

Part I Building the United States

Introduction to Part I

The period following the ratification of the Constitution held both great promise and great danger. A new form of government had been hammered out in the Constitutional Convention, but it was unclear whether the political compromises made in Philadelphia could overcome the divisive forces that threatened the unity of the new nation. Federalists and Anti-Federalists, after all, still held significant differences of opinion in a wide variety of issues. Eventually these political differences would evolve into the First American Party System, comprised of Federalists and Republicans. The documents in Part I present the discordant voices of the early United States, illustrating how the nation's first system of political parties attempted to deal with conflict, and the ways in which Thomas Jefferson's 1801 declaration that "We are all republicans: we are all federalists," attempted to unify the nation at the same time that it underwent its first significant political transition.

Chapter 1 Origins

1. First Inaugural Address of George Washington, April 30, 1789¹

George Washington arrived in the temporary capital of the United States, New York City, with a great deal of fanfare and pageantry, but also with a great deal of concern. When Washington appeared in front of a boisterous crowd on Broad Street on April 30, 1789 the United States was less than a decade old and had just substantially revised the structure of its federal government. The 13-gun salute that erupted immediately after the administration of the oath of office signaled a new era for the new nation and when he entered the Senate Chamber to address the joint houses of Congress, the first President of the United States had the opportunity to establish a number of precedents. First among these was the tone and tenor of the presidential inaugural address, which subsequent presidents have used to lay out both a broad vision of their leadership as well as some specific policy goals. Washington also established a tradition of humility and quiet respect for the office. Eyewitness accounts describe him as dressed in a simple brown suit and some claim he looked uncomfortable throughout his address. After his speech, Washington slipped away to meditate in nearby St. Paul's Church while the festivities in New York City continued into the early hours of the next morning.

¹ W. W. Abbot, ed., *The Papers of George Washington. Presidential Series. Volume 2: April–June 1789* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987), pp. 173–7.

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Fellow-Citizens of the Senate and of the House of Representatives:

Among the vicissitudes incident to life no event could have filled me with greater anxieties than that of which the notification was transmitted by your order, and received on the 14th day of the present month. On the one hand, I was summoned by my Country, whose voice I can never hear but with veneration and love, from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection, and, in my flattering hopes, with an immutable decision, as the asylum of my declining years – a retreat which was rendered every day more necessary as well as more dear to me by the addition of habit to inclination, and of frequent interruptions in my health to the gradual waste committed on it by time. On the other hand, the magnitude and difficulty of the trust to which the voice of my country called me, being sufficient to awaken in the wisest and most experienced of her citizens a distrustful scrutiny into his qualifications, could not but overwhelm with despondence one who (inheriting inferior endowments from nature and unpracticed in the duties of civil administration) ought to be peculiarly conscious of his own deficiencies. In this conflict of emotions all I dare aver is that it has been my faithful study to collect my duty from a just appreciation of every circumstance by which it might be affected. All I dare hope is that if, in executing this task, I have been too much swayed by a grateful remembrance of former instances, or by an affectionate sensibility to this transcendent proof of the confidence of my fellow-citizens, and have thence too little consulted my incapacity as well as disinclination for the weighty and untried cares before me, my error will be palliated by the motives which mislead me, and its consequences be judged by my country with some share of the partiality in which they originated.

Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station, it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the Great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own, nor those of my fellow-citizens at large less than either. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been

distinguished by some token of providential agency; and in the important revolution just accomplished in the system of their united government the tranquil deliberations and voluntary consent of so many distinct communities from which the event has resulted can not be compared with the means by which most governments have been established without some return of pious gratitude, along with an humble anticipation of the future blessings which the past seem to presage. These reflections, arising out of the present crisis, have forced themselves too strongly on my mind to be suppressed. You will join with me, I trust, in thinking that there are none under the influence of which the proceedings of a new and free government can more auspiciously commence.

By the article establishing the executive department, it is made the duty of the President "to recommend to your consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient." The circumstances under which I now meet you will acquit me from entering into that subject further than to refer to the great constitutional charter under which you are assembled, and which, in defining your powers, designates the objects to which your attention is to be given. It will be more consistent with those circumstances, and far more congenial with the feelings which actuate me, to substitute, in place of a recommendation of particular measures, the tribute that is due to the talents, the rectitude, and the patriotism which adorn the characters selected to devise and adopt them. In these honorable qualifications I behold the surest pledges that as on one side no local prejudices or attachments, no separate views nor party animosities, will misdirect the comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great assemblage of communities and interests, so, on another, that the foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality, and the preeminence of free government be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its citizens and command the respect of the world. I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my country can inspire, since there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness; between duty and advantage; between the genuine maxims of an honest and magnanimous policy and the solid rewards of public prosperity and felicity; since we ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained; and since the preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people . . .

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Having thus imparted to you my sentiments as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave; but not without resorting once more to the benign Parent of the Human Race in humble supplication that, since He has been pleased to favor the American people with opportunities for deliberating in perfect tranquillity, and dispositions for deciding with unparalleled unanimity on a form of government for the security of their union and the advancement of their happiness, so His divine blessing may be equally conspicuous in the enlarged views, the temperate consultations, and the wise measures on which the success of this Government must depend.

2. Tickagiska King Addresses President George Washington, May 19, 1789²

At the time of Washington's Inaugural, the United States still had quite a few lingering issues with Native American nations all along its western borders. In 1785, representatives of Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaw nations in the Southeast met with American officials. The resulting Treaty of Hopewell ceded significant lands from those three nations to the United States and also set up a western boundary for American settlement. But as Native Americans fronting the young republic quickly discovered, treaties could not stem the flow of white migrants into their land. Some Native Americans advocated armed resistance, whereas others counseled patience and negotiation. At a meeting held in the Cherokee town of Chota in the spring of 1789, various leaders appealed to the United States to recognize their rights by treaty. The transcriber of this and other speeches at Chota, North Carolina politician John Sevier, brought their case to American authorities at the same time that he planned to sell disputed land to white settlers. Such confusion and conflict was common in the Early Republic.

GREAT BROTHER: The great Being above has directed our hearts to listen to the talks of peace, and sorry that ever any misunderstandings arose between us and our white brothers. Our last troubles have been occasioned by our rash inconsiderate young men, who, we doubt, have been too much encouraged by white men in our towns, that pretend you have sent them among us to do us justice and to direct our nation how to manage.

² US Senate, *The Southern Tribes*, 1st Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 4, Serial ASPo7 Ind.aff. 4, August 22, 1789.

There are a great many towns of us that live on Tennessee, Highwassee, Telliquo, and Ammoah, who are near neighbors to the white people, and we wish to live in peace with them.

We hope that Congress has not forgot the treaty last held at Hopewell, South Carolina. We intend to abide by it, and hope Congress will do us justice, as we look up to them for it, and intend to hear their good talks, and also the talks of all them that are joined with them, but will not listen to any others.

BROTHER: At our last treaty, held in South Carolina, we gave up to our white brothers all the land we could any how spare, and have but little left to raise our women and children upon, and we hope you wont let any people take any more from us without our consent. We are neither birds nor fish; we can neither fly in the air, nor live under water; therefore we hope pity will be extended towards us. We are made by the same hand, and in same shape with yourselves.

We send some of our head-men and warriors to you with talk, and to represent the case and circumstance of our nation; and we hope you will settle matters with them to all our satisfaction, and that they may return home to our country with good tidings of peace and friendship; and any thing done by Congress and our representatives will be held safe by us, and fast by us.

We hear that Congress have got strong powers now, and nothing can be spoiled that you undertake to do; this we hear from our elder brother, John Sevier, which makes us glad and we rejoice at the news.

We wish you to appoint some good man to do the business between us and our elder brothers. Let us have a man that don't speak with two tongues, nor one that will encourage mischief or blood to be spilt. Let there be a good man appointed, and war will never happen between us. Such a one we will listen to; but such as have been sent among us, we shall not hear, as they have already caused our nation to be ruined, and come to almost to nothing.

3. Western Pennsylvanians Petition Against Taxes, March 19, 1790³

At the same time that President Washington delivered his inaugural address in New York City, many Americans resented the growing financial and political influence of eastern cities. In early 1787, farmers led by Revolutionary War

³ *Pennsylvania Archives*, Series I, Volume II: 1786–1790 (Philadelphia: J. Severns, 1856), pp. 670–3.

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veterans in western Massachusetts marched on the federal armory at Springfield Daniel Shays in order to protest an increase in taxes. Shays' Rebellion was short-lived, but bitterness between western and eastern residents continued to plague many states. The following petition explains how tax policy often served as a point of contention. In this case, western Pennsylvanians complain about a state tax to their own legislature in 1790. Four years later, western Pennsylvanians marched on Pittsburgh to protest a federal excise tax on whiskey. President Washington himself led the troops that put down the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794, but no amount of force could completely squash the rivalry between easterners and westerners during the Early Republic.

To the Honorable the Representatives of the Freemen of Pennsylvania, in General Assembly met.

The Petition of the Inhabitants of Westmoreland County – Humbly Sheweth.

That your petitioners are greatly aggrieved by the present operation of an Excise Law, passed on the 19th day of March, 1783, by which we are made subject a duty of four pence per gallon on all spirituous liquors distilled and consumed amongst us from the productions of our farms, even for private and domestic uses. It is generally believed that excise laws, in all nations and at all periods, have given greater disgust, and created greater tumults amongst the people, than any other species of taxation ever adopted for the raising of revenue; we do not hesitate to declare, that this law has already been productive of all those and many other evils, and that it is the only one passed since our revolution that has been treated with general disapprobation, and reflected upon with universal abhorrence and detestation: and such has been the resentment of many of our fellow citizens, which we are sorry to have occasion to confess, that they have, upon several occasions, proceeded to unwarrantable lengths in opposing its operations.

We do not deny that we are as strongly rooted in the habits, and as much addicted to the use of spirituous liquors as our brethren in the eastern part of the state: having emigrated from among them, we cannot be condemned for carrying their customs along with us. But independent of habit, we find that the moderate use of spirits is essentially necessary in several branches of our agriculture.

In this new country, labourers are exceedingly scarce, and their hire excessively high, and we find that liquor proves a necessary means of engaging their service and securing their continuance through the several important seasons of the year, when the pressing calls of labour must be attended to, let the conditions be what they may. For those reasons we have found it absolutely necessary to introduce a number of small distilleries into

our settlements, and in every circle of twenty or thirty neighbours, one of these are generally erected, merely for the accommodation of such neighbourhood and without any commercial views whatever. The proprietor thereof receives the grain (rye only) from the people, and returns the stipulated quantity of liquor, after retaining the toll agreed upon. In this manner we are supplied with this necessary article, much upon the same conditions that our mills furnish us with flour; and why we should be made subject to a duty for drinking our grain more than eating it, seems a matter of astonishment to every reflecting mind.

These distilleries, small and insignificant as they are, have always been classed among the first objects of taxation, and have been highly estimated in the valuation of property. This, we conceive, might fully suffice, without extending revenue to the mean and humble manufacture produced by them.

With as much propriety a duty might be laid on the rye we feed our horses; the bread we eat ourselves, or any other article manufactured from the products of our own farms.

Our remote situation from the channels of commerce, has long ago prohibited the use of all imported liquors amongst us, and as we are aiming at independence in our manner of living, we have neither the abilities or inclination to aspire to their use. We freely resign to our eastern neighbours, whom Providence has placed under the meridian rays of commercial affluence, and whose local situation confer on them many enjoyments which nature has denied to us; and whilst they are revelling in the luxuries of the most bountiful foreign climes, we are perfectly content with the humble produce of our own farms, and it is our only wish to be permitted to enjoy them in freedom.

We beg that we may not be considered as unfriendly to the supporting of a government, which we so highly approve, as that of Pennsylvania. We have too exalted ideas of the blessings deriving from it, to ever suffer such thoughts to harbour in our breasts. The payment of the state tax has always been submitted to with cheerfulness, and paid to the utmost of our abilities. And here we cannot forbear expressing our astonishment at the suspension of a tax so just and equitable in its nature, whilst the excise complained of is continued to be exacted with rigor. We have reason to believe that the produce of this excise will amount to the same, or perhaps exceed that of our state tax, and if we had any security for the net produce thereof getting into the treasury, it would afford some consolation; but from the flagrant delinquency which we have experienced from many of our revenue officers in this county, as well as from a want of confidence in the present excise officer and his security, our fears are greatly awakened upon the present occasion . . .

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It is with pleasure that we reflect upon the many instances of liberality and general encouragement which the legislature, as well as many respectable societies, have given through the course of some years past, for rendering ourselves still more independent of foreign nations, by promoting and improving every branch of our own manufacture; we therefore flatter ourselves that the present assembly will no longer suffer a law to remain in existence which is so evidently calculated to counteract the virtuous designs of those respectable bodies, and which proves so universally obnoxious to the people of this western world. We therefore humbly pray, that the several observations herein stated, may be taken into serious consideration, and that the present excise law, so far as it extends to the laying of a duty or imposition of any kind whatever, upon liquors made or distilled from the productions of this state, may be fully and speedily repealed. And your petitioners as in duty bound will pray . . .