverage for the Republicans with "His Rotundity." Though the *Aurora* had

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supported Jefferson during the election of 1796, it had generally avoided personal abuse of Adams. Its opposition primarily consisted in reprinting Tench Coxe’s “Federalist” articles, which had originally appeared in John Fenno’s Hamiltonian Gazette of the United States, as well as a few essays from other newspapers that denounced Adams’s monarchical sympathies.\(^16\)

Although Federalists derided the *Aurora’s* abrupt volte-face, Bache’s shift was actually less extreme than they pretended. His newspaper had confined itself primarily to praising Jefferson during the election campaign of 1796, rather than abusing Adams, who was encouraged to exemplify disinterested “republican virtue” in the following months. Since little of Bache’s political correspondence for this period has survived, we must turn to the *Aurora’s* editorials (some of which he wrote) to gauge his aims.\(^17\)

In February 1797, Bache’s paper began to stress Adams’s aloofness from the objectionable policies of Washington and Hamilton, especially

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the odious Jay Treaty. Its pro-British clauses had caused the French government to retaliate, breaking off diplomatic relations and seizing American shipping in the West Indies. The Aurora reported that “the federal or British party, and particularly Jay and Hamilton, are disappointed at the election of Mr. Adams as president.” They had allegedly favored the relatively unknown candidate, U.S. minister to Spain Thomas Pinckney, hoping to “confine Mr. Adams another four years to the insignificant and unimportant office” of vice president. “A Correspondent” commended the Braintree statesman for his minor role in devising Washington’s programs, which had largely emanated from Hamilton. At the same time he upbraided the administration for excluding Adams from the cabinet’s deliberations. “Whence has this arisen?” he inquired. “Was it from a belief that the Vice President wanted talents or integrity? Was it from an opinion, that he was not deserving of confidence?” It was because Adams opposed Hamilton’s schemes, he concluded.18

With such considerations in mind, Republican praise for Adams intensified. When he bade farewell to the Senate in February 1797, a formal expression of his gratitude for having served as its presiding officer and his hope that “no more permanent body” would be necessary to protect property rights, the Aurora reprinted a New York editorial that acclaimed the speech as one that would “be read with pleasure by the American Republicans.” Implying that Adams might be the independent statesman Americans had been waiting for and had mistakenly thought Washington embodied, the author asserted: “The republicans are well satisfied with the election of Mr. Adams; they have reason to believe that he is a firm and upright patriot—that he will not commit his conscience to the keeping of any one but judge for himself and pursue the real good of his country—Nor have they any apprehension of his putting himself at the head of a party as his predecessor has done.”

Engaged in molding the new president in the image of an independent statesman, the personification of Bolingbroke’s “patriot king” reduced to republican stature, Jeffersonians predicted he would impartially appoint his former opponents to office and redress French grievances. Guided by his own judgment, he would not be the pawn of “faction.” Unlike Washington, who had chosen “the greatest tories . . . to confidential

places, merely because they were of his party,” Adams would “distribute public offices among men of probity and talents, and not select those only who may approve of his administration.” His goal, like a patriot king/president should be (in Bolingbroke’s words), “to espouse no party, but to govern like the common father of his people.”

Persevering in its hope that Adams would strive for impartiality, the *Aurora* concluded: “Upon the whole, America has a right to rejoice in the prospect she has of a wise and virtuous administration under two such distinguished patriots as Adams and Jefferson.” On inauguration day, another Republican newspaper, the *New York Journal*, concurred: “That his administration may be propitious to the spirit and intention of our late revolution, and to the true dignity, peace and happiness of the people of our empire, is the sincere wish of every good citizen.” An optimistic Wilmington, Delaware, correspondent viewed Adams as a patriot president who would reject special interests and guarantee the success of disinterested representative government. With the “retirement of the President,” he thought it could be “reasonably . . . expected, the Aristocrats will again gradually sink into their primitive nothingness;—and that the cause of Republicanism, under the administration of Adams will acquire important vigor.” Fulfilling the promise of his leadership in the Continental Congress and as minister abroad, Adams would “disappoint the British faction, act like a genuine Republican and not prove himself an apostate to the Liberty and Independence of his Country, by disgracing his conduct during our late glorious revolution.”

He would refuse to submit to erstwhile “aristocrats.”

The principles of revolutionary republicanism had taken root within America’s French ally, and Bache hoped Adams would support them against the “High Federalist” Secretary of State Pickering and Secretary of the Treasury Wolcott, who followed Hamilton in their contempt for popular rule and amenability to a Franco-American war. Adams wanted peace with the French republic, Bache insisted, and “his first solicitude

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21 Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 3, 1797 (“Communication,” Wilmington, March 1, 1797)
will be to close the breach and restore harmony.” Bache lent credence to rumors that Adams had opposed Jay’s treaty, and “had declared in [the] presence of one of the Senators . . . that he could have made a better one ten years ago.” Obviously, he had not fallen under “British influence,” as Bache thought Washington regrettably had. Bache trusted Adams to reverse the anti-French policy. Especially after the new president’s friends had reportedly informed him of a Hamiltonian plot to thwart his election, he “takes care how he suffers himself to be led, as Mr. Washington had been, by this gentleman.” Bache suggested Hamilton’s alleged electoral conspiracy had reinforced Adams’s political independence.

Adams’s inaugural address on March 4, 1797, while reflecting his own effort to conciliate the Democratic Republicans, evinced the new president’s basic hostility toward an opposition party. Although professing “a love of virtuous men of all parties and denominations” and “an equal and impartial regard to the rights, interests, honor, and happiness of all the States in the Union, without preference or regard to a northern or southern, eastern or western position,” he simultaneously denounced “the spirit of party . . . and the pestilence of foreign influence, which is the angel of destruction to elective governments.” He firmly pledged his support to the Constitution and the American republic. Denying that he had ever wished for a Senate or executive “more permanent” than what the Constitution had established, he affirmed his disdain for aristocracy and monarchy and support for America’s representative democracy.

Despite Adams’s praise of Washington and promise to support his policies, Bache enthusiastically gave the address his “most unreserved approbation.” “It has hitherto been too common to degrade the sovereignty of the several states, and to treat them as mere subordinate corporations,” Bache pointed out, obviously alluding to Alexander Hamilton’s philosophy of governmental centralization. But Adams’s defense of constitutional government would cause “anti-republicans to foam.” New York City Republicans likewise predicted that Hamiltonians would be disap-


pointed by Adams's and Jefferson's moderate inaugural addresses, which they hailed as the dawn of a "NEW AERA," "auspicious" to "the friends of Republican Virtue." Heartened by Adams's avowed impartiality toward the sections of the Union and his promise to appoint "virtuous men" to federal posts, the Aurora thought such benevolence "reflects the highest honor on him. . . . A striking contrast this to the example of his predecessor in office! May he persevere in it uninfluenced by the menaces or machinations of artful and designing men?" By appointing his former opponents to government posts, Adams would show the sincerity of his pleas for an end to party conflict. The notorious Republican pamphleteer, James T. Callender, who briefly worked for Bache, later suggested that "opposition to his [Adams's] authority must have been subdued, and annihilated," had he appointed Jeffersonians to office at the outset. "History is full of examples, where even the most furious factions have been soothed into perfect harmony, by a small share of prudence on the part of government."25

The Aurora continued to print praise of Adams's inaugural address. One contributor noted that Adams's determination to support the Constitution "pure and inviolate," his desire for peace with France, support of state's rights, and willingness to adopt other aspects of the Republican creed "cannot fail to be completely satisfactory to the candid and dispassionate." The message marked the president's dissociation from his former ties to the Federalist Party: "It is the address of a fellow citizen, who will not deign to become the President of a Party but the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES."26

Reiterating their loyalty to the new administration, Republicans argued that the peaceful transfer of power had demonstrated Americans' respect

24 Philadelphia Aurora, March 10, 1797, quoting New York Argus, "Remarks on the President's Speech," which was also printed in the New York Journal, both papers owned by Thomas Greenleaf, on March 8, 1797. This popular editorial also appeared in the Boston Independent Chronicle, March 16, 20, 1797. For New York comments on the inauguration, see Journal, March 8, 1797. Jefferson's speech to the Senate on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1797, may be found in Saul K. Padover, ed., The Complete Jefferson (New York, 1943), 381-82, and the Aurora, March 7, 1797.


26 Philadelphia Aurora, March 11, 1797 ("New-York, March 8")
for "representative government" and its compatibility with "the strictest harmony and order." Adams's conciliatory inaugural address had made national unity possible: "We find the strenuous opposition made to Mr. Adams, pending the election, melt into a peaceful acquiescence with the declared majority, and a manly confidence in his integrity and love of country, supercede [sic] the doubts and fears, which certain speculative opinions of his had given birth to."  

Reasserting its confidence that Adams would be independent of Washington's advisers and use his own reason to decide critical issues, the *Aurora* asserted that his "former opponents" would be "willing to weigh his measures with candor." By relying on his own judgment, "A Correspondent" was confident Adams would redress Washington's errors and restore peace and prosperity. "It is universally admitted that Mr. Adams is a man of incorruptible integrity, and that the resources of his own mind are equal to the duties of his station," he observed. "We may flatter ourselves, that his measures will be taken with prudence, that he will not become the head of a party, and that he will not be the tool of any man or set of men."  

Republicans favorably compared Adams's inaugural address with Washington's speeches. His message evinced his qualifications to fulfill the role of a leader above partisanship. "Let it be compared with any of his predecessor's, and they must hide their diminished heads in the comparison. How honorable are these sentiments! How characteristic of a patriot!" "A Correspondent" exclaimed. Adams was preferable to Washington, whose "anathemas against particular descriptions of citizens" in his message condemning the democratic societies after the Whiskey Rebellion, in November 1794, still provoked Jeffersonian anger. The *Aurora* praised Adams for intending to pursue a contrary policy, "to soothe the irritated public mind and to harmonize the different parties. May Heaven grant success to his labors, and his reward be in the fruition of his endeavors and the plaudits of his country." Republicans like Bache thus hoped for a coalition government in which they would participate on an equal basis under Adams's benign, dispassionate supervision.

27 Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 14, 1797 ("A Brief History of the Late Election of Electors for the State of Pennsylvania. Receipt of Returns").
28 Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 14, 1797 ("From a Correspondent").
29 Ibid.
"A Correspondent" was confident that Adams would "extricate" the country peacefully from the controversy with the French Directory. He suggested that the president summon the Senate into special session, "either to co-operate in issuing a new commission, with extraordinary powers" for Charles C. Pinckney, whom the Washington administration had dispatched as American minister to France at the end of 1796, "or appointing some other person as envoy extraordinary to the Republic." Alarmed by rumors that the Directory, France's executive body, had summarily rejected Pinckney, "A Correspondent" feared war unless Adams sent a special delegation. He relied on "the prudence and ability of Mr. Adams," who believed that Franco-American friendship was in the national interest, and would use "all means in his power to effect a reconciliation with our injured allies."\(^{30}\)

The *Aurora* and other Jeffersonian newspapers propagated a popularized conception of Adams during the brief hiatus in party warfare that bore similarities to the idealized "founders of states" depicted in political theory. They sought to convey a larger-than-life image of an independent statesman who embodied Enlightenment ideals of rationality and would surmount and unite all parties in the pursuit of the common good.\(^{31}\) Nevertheless, while upholding the ideal of the "patriot president," the *Aurora*'s writers made clear, by the content of their commentary, that their respect and support of Adams were contingent on his persevering as a "republican," a "citizen," and a "patriot" in the style of his inaugural address. He must reject any partiality for monarchy, or monarchies like Britain.\(^{32}\)

At the same time, the Republicans and their foremost editor espoused a "republican" variant of an ostensibly undemocratic ideal. Shrewdly, they appealed to public responsiveness toward the vision of an impartial,

\(^{30}\) Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 14, 1797 ("From a Correspondent") There were early predictions of Pinckney's rejection in the *Aurora*, Jan 27, and the New York *Journal*, Jan 28, 1797, and in Senator Henry Tazewell to Thomas Jefferson, Feb 1, 1797, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress


reasonable moderator, thereby identifying their party with that laudable kind of leadership. As Benjamin Franklin had earlier remarked in a speech at the constitutional convention in June 1787, there was "a natural Inclination in Mankind to kingly Government," since even republicans would "rather have one Tyrant than 500. It gives them more of the Appearance of Equality among Citizens." If only potentially, Franklin's grandson's readers looked to John Adams for the fulfillment of a patriot king's role. They trusted him to override the traumatic party conflict and establish national unity, reviving the virtue of the people and their vacillating representatives who had voted for Jay's treaty.

That was the other side of the equation of political power in the United States—the people—and Bache esteemed this more "revolutionary" facet of republicanism to a greater extent than he did the vestige of monarchy embodied in the presidency. Thus on March 15, 1797, after news of Pinckney's rejection had been received, the _Aurora_, along with other Republican journals, urgently recommended an appeal to the voters. Contending that France's dismissal of Pinckney had been appropriate retaliation for Jay's treaty, the _Aurora_ and its New York counterpart, in identically worded articles, demanded the treaty's repeal and advised public protests to induce Adams's support. "Let the President know there is nothing you wish for so much as peace and friendship with France," they admonished, "nothing you deprecate so much as war with that Republic, or an alliance offensive and defensive with Great Britain. If the British treaty must be the price of this peace and friendship, in God's name let it go." There was no other "way of healing our wounded honor, or repairing our violated faith."

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33 Benjamin Franklin, Speech in the Constitutional Convention on Salaries, June 2, 1787, in Albert H. Smyth, ed., _Writings of Benjamin Franklin_ (10 vols., New York, 1905-07), 9 593
Bache was distraught by what he viewed as a decline of both private and public virtue, especially in the towns, and the popular obsession with wealth and material goods. See his tract, _Remarks Occasioned by the Late Conduct of George Washington as President of the United States_ (Philadelphia, 1797), 83-84. A major theme in James Roger Sharp, _American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis_ (New Haven, 1993), is the political elite's dread of disunion, anarchy, and monarchy

In a variation on the "patriot president" theme, Republicans stressed that, although the president exerted his own reason, he must be aware of his constituents' desires in making his final decision. Only the people themselves, the source of original power in a "representative democracy," possessed the authority to save the nation from the horrors of war by appealing to independent-minded republican President Adams for action. Significantly, Bache assumed that if Adams received public remonstrances he would yield to the popular will and seek peace with France. He thereby pointedly qualified his ideal of the autonomous ruler, who solely followed his own reason, to conform to the reality of American republicanism and the people's interest in the preservation of peace.

Following news of Pinckney's rejection, the Hamiltonian press, aware that a showdown was impending with the Republicans over Adams's response, derided the sincerity of Jeffersonian protestations of loyalty and friendship for the new president. Straining to refute these charges, Republicans emphasized the old friendship between Adams and Jefferson, the conciliatory inaugural address, and the disreputable motives of his opponents, the execrable "British faction." Hamilton's backing of Thomas Pinckney for president combined with Adams's inaugural had convinced Jeffersonians that Adams was an "independent republican . . . determined to be President of the United States, and not the chief of a faction." Far from mere opportunism, they insisted, their new adherence to Adams flowed from an evaluation of recent, concrete events. A New York correspondent explained, "They then, and not until then, proffered him that just tribute of praise, which none but a zealot would have grudged." 35

Jeffersonians further insisted that Adams's independent posture had thwarted Hamiltonian plans to reduce him to an "automaton" who meekly followed the "royal British faction's" anti-French policies. "Finding that Mr. Adams has a will and an understanding of his own, and that he is by no means disposed to become the pupil of Mr. Hamilton, who

35 "Plain Truth," in the Boston Columbian Centinel, April 8, and the Philadelphia Gazette of the United States, April 18, 1797; New York Herald, March 15, April 22, 1797 ("Extract of a Letter from Virginia"); Porcupine's Gazette, March 14, 17 ("RUSTICUS"), and April 18, 1797 ("Extract of a letter from a gentleman in Georgia, to his friend in this city, dated March 1, 1797"), all in Cobbett, Porcupine's Works, 5:66-69, 96-98, 269. For the New York comments, see Aurora, March 16, 1797 ("New-York, March 14").
endeavored to make Mr. Pinckney supersede him, they are overwhelmed with disappointment and mortification," Republicans gloated.36

The insistence by Bache and other Jeffersonians on Adams's virtuous republicanism was more than mere rhetoric. A consistently voiced theme in the Republican press of Philadelphia, Boston, and New York during the first weeks of his presidency, reflecting the prevailing ambivalence toward political parties, it was later abandoned with reluctance.37

The *Aurora* professed confidence that Adams would overcome critical partisan divisions at home and French depredations abroad through the exercise of energetic, virtuous leadership. "This is a moment that demands deliberate prudence and dispassionate energy," a contributor asserted. "The President expressed his intention to submit all differences to negotiation; may success, happiness and tranquility yet await his measures."38 Jeffersonians' adroit praise of Adams might help reduce party tensions and surmount party animosities, in accordance with the classical republican objective of national unity.

The new president's frugal habits proved he had retained his republican virtue, one contributor asserted. He dressed plainly for his inauguration and owned a two-horse carriage rather than a coach-and-six like President Washington.39 Speaking for the Jeffersonians, the *Aurora* explained that Adams's inaugural address had convinced them to "consult him instead of his book"—*A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, which Adams had written in 1786-87 in favor of an aristocratic branch of the legislature as a check on popular rule—"and they are sanguine from the cast of his sentiments, that republicanism will be

36 Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 18, 1797 The *Aurora* rejoiced at the failure of Hamilton's alleged electoral maneuvers against Adams "In spite of every vile and detestable artifice the voice of the people was fully declared, and neither Mr. Adams nor Mr. Jefferson was tricked out of their election," it declared on March 20, 1797
38 Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 17, 1797
39 Philadelphia *Aurora*, March 20, 1797
countenanced, peace with our allies preserved, no hydra of a British faction nurtured, and that all men of virtue will be equal in his estimation, that he will be the president of the people, and not a party.”

If Adams adhered to this program, he would fulfill the role of the patriot president, the ruler who consulted the wishes of the majority of his constituents—“The People”—while his lofty decisions simultaneously reconciled conflicting interests. As Bache put it several years earlier, the independent statesman would rule by example as well as policies, inspiring citizens with “the supreme sense of virtue. . . .” The virtuous leader revealed to the “moral eye” of his people a “living example” of “whatever is lovely and heroic in affections and conduct, or what is nearest to those pictures genuine copies of manners, that it may learn easily to separate between the fair and harmonious, the deformed and dissonant.”

In his youth, Bache himself had political ambitions that he had sought to legitimize by employing them for the disinterested pursuit of the public good. “My principal object shall be to be esteemed virtuous, reputed learned, and to be useful thro’ their means to my Country & Mankind,” he wrote in an early diary, the “Melanges.” “I shall aim at being a public character to shew how I could choose the good of my Country in opposition to my private interest, which is a rare thing now a days.”

Like Bolingbroke’s magnanimous figure, Adams, guided by the intention to promote the public good, would restore national harmony and end the threat to republican unity. This was the Jeffersonian hope.

When Adams called a special session of Congress, the first in the young nation’s history, most observers surmised that Pinckney’s recent dismissal was the reason. Bache and other editors had suggested that he ask Congress to meet in order to choose a special commission to negotiate with the Directory. They greeted his action enthusiastically, in contrast to skeptical Republican leaders like Jefferson and Madison, who questioned the president’s motives. Praising his “disposition to consult the

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40 Philadelphia Aurora, March 20, 1797.
41 Philadelphia Aurora, May 17, 1791. For Bolingbroke’s similar view of the importance of virtuous example, see The Idea of a Patriot King (1749; reprinted, Indianapolis, 1965), 28; Kramnick, Bolingbroke, 163-69. On the disillusionment with royalty, see Richard L. Bushman, King and People in Provincial Massachusetts (Chapel Hill, 1985).
42 “Melanges,” Bache Papers, Castle Collection, American Philosophical Society, quoted in Tagg, Bache and the Aurora, 71.
43 Philadelphia Aurora, March 27, 1797; New York Journal, April 1, 1797. For Jefferson and Madison’s reaction, see note 67.
wishes of the people” by convening Congress, Bache argued that Adams thus upheld the principles of representative government. This was a good omen for peace, though distasteful to the Hamiltonian cabinet which Bache assumed Adams had bypassed in favor of the popularly chosen legislature.\(^4^4\) As one writer put it, the president thus “shews a profound judgment of his own, and that when he wishes for counsel in high matters he looks to a popular representation for it, rather than to an official council.” Boston and New York Jeffersonians concurred, depicting Adams as a man solicitous of the public will. Rather than consult the aristocratic elite that Washington had chosen to advise him—men who had not been confirmed by popular vote—he “is for obtaining the sentiments of The People’ by their Representatives,” they asserted.\(^4^5\) The Republican press apparently sincerely wished to convey to its readers a belief that Adams intended to be a true representative of the people, the “democratic element” in the “mixed constitution” he propounded.\(^4^6\) This gloss on Adams’s motives temporarily assuaged their fear of what Congress, with its small Federalist majority, might do when it convened.

As the date of the special session approached, Bache increased the tempo of his peace campaign. He assured his readers that an “envoy Extraordinary” would resolve differences with France and that “pacific measures will be pursued” by Adams. Bache emphasized Adams’s virtuous behavior and his standing as an “independent republican.” Commending the “true dignity” of the inaugural ceremonies, he observed, “It is a circumstance very auspicious to our country, that this is the kind of dignity the President means to display.”\(^4^7\) Unfortunately, Bache and other Jeffersonian editors mistook the rhetoric of Adams’s statements for the substance of future actions. They were doomed to disappointment.

\(^{4^4}\) Philadelphia Aurora, March 30, 1797, reprinted in the New York Journal, April 1, 1797.

\(^{4^5}\) “A CUSTOMER,” in New York Argus, April 19, 1797, reprinted in Philadelphia Aurora, April 24, 1797; Boston Independent Chronicle, April 3, and New York Journal, April 12, 1797.


\(^{4^7}\) Philadelphia Aurora, April 21, 28, 1797. These pieces were reprinted in the New York Argus, April 24, the New York Journal, April 24, May 3, and the Boston Independent Chronicle, May 8, 1797.
When the special session began on May 15, 1797, Congress, responding to the crisis, assembled a quorum much more quickly than usual. The first item of business was the election of the clerk of the House of Representatives. John Beckley, a leading Republican strategist responsible for Jefferson’s victory in Pennsylvania in 1796, had been clerk since 1789. The previously indifferent Federalists mobilized their forces to remove him, revealing the increase of party hostility since Pinckney’s rejection by the French government. Beckley was defeated by one vote on the first day of the session.48

Outraged by this new outburst of Federalist partisanship, Bache elaborated his antipathy to party strife, expanding on the views he had expressed encouraging a nonpartisan administration under Adams. Denouncing the Federalist action against Beckley as factious malice against a man who had competently performed his duties despite his political affiliation, he argued they had removed him “because he acted like a freeman, according to his own conscience and the dictates of his own understanding; because he was not a tool of faction, but would think for himself.”49 In common with his recent praise of Adams, Bache’s assessment of Beckley’s defeat stressed his support for the Enlightenment ideal of the rational, independent statesman with “an opinion of his own,” who used his judgment free from influence or manipulation. According to the Aurora’s correspondents, Beckley, a capable government officer who had been cruelly removed by the Federalists (in an early instance of the “spoils system”), upheld this ideal. His dismissal as clerk “is a specimen of party ranchor [sic] that has seldom been equalled even in the annals of federalism,” one of them protested. “Mr. Beckley has served in that capacity eight years, during which he has conducted himself with acknowledged fidelity and ability. The experience he has acquired is now lost to the public, thro’ the party animosity of a few bustling individuals.” “A man’s private opinions, it appears, are to be the test of his fitness to office,” the Aurora bitterly concluded.50 Bache’s writers agreed that it was essential to good

49 Philadelphia Aurora, May 18, 1797.
50 Philadelphia Aurora, May 16, 1797. The New York Argus reprinted this article on May 18, 1797.
government that a republic's citizens discern its interest on the basis of their own honest perception of that interest, uncolored by the threats of "faction." Beckley's removal flagrantly violated this ethos.

Much more important, Adams's speech to the special session shattered Bache's hopes for party reconciliation. The president suggested increased appropriations for national defense to complete construction of three frigates; the arming and convoying of merchant ships; and strengthening of the militia and creation of a provisional army to enter service if war with France broke out. His belligerent recommendation for increased armaments overshadowed his proposal to send a special mission to Paris to renew negotiations.51

Bache printed Adams's address on May 17, denouncing it as a "war speech" that revealed he had become the tool of Secretary of State Pickering and the warmongers in the cabinet. "From the temper which a great man shewed in his speech on Tuesday to a great assembly we are unavoidably led to believe that his men TIMOTHY and OLIVER have fed him upon pepperpot these three weeks past in order to bring his nerves to a proper anti gallian [sic] tone," he protested.52 Far from acting reasonably and independently, Adams had fallen under the domination of the hated cabinet. He resembled George III, who in 1776 had betrayed the colonists he was obligated to serve and taken counsel from evil ministers who put their selfish desire for power and "influence" above the public welfare. As one had forfeited the role of patriot king, the other had abandoned the stance of "patriot president."53

An alarmed Aurora vented Jeffersonian fears that Adams wanted war and merely intended to deceive the French and American people by proffering new negotiations. "With such a specimen of the disposition of our executive as the President's speech affords . . . the sending an envoy would be little better than a farce; and where would the puppet be found to act it?" Bache declared. If Congress adopted Adams's propos-

52 Philadelphia Aurora, May 18, 19, 1797
53 The decline of the colonists' veneration of George III as a patriot ruler in the years before the Revolution bears a notable affinity to Bache's deteriorating confidence in Adams. See Bushman, King and People, 212-35; Bernard Bailyn, Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, 1967), 122-30; Liddle, "'Patriot King or None,'" 951-70; and Jernlyn G. Marston, King and Congress: The Transfer of Political Legitimacy, 1774-1776 (Princeton, 1987)
als, "the only measure adviseable is to arm; and in the meantime send a man to France (if one can be found fit for the dirty business) to amuse the French until we are in tolerable readiness to join the coalition" of monarchs aligned against the republic.\textsuperscript{54} By ignoring British "depredations" on American shipping, Adams had made it painfully clear that he was under their "influence."\textsuperscript{55}

Convinced that Adams's earlier, amicable inauguration day comments were insincere, Bache recanted his earlier praise. He charged that the "president by three votes"—Adams's electoral majority in 1796—had duped Republicans into thinking him nonpartisan and independent, when he was actually committed to the "British party" which sought war. "Dissimulation" was his chief characteristic, and he had "completely deceived the people, who were led by his inauguration speech and other circumstances to believe, that he was of no party, and that he was under no extraneous influence." In a burst of acerbity, Bache concluded, "Thanks to him, however, he has thrown aside the masque, and we must see him in propria persona."\textsuperscript{56}

The impetus behind Bache's efforts to conciliate Adams, the hope that Republicans could persuade him to change Federalist policy toward France, had now disappeared. Therefore he turned to the people for support. In an appeal couched in the democratic language of a popular party, he stressed his adherence to the ideal of majority rule as well as more immediate considerations in his struggle for peace.\textsuperscript{57}

Asserting that Adams was not the people's choice, Bache contended that, had the electors been chosen by popular vote in all of the states, "the president by three votes" would surely have lost. In Republican opinion, Adams had deteriorated into a mere pawn of the British and Tory factions that abhorred democracy, sought to eradicate the French

\textsuperscript{54} Philadelphia Aurora, May 19, 1797.
\textsuperscript{55} Philadelphia Aurora, May 20, 1797.
Revolution, and "think themselves delegated by Heaven or Hell to govern, and that the American people are asses made by nature to bear any burden, even an additional burden of fifty or an hundred millions of dollars to carry into effect the extravagant and barbarous schemes of a weak old man." Adams had discredited any pretense to patriot independence or virtuous pursuit of the public good. Bache now despised him as a bumbler in his "dotage" who had allowed corrupt advisers to seize the decision-making power. The acuteness of the Aurora's censure reflected the extent of Jeffersonian disappointment in Adams's failure to fulfill their nonpartisan ideal. At the same time, the newspaper responded to Adams's betrayal by shifting its support to the ideal of popular rule as well as the reality of increased taxes that would be needed for war with France.58

When Adams announced the appointment of a three-man special mission to France on May 31, 1797, the Aurora remained unimpressed. Those chosen—the rejected minister Pinckney, Virginia Federalist legislator John Marshall, and Massachusetts judge Francis Dana—were all dedicated Federalists and probably hostile to France. The Aurora thus interpreted Adams's action as another step toward war. His choice of envoys revealed his deceit; he was only feigning conciliation in order to placate and outwit public opinion. "Can it be supposed that success will attend this negotiation when the persons who are nominated, will carry with them the temper of a British faction, instead of the temper and sensibility of the people of the United States?" one of its correspondents argued. "Disguise it as they will the disposition of the presidential party is for war, and if they can effect it by such means as will deceive the people, war we shall have."59 The "British faction" nefariously pursued its self-interest, and it seemed that Adams had joined it either through

58 Philadelphia Aurora, May 22, 1797 ("Communication") For earlier Republican claims that Jefferson was the more popular candidate, see the Aurora, March 3, 10, 14, and New York Journal, March 15, 1797. The latter proposed direct election of that state's presidential electors rather than the existing mode of selection by the state legislature. For a possible source of the Aurora's bovine metaphor, see Douglass Adair, "Rumbold's Dying Speech, 1685, and Jefferson's Last Words on Democracy, 1826," in Colbourn, ed., Fame and the Founding Fathers, 92-101.

59 Philadelphia Aurora, June 2, 1797 ("Communication") The Aurora reported the nominations on June 1. When Francis Dana declined to serve, Adams on June 20 nominated his friend Elbridge Gerry, who was considered politically impartial. The Senate confirmed his appointment on June 22. Harold C. Syrett et al., eds., The Papers of Alexander Hamilton (27 vols., New York, 1961-87), 21:341n.
ignorance or malice, betraying classical republican values. In quest of the power to be gained by war with France, the executive branch had substituted private interest for the well-being of the whole.  

But the rupture between Adams and the Jeffersonians had its aspect of pathetic regret. "A Correspondent" bitterly commented: "If ever a man played the hypocrite for the purpose of the basest deception the President by three votes is the man—When he delivered his inauguration speech he pretended to be the friend of the French Republic and many who were ignorant of his real character supposed him sincere." He charged that Adams had proposed a peace commission, not because he sought to avoid war, but because he expected Congress to reject hostilities. The commissioners' Francophobia betrayed the president's motive, to assuage popular suspicion, when in fact "WAR is their object." Adams's wicked plots, his "pretend[ing] to negotiate to deceive the people and unite them against France afterwards by persuading them that every endeavour was made to accommodate," would fail to beguile Americans' common sense, "A Correspondent" warned.

By contrast with his constituents, however, President Adams was apparently bereft of his senses. "A Correspondent" argued that his May 16 speech to Congress "manifests the temper of a man divested of his reason, and wholly under the dominion of his passions." It seemed only logical, therefore, for the American people to "come forward in a manly tone of remonstrance to induce Mr. Adams to resign the helm to safer hands." He had "committed himself too far to retract" his aggressive conduct toward France and the consequent violation of national self-interest. Adams's transformation in the Aurora's columns from an erstwhile patriot president, who epitomized reason and objectivity, to an irrational, demonic character could hardly have been more extreme.

The Philadelphia Aurora's abortive attempt, along with other Republican newspapers, to cooperate with Adams indicated that even so fierce a party man as Benjamin Franklin Bache had not yet outgrown (at least in theory) the legacy of Bolingbroke, the real Whigs, and the classical republicans. Following a tradition that went back to Plato and Aristotle,

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60 Ketcham, Presidents Above Party, 31.
61 Philadelphia Aurora, June 6, 1797 ("From a Correspondent"); Aurora, June 19, 1797.
62 "A Correspondent," Aurora, June 6, 1797; Aurora, June 19, 1797.
the *Aurora* had stressed the need for independence and impartiality within
the nation’s political elite. The newspaper, during this epoch of the first
presidential interregnum, seemed to agree with British thinkers like John
Toland, a leader of the Country Party at the beginning of the century,
that partisans were “no longer voluntary agents, but so many Engines
merely turned about by a mechanic motion.”

Paradoxically, the *Aurora*, despite its reputation for partisanship, hesitated to accept the existence
of two irreconcilable parties until Adams’s message to Congress blasted
Republican hopes.

Unfortunately, several historians who have studied this period have
tended to adopt the view of Bache’s scurrilous journalistic opponents and
detractors, William Cobbett, John Fenno, and Noah Webster. Although
scholars employ less acerbic language, they seem to agree with Fenno’s
*Gazette of the United States* that Bache was a “poor, silly, emaciated
dupe of French villainy,” whose loyalty to revolutionary France and the
Jefferson party proved that “he must be well paid for his infamous
services.” Fenno misogynistically impugned Bache’s alleged “lady-like
squeamishness,” an appropriate trait for “this miserable tool of the most
abandoned faction that ever disgraced a free country.” After the *Aurora*
praised the moderation of Adams’s inaugural address, Fenno sullenly
observed that “the only credit that any man can derive from that paper
(which has been not inaptly styled the ‘Infernal Gazette’) is to receive
its abuse.” Webster’s New York paper, the *American Minerva*, similarly
found that Bache’s abrupt approval of Adams evinced “shameless, un-
blushing effrontery.” “Peter Porcupine” (Cobbett) bluntly labeled Bache
a hypocrite, reminding his readers that formerly, “there is no species of
turpitude that this base hireling of France has not imputed to Mr.
Adams.” Jeffersonian fawning made clear that “there is nothing too
barefaced, too brutally base, for the Democratic faction of America.”

James Tagg, Bache’s most thorough biographer, agrees with some of
these views. He implies that Bache’s ephemeral support for Adams was,
at least in part, “calculated and cynical,” “a sly desire to manipulate,
insofar as he could, an impressionable, friendless, pliable President.”

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63 John Toland, *The Danger of Mercenary Parliaments* (London, 1695), quoted in Kramnick,
*Bolingbroke*, 153.
Bernard Fay, Bache's first major biographer, like the Federalists depicts Bache as acting on Jefferson's orders in printing pro-Adams editorials. However, those critics, past and present, who consider Bache's editorial stance toward Adams in early 1797 merely an opportunistic strategy undertaken at the direction of his mentors, Jefferson and Madison, ignore Madison's early lack of enthusiasm for an Adams-Jefferson entente. Shortly after the election he had warned Jefferson that too friendly an attitude to the new president would alienate his followers and compromise the integrity of the Republican organization should the need arise for renewed opposition.

Jefferson's diary for this period, the Anas, records his growing awareness, as early as March 1797, of Adams's unwillingness to abandon the high Federalists in the cabinet. Only two days after the inauguration, Adams, who earlier had promised him that he would nominate Madison special envoy to Paris, curtly retracted the offer. "He immediately said that, on consultation, some objections to that nomination had been raised which he had not contemplated; . . . and we took leave; and he never after that said one word to me on the subject, or ever consulted me as to any measures of the government," Jefferson wrote. He had accurately conjectured that Adams's cabinet had forced him to abandon friendly overtures to the opposition. Virginia congressman John Dawson observed

64 Gazette of the United States, March 14, Sept. 22, 1797 ("Philadelphia"); American Minerva, March 11, 1797. Porcupine's Gazette, March 14, 1797, in Works of Peter Porcupine, 5:69. Scholars who tend to view Bache as insincere or in collusion with Jefferson include Stewart, Opposition Press, 9-10, 646; Tagg, Bache and the Aurora, 297, 319; Fay, Two Franklins, 310-12. Though Tagg thoroughly discusses the Aurora's pro-Adams campaign in his book (295-97, 318-19) and his doctoral dissertation (556-60, 576-82), he fails to link Bache's editorial rhetoric to the classical republican tradition, sharing a deep-rooted conviction among historians that he was a radical republican revolutionary. Tagg, Bache and the Aurora, 299-300, 350-52, 401-403; Fay, Two Franklins, 361. This essay has tried to reveal a more moderate aspect of the Jeffersonian ethos by examining the editorials in Bache's Aurora, which by 1796 had emerged as the primary Republican mouthpiece. Naturally, it reflected its editor's viewpoint. Tagg calls Bache "a leader in developing newspaper editorials" and says he "wrote many of the undesignated or unsigned editorials that appeared in his paper." Even the contributions from outside "correspondents," he notes, "began very early to take on the strict ideological line that Bache worked to maintain in the paper." Tagg, "Limits of Republicanism," 536n. On Federalist misogyny, see Karen K. List, "Two Party Papers' Political Coverage of Women in the New Republic," Critical Studies in Mass Communications 2 (1985), 152-65.

a few months later that the administration avoided appointing Jeffersonians to office. Jefferson had told him that Adams "has not opened his lips to him on politicks since his appointment." The new vice president had spent the crucial weeks from March 20 to May 5 at home in Monticello and did not return to Philadelphia until May 21, so he had little time to confer with or influence Bache or other Republicans about Adams. His absence may have relieved Hamiltonians like South Carolina congressman William L. Smith, who observed in April: "Jefferson lodged at Francis' Hotel (with Adams) while here, attended the [American] Philosophical Society of which he is President, made a dissertation about a Lion's claw, and soon after returned to Monticello."  

Jefferson and Madison's early misgivings about the feasibility of cooperation with the new president, ostensibly verified by Jefferson's encounter with Adams, help explain their later anxiety and mistrust when he called a special session of Congress. Since Bache, by contrast, praised Adams's action, it seems clear that the Republican leaders were not in close contact with the Philadelphia editor, and that he followed an independent editorial policy. Bache was either ignorant of, or chose to ignore, Adams's early rebuff to Jefferson and his and Madison's pessimistic appraisal of Adams's motives for convening Congress. 

The hostile Federalist view that Bache docilely followed the dictates of Jefferson and Madison in making his brief appeal to Adams overlooks the possibility that he was autonomously impelled by hopes for party accommodation and reconciliation. Bache's detractors also ignored his support in 1787 for adoption of the Constitution and of early Federalist programs. The Aurora favored the Washington administration's policies, including Hamilton's funding and assumption plan, neutrality in the wars of the French Revolution, and the unpopular whiskey excise tax.


67 Jefferson to Peregrine Fitzhugh, April 9, 1797, Writings, 9 380, Madison to James Madison, Sr, [ca March 27, 1797], Papers, 16 504 After Adams's belligerent message, freshman Virginia congressman John Dawson wrote Madison "I am sorry to find all your apprehensions merited by the President's warlike spirit" Dawson to Madison, May 18, 1797, ibid, 17 6
Though fulminating against aristocracy and praising the French Revolution, as late as 1794 the *Aurora* favored military suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion, not deviating from that position until year's end. Bache printed both sides on the issue of Hamiltonian fiscal policy as late as 1795. In contrast with other Philadelphia papers, like Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* and Eleazar Oswald's *Independent Gazetteer*, which unspARINGLY attacked Hamilton by early 1792, Bache's *Aurora* showed forbearance in turning to opposition. 68

Bache belonged to a "transitional generation" that had rejected monarchy in favor of republicanism but had not yet transcended the habit of venerating regal personages like President Washington, whose birthday was celebrated during his presidency as if he were a king. Forrest McDonald observes the congruence between presidents and kings and the office's role in furnishing Americans with a symbol of stability and a bridge from monarchy to republicanism after 1776: "Reverence toward the Crown was a deep-rooted habit in the English-speaking world, and love of the president as a king-surrogate was a crucial social adhesive for the diffuse and pluralistic infant United States." 69

In a sense, Adams more appositely filled the part of a republicanized "patriot king"—the patriot president—than his apotheosized, austere predecessor. He stood between the poles of regal, Olympian distance and gracious familiarity with his constituents. Yet, despite his unimpressive bearing and simple accoutrements, Adams's somber personality and some tendencies of his political thought, like his advocacy of the perpetuation of fixed "social orders" and "balanced government," might be con-


structured as incompatible with the self-esteem needs of the struggling democratic republic. Dedicated to propagating populist republican principles and promoting the rule of the majority, it was inevitable that Bache and his newspaper would abandon a president who persisted in carrying out the policies of a minority “faction” and frustrated the people’s hopes for peace with France. Affected by considerations of political necessity as well as ideological conviction, Bache and his fellow Republicans felt compelled to renounce Adams, whom they now feared would employ the executive’s dormant powers to antirepublican ends.

The abortive reconciliation between Adams and the Jeffersonian *Aurora* held a greater significance. To a degree, Americans had been unable to forego their affinity for monarchy, under which they had lived for almost two centuries. In an ambiguous manner, the split between Adams and the *Aurora* in 1797 helped determine the Republican Party’s transition, and along with it the American republic’s, from a “monarchical” mentality, based on a belief in the benevolence, independence, and omniscience of one man, the patriot president, who they anticipated Adams would personify. They rejected this world-view for one dedicated to democracy. They argued that the majority of voters, the “People,” both through their legislative deputies and more directly in their meetings and committees, embodied the sole legitimate policy-making authority; their “common sense” could directly determine vital national issues.

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70 On patriotic citizens’ devotion to the president as humanistic republican monarch, see McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers*, 16-17, 22-35, Melvin Yazawa, *From Colonies to Commonwealth*. For Jefferson’s role in “humanizing” the presidency, see Ketcham, *Presidents Above Party*, 154, and McDonald, *Presidency of Jefferson*, 166. Occasionally, Tagg (Bache and the *Aurora*, 401) views Bache as a “transitional figure” between republicanism and democracy, a political “romantic.” The best summary of Bache’s emphasis on popular sovereignty and equality of opportunity is Tagg’s analysis of his “radical ideology” in ibid, 116-57.


Bache's confidence in Adams reached its nadir when the Federalist-dominated Congress, with the president's support, passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798. The Federalists used the failure of the second mission to France and the ensuing undeclared war to justify these repressive measures against the political opposition as well as a military and naval build-up designed in part to intimidate their Republican foes. Denied equal freedom to compete in the electoral arena and finding its legitimacy threatened, the Republican Party organized a multitude of campaign committees and propaganda organizations in preparation for the critical elections to be held in 1800. The techniques it adopted to reach the public were similar to those used today.73

Bache and the *Aurora* were instrumental in the promulgation of this popularly oriented politics. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the brief hiatus in party warfare in which the newspaper participated during the first presidential "honeymoon." In pursuing a conciliatory editorial policy toward the Adams administration during its first months, the *Aurora* revealed that an important segment of the Republican Party was not unalterably opposed to abandoning the heated party conflict that many critics believed threatened national existence. But Adams's betrayal of Jeffersonian hopes and expectations by turning against France in his special message to Congress, exacerbated by his party's efforts to crush all opposition a year later, rendered Bache's overtures futile. Far from realizing the ideal of a self-controlled patriot republican leader, Adams had shown himself a weak and indecisive figure who followed the lead of his Francophobic, pro-monarchical cabinet.

Bache did not live to see the growth of the party system in whose creation his newspaper had played a crucial yet ambivalent role. In September 1798 he died of yellow fever, while fighting common law

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governmental prosecution for seditious libel during the Francophobic XYZ war hysteria.\textsuperscript{74} He was one of the first victims of the partisan fury with which his name and newspaper had come to be associated.

Despite Bache's somewhat undeserved reputation for fanaticism, during the interregnum between the Washington and Adams administrations and in the latter's first months he had abandoned violent party rhetoric and preached interparty coalition and accommodation in the \textit{Aurora's} columns. We have focused on this paradoxical, little-noted newspaper campaign, in which Philadelphia's most prominent radical Republican journal espoused the classical values of a "patriot president" who used his independent reason and eschewed the mundane interests of his constituents. The brief war in the \textit{Aurora's} columns between the ideal of deference to exemplary elites and an ultimate reliance on the people's judgment deserves attention for the light it throws on the ambiguities of republicanism. For Bache and the Jeffersonians, in the final analysis John Adams had failed the test of character.\textsuperscript{75}

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