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# What's In a Name: Political Smear and Partisan Invocations of the French Revolution in Philadelphia, 1791 - 1795

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### What's In a Name:

#### Political Smear and Partisan Invocations of the French Revolution in Philadelphia, 1791 - 1795

Mere months after Louis XVI met his end at the base of the National Razor in 1793, the guillotine appeared in Philadelphia. Made of paper and ink rather than the wood and steel of its Parisian counterpart, this blade did not threaten to turn the capital's streets red or cause prominent heads to roll; however, it was not without its dangers, rhetorical as they were. In a satirical broadside entitled "The Funeral Dirge of George Washington and James Wilson, King and Judge," the nation's president, along with one of its Supreme Court justices, was dragged to the guillotine and executed for perceived aristocratic crimes against the nation.<sup>1</sup> Pictured with his head poking through the lunette, Washington was, in no uncertain terms, compared to the late king of France, an unfortunate position in which to be given the monarch's highly publicized fall from public grace and indecorous execution. Accompanied by a mock burial hymn for the nation's accused "king and judge," "The Funeral Dirge" presented Washington's execution as a celebration, even if in jest.

Mentioned in passing during a cabinet meeting, the broadside became the president's final straw. Stopping the meeting abruptly, Washington insisted he would rather be cold in his grave than continue in the presidency. He bewailed his current situation and the monarchial

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman with John Alexander Carroll and Mary Wells Ashworth, *George Washington A Biography VII* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 117. As far as I've been able to find, there is no longer an extant copy of "The Funeral Dirge of George Washington and James Wilson, King and Judge." However, Freeman and Jefferson both provide accounts of the broadside.

accusations his detractors threw at him within the increasingly unfriendly press, declaring, as Jefferson later recounted, “that he had rather be on his farm than to be made *emperor of the world*; and yet they [the press] were charging him with wanting to be a king.”<sup>2</sup> Not a monarchy, Washington seemed to believe he had cause to worry as though he were.

Though provocative “The Funeral Dirge of George Washington and James Wilson, King and Judge,” was not unique. Rather, this piece was part of a larger partisan competition between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans meant to delegitimize the opposition and create a popular case for each faction’s legitimacy. While American political discourse had traditionally been rooted in British rites and rhetoric, France began to eclipse Great Britain in this aspect, thereby providing American partisans with a new language to debate their ideas.<sup>3</sup> Representing expanding liberty to the Democratic-Republicans and anarchy to the Federalists, each party utilized the French Revolution (1789 – 1799) as a crucial piece of evidence in their public debate and used newspaper reporting to turn the Revolution into a partisan proxy war.

Historians have long been interested in the partisanship plaguing the nation’s early years because parties defined American political life and rhetoric, despite pre-existing fears of faction. Republicanism was widely embraced in the United States, but different definitions of the ideology proliferated. As Joanne Freeman argues, “one man’s virtuous republican restraint was another man’s monarchical excess,” and this discrepancy caused American partisans to view each other as vile threats to the Union.<sup>4</sup> Believing that the very fate of the nation hung in the balance, Americans shrilly fought faction with faction in hopes of destroying political opponents. In doing

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Anas of Thomas Jefferson*, 158.

<sup>3</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism 1776 – 1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 18 - 25.

<sup>4</sup> Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 7.

so, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans relied upon America's longstanding, antagonistic political rhetoric and rites – a tradition David Waldstreicher coined “the politics of opposition.”<sup>5</sup> They defined themselves against one another and, in seeking American unity, created exclusive political spheres.

Examining this early partisan rhetoric in light of the French Revolution, historians have been forced to question the importance of democracy to American history and political thought. Earlier historians, viewing democracy as a defining feature of the United States and an almost unquestionable moral good, placed the nation's evolving political order within a larger international narrative of liberal progress. Writing as the Berlin Wall fell – an arguable victory for democracy – Lloyd S. Kramer claimed the French Revolution, more than anything else, “forc[ed] Americans to define their place in the world” and “revealed greater differences in the elite's conceptions of how American society should function” by promoting a “rapid expansion of the public sphere.”<sup>6</sup> Engaging more and more individuals, the French Revolution paved the way for broader democracy within the republic. More recent historians, however, have viewed the French Revolution as a factor, but not the driving force, behind American democratization. Matthew Rainbow Hale, for example, argued “modern American democracy was forged when a diverse group of individuals ... embraced French-inflected egalitarianism and its call for the ‘regeneration of society.’”<sup>7</sup> Far from fated, the American republic's transition to a broader democracy was the result of individual participation in popular political debate; the French

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<sup>5</sup> Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd S. Kramer, “The French Revolution and the Creation of American Political Culture” in *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ed. Klaitz and Haltzel, 26, 29, & 33.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Rainbow Hale, “Regenerating the World: the French Revolution, Civic Festivals, and the Forging of American Democracy, 1793 - 1795” *Journal of American History* 103 no. 4 (2017): 895.

Revolution merely provided the stage and stakes for American ideological debates, as well as the language and examples with which American partisans forged ideologically sympathetic yet exclusive political spheres.

While French influenced rhetoric pervaded the public sphere, this study concerns itself primarily with the ways in which the French Revolution was invoked by American partisans to both establish their legitimacy and attack opponents. Focusing specifically upon the ways the French Revolution influenced national political rhetoric, this study will examine partisan discourse within Philadelphia, turning the nation's capital from 1790 to 1800 into a case study of American political rhetoric. As such, this study will rely upon the writings of prominent politicians at work in the capital and Philadelphian newspapers published between 1791 and 1795. While the public and private writings of political leaders working in Philadelphia throughout much of this designated time period, like those of cabinet members and party heads Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, reveal both elite and party-line opinions of the French Revolution, newspapers illuminate the more public way in which the affair was invoked to both argue with and delegitimize political opponents. As widely read and discussed purveyors of fact, opinion, and everything in between, newspapers reveal the intensity and antagonism of American political debates.<sup>8</sup> The writings of political elites, meanwhile, serve as reminders of the perceived high-stakes at the heart of these rhetorical wars – namely, the continuation of the Union and American liberty.

The French Revolution was an American obsession. Newspapers dramatically covered its twists and turns, while politicians wrestled with its implications for foreign policy. Perceived as a move against the monarchies and aristocracies of the Old World, the Revolution excited the

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<sup>8</sup> Jaci Cole and John Maxwell Hamilton, "Another Test of the News: American Partisan Press Coverage of the French Revolution," *Journalism History* 34, no. 1 (2008): 36.

American populace. With the fall of the prison Bastille, France had ushered in a critical moment in human history that the United States had precipitated.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting the popular sentiments of the time, one piece within *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, read: "To see the gigantic image of [French] despotism prostrate itself before the genius of freedom ... [is a] circumstance which must pour an overflowing tide upon the hearts of all friends of human nature."<sup>10</sup> Liberty was the heart and cause of this grand watershed. The ideal, which had once provided the American rebellion with a just cause and a moral imperative with which to fight King and Crown, was expanding.<sup>11</sup> As such, Americans believed that, by their example, France was carrying "the flame of liberty" into the heart of despotic Europe and bringing an end to unjust governance.<sup>12</sup> Viewing monarchy and aristocracy as the root of human suffering, Americans tied increasing liberty to an improvement of the human condition.<sup>13</sup> Humanity was thought to be advancing, and Americans and Frenchmen were at the forefront of a brighter and more glorious future.

These hopes for continued liberty, combined with the military alliance and friendship between the United States and France forged during the American Revolution, made the United States' citizenry personally invested in lives abroad. Despite the tremendous distance between France and the United States, American interest in the other nation's affairs intensified their connection and encouraged citizens to view themselves as members of a larger Trans-Atlantic

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Rainbow Hale, "On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers During the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, circa 1792 - 1793," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 2 (2009): 196.

<sup>10</sup> John Dunlap, "Philadelphia, July 5. For the American Daily Advertiser," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*. (Philadelphia, PA), July 5, 1791.

<sup>11</sup> Simon Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 34.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Freneau, *National Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA), May 15 1793.

<sup>13</sup> John Dunlap, "A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States in Congress Assembled," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), July 4, 1791; Benjamin Franklin Bache, *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 7, 1791; Benjamin Franklin Bache, *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 26, 1791

community.<sup>14</sup> Increasing the connection between the nations, *Dunlap's Daily Advertiser* declared the France to be following in the United States' footsteps: "The regeneration of so great and powerful a kingdom [as France] ... and the exaltation of its slaves to the high and dignified character of citizens, are events so analogous to the experience of these United States."<sup>15</sup> Initially united by military alliance and war debt, the United States and France were becoming increasingly tied to one another through the shared principles expressed by the French Revolution.

However, the American fascination with the French Revolution was also rooted in a desire for political validation. Americans believed liberty made the United States distinct in the Trans-Atlantic World, but it placed the nation in relatively uncharted political territory. If liberty could grow and flourish in France, then it followed that the principles upon which the United States believed itself to be founded were tenable. France, therefore, became a test of liberty's feasibility: "The success of that [revolution] will ensure the progress of liberty in Europe, and it's preservation here. The failure of that would have been a powerful argument with those who wish to introduce a king, lords and commons here..."<sup>16</sup> United States could not bear to see this principle fail.

While both parties recognized the importance of liberty to American political thought, the means with which to best preserve the beloved ideal were up for debate. The Federalist Party craved order. Rather than sway at the people's whim, the national government, they believed, should remain steadfast but not unyielding; the people should be heard but not to whom be

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<sup>14</sup> Hale, "On their Tiptoes," 202. & Kramer, *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> Dunlap, "July 5. For the American Daily Advertiser." *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*. (Philadelphia, PA), July 5, 1791.

<sup>16</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to Edmund Pendleton, July 24, 1791." *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

deferred. They rejected hereditary aristocracy, but maintained social hierarchy as inevitable. Liberty was, in their visage, best secured through proper structures preventing chaos. As Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton stated when laying out a hypothetical plan to end to the United States, “If I were disposed to promote Monarchy & overthrow State Governments, I would mount the hobby horse of popularity – I would cry out usurpation – danger to liberty &c. &c. – I would endeavor to prostrate the National Government – raise a ferment – and then ‘ride in the Whirlwind and direct the Storm.’”<sup>17</sup> For the Federalists, liberty required a proper balance between too much and too little, between despotism and mayhem.

The Democratic-Republicans disagreed. Chaos, of course, was to be avoided, but that did not mean the structures limiting liberty were inherently good: “If virtuous, it [the government] need not fear the fair operation of attack and defense.”<sup>18</sup> Rather, the party embraced the will of the people as the basis of governance and the best means with which to protect liberty, painting the pulse of the nation as a compass to guide the country and sword to protect it. Leaning towards majority rule much more than their counterparts, the Democratic-Republicans placed a great deal of trust in the masses. Liberty was not threatened so much by an excess than by a death of freedom.

Both parties, quite committed to their own means of preserving liberty, saw the other as the dreaded and threatening faction. Fearing for the young nation’s future, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans “organize[d] and practice[d] an especially bitter partisanship meant to

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<sup>17</sup> “Alexander Hamilton to Edward Carrington, May 26, 1792.” *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett & Jacob E. Cooke. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, Sept. 9, 1792.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

discredit and destroy the other.”<sup>19</sup> In doing so, the parties deepened the existing political divide and, in the process, turned the French Revolution into a partisan proxy war. Employing the press to make their argument, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans invoked the French Revolution and its participants to make a popular argument for the party’s legitimacy.

Throughout the period, both parties maintained a plethora of ideologically sympathetic newspapers within Philadelphia, but four – the Federalist *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser* (also printed as *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*) and *Gazette of the United States* and the Democratic-Republican *General Advertiser* (later called the *Aurora*) and *National Gazette* – were among the most widely read and discussed in the capital. These four papers, along with the actions and opinions of their publishers, figured quite prominently within political and party leaders’ discussion of both American and French politics. John Dunlap, publisher of the so-named *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*, enjoyed bipartisan respect not afforded to his competitors. Having published newspapers since 1771 and served as a printer to the Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention, Dunlap was well-known, established, and respected in Philadelphia’s political sphere – so much so that, upon his refusal to print an essay criticizing Hamilton, Jefferson suspected the end of the free press more than partisan biases.<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, the grandson of Benjamin Franklin, was newer to the Philadelphian printing world, though he quickly made a name for himself with his *General Advertiser*. Declared the best newspaper in Philadelphia by James Monroe, Bache’s paper was an acclaimed Democratic-

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<sup>19</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750 – 1804* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 412.

<sup>20</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Mar. 25, 1793.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

Republican paper that not only received aid from party leaders, but was also served as an unofficial party organ until the advent of Philip Freneau's *National Gazette*.<sup>21</sup>

Freneau's paper served as one of two party organs operating in Philadelphia; the other, written by Federalist John Fenno, was the *Gazette of the United States*. As official party organs, Fenno and Freneau's gazettes received patronage through intelligence, essays, and, on occasion, government printing commissions from, respectively, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. Deemed to be the two sides of American thought by Thomas Jefferson, the two papers were not only one of the Secretary of State's preferred method of disseminating foreign intelligence to the public but also served as a key means of keeping American diplomats informed public opinion.<sup>22</sup> However, due to their diametric opposition to one another, Fenno and Freneau were at war with one another, brazenly attacking the other's ideology and character within their papers all whilst vying for public favor.<sup>23</sup> Their discourse took on a deeply personal character, and, as such, these party organs did not always toe party line; the opinions expressed were still their own.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, Sept 9, 1792." *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. Bache's tenure as the primary Democratic-Republican paper in Philadelphia ended because he published daily rather than twice weekly, thereby making it more difficult to reach an audience outside of Philadelphia. Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, his Federalist competitor, ran a twice-weekly paper, and Bache simply wasn't able to compete as well against him due to format.

<sup>22</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to David Humphreys, Aug 23, 1791." *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. While Jefferson sent copies of these papers to Americans abroad, French Foreign Minister to the United States between 1791 and 1793 Jean Baptiste, however, preferred Freneau's *National Gazette* and Bache's *General Advertiser* because of their sympathetic lean towards France, and he frequently forwarding issues of both papers to the French government. Jefferson also frequently noted which foreign intelligence should be given to the press and, until Freneau's paper ceased publication in 1793, these reports were invariably given to Freneau and Fenno for public dissemination.

<sup>23</sup> "Thomas Jefferson to Washington, Sept 9, 1792."

Whether American partisans embraced or rejected the French Revolution was a reflection on how one feared liberty would most easily be lost. As such, Federalist opinion of the revolution quickly soured as the Revolution became more radical. Moving from tentative support arising from “a mixture of Pleasure and apprehension” at the fall of the Bastille to vehement denunciations of a Revolution “spreading ruin and devastation far and wide,” the reigning party began to equate the French Revolution and its supporters with violence, chaos, and anarchy.<sup>24</sup> The Democratic-Republicans, however, were adamant in their support of the French cause. Embracing the Revolution’s proclamation of equality, liberty, and brotherhood as the basis of good governance, they believed “for the good of suffering humanity all over the earth, that [the] revolution [should] be established and spread through the world.”<sup>25</sup> For these partisans, France was still the “cause of mankind;” it was a moral good even in the face of immoral acts of violence. Regardless of their divergent opinions, both parties made use of French figures, policies, and actions to discredit their opponents within the press.

Through their newspaper coverage of the French Revolution’s twists and turns, these editors introduced a myriad of French political figures to the Philadelphian public. Citizens were already well acquainted with the Marquis de Lafayette and Louis XVI due to their role in the American Revolution, but other Frenchmen were newer.<sup>26</sup> The “noble-patriots,” members of the

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<sup>24</sup> “Alexander Hamilton to the Marquis de Lafayette, Oct. 6, 1789” *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett & Jacob E. Cooke. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969. Alexander Hamilton, “Memorandum on the French Revolution,” 1794, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett & Jacob E. Cooke. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969. & Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 134.

<sup>25</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to John Sinclair, Aug. 24, 1791.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Democratic-Republican editor and staunch anti-monarchist Philip Freneau referred to Louis XVI as a “Patriot King” within his *National Gazette*, and the monarch’s birthday was actually celebrated in the United States. While Louis XVI would eventually fall from grace, Americans would almost universally love Lafayette throughout the Revolution. In fact,

French aristocracy who supported the early phases of the French Revolution, and members of the National Assembly frequently received coverage in American newspapers through reports of their speeches and acts in the legislature. Given that papers tended to publish speeches before the National Assembly that pertained to the United States, high-points of the Revolution, or merely the editor's interests, American readers may not have had the fullest view of a French politician's character but the populace had enough information to form an opinion on one's merit and morals.<sup>27</sup> Through their admittedly biased and incomplete source material, Americans cast French Revolutionaries as heroes, anarchists, and everything in between. Even among ardent American supporters of the French Revolution, there were good and bad revolutionaries at work in France.

The "noble patriots," or at least a large number of them, were favorably viewed in the United States. Having sacrificed their station in life and used their privilege to increase liberty in France, these aristocrats, Americans believed, were advancing the state of humanity and, thus, applauded in the United States. Due to their service and devotion to France, these aristocratic revolutionaries were politically virtuous in the eyes of the American populace, especially when compared to other aristocrats who, as Democratic-Republican newspapers frequently reported,

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Lafayette's popularity amongst Americans was almost unshakeable – so much so that Freneau's critiques of the Marquis on the basis of his involvement in a massacre of common Parisians whilst head of the National Guard and his support for Louis XVI in the face of the monarch's tarnished reputation were met with vehement derision for even suggesting Lafayette had ever acted with anything but honor. In the eyes of many Americans, Lafayette could do no wrong.

<sup>27</sup> Among the published addresses, Robespierre's speech on freedom of the press was commonly circulated, often alongside reports of the loss of the principle in England within Democratic-Republican papers. This was likely done to emphasize the similarities between the United States and France, as well as draw attention to the "loss" of liberty within a country headed by a monarch.

fled the nation and threw their lot in with foreign kings.<sup>28</sup> The “noble-patriots” were properly committed to their country and to its improvement – at least, that was the impression held by American observers. As such, their names carried weight both when mentioned in reports of French political proceedings and when invoked by American partisans in debate against political opponents.

Democratic-Republicans explicitly traded upon the political virtue of favored French revolutionaries when critiquing the policies and behavior of the reigning Federalist Party. Washington was too distant, was behaving too king-like for the opposition’s taste, and the Federalists’ embrace and encouragement of this behavior smacked of aristocratic ambition in the eyes of the other party.<sup>29</sup> To highlight this opinion, Democratic-Republicans tied their political attacks to the progressive sentiment of the French Revolution and cast their critiques as a warning against a republican regression into monarchy and aristocracy. The good reputation of a “noble patriot,” became a “weapon of rhetorical strategy” against the Federalist Party and lent “a legitimating voice to men making the criticism.”<sup>30</sup> Their opinions, therefore, did not appear as partisan thought, but rather as a part of an ideologically progressive canon.

For example, when detailing “the forerunners of monarchy and aristocracy within the United States,” a correspondent for the *General Advertiser* employed “Mirabeau,” the surname of an early French Revolutionary leader, as a pseudonym thereby utilizing the Comte de Mirabeau’s good standing as a “noble patriot” to rhetorically highlight what the author deemed the Washington administration’s dangerously aristocratic behavior. Within his warning to the

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<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Nov. 5, 1791; Philip Freneau, *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb 13, 1792; Philip Freneau, *National Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), Feb 16, 1792; & Philip Freneau, *National Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA), Feb 20, 1792.

<sup>29</sup> Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 59.

<sup>30</sup> Marisa Linton, *Choosing Terror* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 33.

American public, “Mirabeau” attacked the titles and festivities with which the president was honored. Declaring these practices was dangerous to the republic, he insisted they forced the people “to believe, that any one man or set of men are necessary to the safety or a happiness of a country,” thereby paving the way for monarchy and aristocracy that would crush liberty underfoot. In “Mirabeau’s” viewpoint, nothing mattered so much to the republic as the people and nothing should matter so much to the people as the republic. Steeped in the monarchist traditions of the Old World, Washington’s administration was bordering on a threat to the young nation’s liberty. Praying that heaven above “grant us republican principles and manners, as well as republican governments,” “Mirabeau” raised doubts about America’s republican status, ultimately driving home his point that the United States had strayed into dangerously monarchist and aristocratic territory under Washington.<sup>31</sup>

While these sentiments were commonly held by Democratic-Republicans, the invocation of Mirabeau and other estimable “noble-patriots” or revolutionaries added rhetorical strength to the argument. The inclusion strengthened the popular political ties between the United States and France, as well as associated the Democratic-Republican thought and ideology with a revolution still widely believed to be a progressive movement directing humanity towards a more glorious future. Furthermore, the perception of one of these revolutionaries, even if only as a *nom de plume*, directly critiquing the current administration deepened the Democratic-Republicans claims that the reigning party was a threat to young nation’s liberty.

The Federalists, too, relied upon the popularly perceived political virtue of prominent French revolutionaries when arguing against the Democratic-Republicans – though, of course, to different ends. Rather than invoke the great actions of favored revolutionaries to argue for

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<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, “Forerunners of Monarchy and Aristocracy in the United States,” *General Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, PA), Dec. 7 1792.

increased liberty, they embraced the darker side of the French Revolution to highlight its dangers. Like the Democratic-Republican use of noble-patriots as pseudonyms, Federalists wrote under the names of revolutionaries with negative reputations to mock the opposition's rose-colored view. For example, a correspondent for John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* adopted widely loathed Jacobin journalist Jean-Paul Marat's surname as a nom de plume when critiquing the charges of aristocracy and subversion of equality laid against Hamilton.<sup>32</sup> Satirically denouncing efficient government and public servants as "highly reprehensible" and "dangerous to the public safety," Federalists mocked opposition to the Washington administration as the baseless complaints of disaffected dissidents.<sup>33</sup> Tying Democratic-Republican thoughts and critiques to Marat and his "hellish factions" of Jacobins, Federalists attacked the not only derided the opposition's embrace of the French Revolution but also relied upon Marat's ill reputation to make the argument and sour public opinion of both the Democratic-Republican Party and France.<sup>34</sup>

The Federalists also invoked Lafayette's untarnishable reputation among Americans to warn against the French Revolution and French Revolutionary style action. Describing his near execution at the hands of the Parisian masses following the French royal family's failed escape attempt in 1792 and his trouble controlling the violent impulse of the populace while at the head of the National Guard, the Federalists presented Lafayette as in danger from the very cause he

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<sup>32</sup> Marat was so hated within the United States that his murder at the hands of Marie-Charlotte Corday in 1794 led a group of women to toast his assassination, saying "May every Columbian daughter be ready to sacrifice their life to liberty" as Corday had done.

<sup>33</sup> John Fenno, "For the GAZETTE of the UNITED STATES," *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), Mar 20, 1793 & John Fenno, "Articles of Impeachment Against ALEXANDER HAMILTON, Secretary of the Treasury," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), Mar 20, 1793.

<sup>34</sup> John Fenno, *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA): Nov. 17, 1792.

supported.<sup>35</sup> Through foreign reports, the Federalists tracked his descent from celebrated patriot to disgraced and arrested monarchist in the eyes of the French populace, highlighting not only the speed with which public opinion could change but also the dangers it presented in a nation operating at its beck and call. Presenting a man popularly equated with the American liberty as threatened by the excess of it in France, Federalists traded on Lafayette's trials and tribulations to warn against liberty-induced anarchy.

France began 1793 with a bang. Within roughly a week, the French publicly executed Louis XVI and declared war on Great Britain, adding yet another country to their growing list of hostile powers France fought in her Revolutionary Wars. This was problematic for the United States for it threw the nation in between Great Britain and France. Much of the government was loathe to once again go to war against the British Empire; however, the Treaty of Versailles of 1783, the document that had ended the American Revolution, maintained the Franco-American military alliance. Complicating matters further, Hamilton had ceased war debt payments to France following the nation's abolition of monarchy in 1792 out of fear that, without Louis XVI, America's payments would not be credited.<sup>36</sup> Roughly along party lines, public opinion on the French Revolution fractured.

Democratic-Republicans saw American neutrality as the abandonment of a dear ally and a move akin to preferential treatment of a hostile foe. Believing the Federalists had aligned themselves with Great Britain in opposition to France, Democratic-Republicans accused the

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<sup>35</sup> John Fenno, "London, July 7: Escape of the Royal Family from Paris," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 27, 1791; John Dunlap, *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Oct 5, 10, & 12, 1792.

<sup>36</sup> "Report Relative to the Loans Negotiated Under the Acts of the Fourth and Twelfth of August, 1790, [13–14 February 1793]," *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-14-02-0013-0001>. [Original source: *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 14, *February 1793–June 1793*, ed. Harold C. Syrett. New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, pp. 26–58.]

reigning party of forsaking the United States and the revolutions' lofty ideals for monarchy and aristocracy. Enemies of France, the Federalists were presented by their opponents as enemies to the American public. The Federalists, however, doubted whether the Democratic-Republican celebrated political advances of the French Revolution were sustainable or even merit-worthy given the horrific shows of violence that had allowed them. Writing to Lafayette years after the fact, Hamilton claimed he had "never been able to believe that France [could] make a republic" and the populace's violent and chaotic impulse "cured me of my goodwill for the French Revolution."<sup>37</sup> The Federalists, further, asserted that blind faith and support of the French Revolution would reduce the United States' foreign standing to that of a colony in the French empire in either practicality or actuality. Observing the French Revolutionary Wars, the Federalists asserted France was more interested in expanding its borders than its ideology and would happily see the United States subjugated like any of France's European victims.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of political allegiance and affiliation, American partisans believed their political opponents were loyal to a foreign power and would delight to see American liberty vanquished.

The Federalists conflated support for the French Revolution with a desire for similar action and anarchy in the United States.<sup>39</sup> As a result, Federalist critiques of the French Revolution bled with ease into attacks upon the Democratic-Republican Party and its tenets. Separated by an ocean but of one mind, Democratic-Republicans and French revolutionaries were one and the same in the eyes of the Federalist Party: to allow the opposition to rise to power

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<sup>37</sup> "Alexander Hamilton the Marquis de Lafayette, Apr. 28, 1798." *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett & Jacob E. Cooke. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "No Jacobin No. II" in *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 5, 1793. & John Fenno, "For the Gazette of the United States," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), July 3, 1795.

<sup>39</sup> Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 59.

in the United States would be to freely allow the chaos and violence of Paris a home in Philadelphia.

Warning against the Democratic-Republican Party, Federalist papers dedicated page upon page to the violence committed during the Reign of Terror (1793 – 1794). Placing a particularly heavy focus upon Louis XVI's trial and execution, in part because it was heavily publicized within the French, English, and Dutch papers Philadelphian papers relied upon for foreign intelligence and in part because Louis XVI was name Americans would recognize having once held it in esteem, Federalist editors spent months detailing and denouncing the former French monarch's fall from public grace. He was, in their minds, a prototypical victim of the French Revolution and its adherents. Chaos had killed the king and, by encouraging an excess of the ideal, toppled individual liberty in France.

Dunlap and Fenno not only maintained Louis XVI's innocence but also emphasized his dignity in the face of the National Convention and the guillotine. Emphasizing the prejudiced nature of the National Convention, Fenno relayed Louis XVI's defense to the Philadelphian public: "I search among you for Judges, and I see only Accusers; you would give judgment upon Louis, and you have accused him; you would try him, and you have already expressed your will."<sup>40</sup> Denied a citizen's trial and accused of crimes committed before the First French Republic even existed, Louis XVI was doomed from the start. Furthering this portrait of a trial simply for show, the Federalist press emphasized the National Convention's compliance to the

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<sup>40</sup> John Fenno, "National Convention. Wednesday, December 26: Trial of Louis XVI," *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA). Feb. 27, 1793. Fenno's reporting also included a brief story of the former monarch travelling from his trial to his apartment. Whilst Louis XVI was riding in a carriage with the mayor of Paris at the time, passerby shouted "Fermez les fenetres," (close the windows) which Louis XVI briefly mistook for "Vive La Fayette." This may have been included in Fenno's report to highlight the ideological differences between France and the United States, where Lafayette was still hailed as a hero.

populace' calls for the Louis XVI's head. Noting which remarks were met with cheers and which met jeers, the papers suggested that the convention members were merely grandstanding; these men were searching for praise rather than justice. Calls for immediate decisions were met with raucous applause while calls for order heckled. Armand de Kersaint's objections – "We are judges, and not hangmen ... give us time to examine" – were hissed at by the audience, while Lanjuinais' assertion that "the time of cruelty [has] passed" resulted in "dreadful cries" and calls for him to "be sent to the Abbaye prison."<sup>41</sup> The people were out blood, and the National Convention, simply following the pulse of the nation, happily complied.

Both publishers ran multiple accounts of Louis XVI's beheading, placing particular focus on the people's reactions. According to both papers, Place de la Revolution, the site of the guillotine, was silent until Louis XVI arrived. Upon reaching the scaffolding, the former king was enveloped in noise as the area erupted into fanfare. The drums and trumpets accompanying Louis XVI's ascension and execution were reportedly loud enough to drown out his last words, though both papers claimed that he told onlookers, "I am innocent! I forgive you all!"<sup>42</sup> Placed in juxtaposition with the outbreak of "*Vive la Nation* [that] resounded on all sides," when the executioner lifted the monarch's severed head, Louis XVI's supposed last words present him as a dignified and virtuous individual while the people appear merely bloodthirsty, taking pleasure in the loss of human life.<sup>43</sup> Fenno furthered this violent image of the Parisian masses, claiming: "After [Louis XVI's] death the nearest spectators divided among them what of his hair had been

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<sup>41</sup> Fenno, "National Convention. Wednesday December 26: Trial of Louis XVI." *Gazette of the United States*.

<sup>42</sup> John Dunlap, *Dunlap's Daily American Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), Mar 23, 1793. & John Fenno, *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), Mar 27, 1793. Later issues of the *Gazette of the United States* do list Louis XVI's last words as "Citizens, I forgive my enemies and I die innocent," instead, this may be the result of a different translation of his last words rather than an entirely different French phrase.

<sup>43</sup> Fenno, *Gazette of the United States*, Mar 27, 1793.

cut off by the stroke of the guillotine, and several persons were so inhuman as to dip their handkerchief in his blood, which they afterwards carried about, crying – ‘Behold the blood of a tyrant!’”<sup>44</sup> Others meanwhile, paid handsomely for either a bit of the king’s hair or a handkerchief soaked in his blood, showing American readers that the French felt no remorse over Louis XVI’s execution.<sup>45</sup>

All the while, the Federalist press reminded readers that there was little difference between the men who ordered Louis XVI’s execution and those who threw criticism at the current administration. “Those vehicles of abuse” which murdered Louis XVI were already at work in the United States, “echo[ing] the huzzas of the ‘cut throats’ of Paris” and “steel[ing] the [nation’s] heart against every generous and human feeling.” Forsaking rational thought, the dissidents in the Democratic-Republican Party aligned themselves with the “Three furious anarchists” and prominent members of the National Convention Maximilien Robespierre, Jean-Paul Marat, and Jacques-Alexis Thuriot de la Rosière.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, democrats, whether the Democratic-Republicans of the United States or the Jacobins of France, were charged with “incautiously venturing to arraign Laws and Constitutions, which they had never read,” and “rais[ing] a *Rebellion in America* and the *Guillotine in France*.”<sup>47</sup> Supposedly unable to solve

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<sup>44</sup> John Fenno, “Particulars of the Execution of Louis XVI,” *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), April 3, 1793.

<sup>45</sup> John Fenno, “France. National Convention.” *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), April 6, 1793.

<sup>46</sup> John Fenno, “STOCKBRIDGE (Mass.) April 2.” *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), April 13, 1793. It is interesting to note that actually Marat spoke in Louis XVI’s defense during the former monarch’s trial.

<sup>47</sup> John Fenno, “From the Columbian Centinel. Another Political Epitaph: A Parody. Hairet lateri lethalis arundo.” *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), April 1, 1795. The claim democrats had not read the Constitution was mentioned a few times throughout various issues of Fenno’s paper, carrying the implication only those who could not possibly be informed would subscribe to Democratic-Republican ideology over Federalist republicanism.

problems rationally or tolerate opposing political views, these democrats turned not to just laws but to “tar and feathers, a guillotine, or a riot,” throwing the political sphere into abject chaos.<sup>48</sup> As such, Federalists believed their opponents were attacking the very basis and existence of free government, thereby making French and American democrats “the vilest of human beings – far worse than a felon or a murderer.”<sup>49</sup> In the Federalist visage, the two were united in bigotry, anarchy, and wickedness that wreaked havoc wherever they went.

The Democratic-Republicans, on the other hand, defended France whenever possible and attacked England frequently. They insisted that, while not perfect, the French Revolution was, at least, fighting monarchy and aristocracy abroad and, therefore, defending liberty from those who would wish to see it destroyed. One could be for the Revolution and against certain aspects, but to reject the affair in its totality was tantamount to forsaking American liberty and independence. In the Democratic-Republican view, American and French interests were so aligned that to hate one was to inherently loathe the other.

Due to the Federalists’ rejection of the French Revolution, Democratic-Republicans viewed the reigning party as liberty’s enemies. Decried as aristocrats, monarchists, Anglomen, and a myriad of variations on the same theme, Federalists were not only painted as conservative individuals rejecting progress but also as a party antithetical to the principles of the United States. Vocalizing the Democratic-Republican view on the matter, Jefferson, writing to American diplomat William Short, declared, “There are in the US some characters ... hostile to France and fondly looking to England as the staff of their hope ... [they] have espoused [the

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<sup>48</sup> John Fenno, *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 7, 1794 & John Dunlap, *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, PA), Aug. 28, 1794.

<sup>49</sup> John Fenno, *Gazette of the United States*, (Philadelphia, PA), Dec 12, 1795

republic] only as a stepping stone to monarchy.”<sup>50</sup> By that token, Federalist attacks upon the French Revolution and its Democratic-Republican supporters were the machinations of unpatriotic usurpers of the popular will rather than critiques of anarchy-fearing partisans.

However, the Democratic-Republican Party itself did not have a uniform opinion on France’s activities – particularly the commonplace executions of the Reign of Terror. In the face of this foreign violence, some party members celebrated the acts as the just end of aristocratic and anti-revolutionary individuals who would threaten the continuity of French liberty, while others saw these acts as unfortunate evils necessary for the preservation of the still glorious First French Republic.

Philip Freneau, for example, embraced the Reign of Terror and invoked its actions to reinforce his anti-monarchial stances. Celebrating Louis XVI’s execution, he announced, “I am glad he is dead, and I wish it were possible by one thrust of the exterminating sword to extirpate every king, and every sign of royalty throughout the world.”<sup>51</sup> While committed under, what Democratic-Republicans deemed, potentially questionable legal means, the execution served a greater good by not only removing another tyrant from the world but also informing monarchs and would be kings that their position at the head of a nation did not secure their inviolability or enforce infallibility. Employing this argument to deepen his critiques of a potentially budding monarchy and aristocracy within the Washington administration, Freneau placed articles justifying Louis XVI’s execution alongside an essay series criticizing the President in a move of rhetorical offense.

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<sup>50</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to William Short, Jan. 3, 1793.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed John Catanzariti. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

<sup>51</sup> Philip Freneau, *National Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA), July 13, 1793.

Penned by a correspondent under the pen name “Veritas,” the series argued that, despite his lofty position, Washington was accountable to the public because he served at the populace’s pleasure. His position as “first Magistrate” did not elevate him to a rank higher than public servant, thereby making him no more untouchable than any other government official. To pretend otherwise would be to veer dangerously towards despotism: “no public character ought to be so sacred as to make it dangerous or criminal to arraign it; this is a species of inviolability which royalty lays claim to, and where it obtains, the government is no longer free.”<sup>52</sup> Similar to the earlier Democratic-Republican invocations of “noble-patriots” when critiquing public servants, Freneau’s editorial selection and arrangement implicitly connected American and French political action.

Less radical party members were not as enthusiastic initially, though they too became increasingly attached to the French Revolution as it progressed. Maintaining the evils of monarchy and aristocracy, many originally attempted to strike a delicate balance between ideologically motivated support for the French Revolution and a distaste for the some of its actions. However, as the Reign of Terror revealed what the Democratic-Republican Party believed to be the latent monarchist and aristocratic sympathies of a myriad of American citizens “occupy[ing] the station of a private citizen or of a Vice-President,” these less enthusiastic party members radicalized and strengthened their support for the French Revolution in opposition to the Federalists.<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the *General Advertiser*, for example ceased pitying the plight of the French aristocracy and declared that one could easily apologize for the sins France had committed whilst striving for its own liberty within a shockingly short time

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<sup>52</sup> Philip Freneau, *National Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA) June 26, 1793.

<sup>53</sup> Philip Freneau, “For the National Gazette: To the Citizens of the United States.” *National Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA), May 11, 1793.

span.<sup>54</sup> His mind had not changed on the imperfect nature of the French Revolution, but Bache, like the rest of his Democratic-Republican compatriots, seemed intent upon embracing these flaws over the greater sins of aristocracy and monarchy.

Democratic-Republicans asserted the Federalists had shown their true ideological colors in weeping for the French monarchy and aristocracy.<sup>55</sup> While there, of course, had been party members who had shown sympathy for those executed, Democratic-Republicans differentiated between their genuine pity for an unfortunate necessary evil and the theatric horror and mourning shown by the Federalist Party. The pity and sorrow this “whole heavy troop of aristocrats, [and] the black band of tories,” showed for the late king, his family, and the French aristocracy was merely a ruse meant to justify their hatred of France.<sup>56</sup> In claiming to mourn for a former ally from the American Revolution, the Federalists were supposedly acting like the British loyalists of 1776 because of their open “attachment to monarchy and aristocracy, and their hatred of republican principles.”<sup>57</sup> To the Democratic-Republicans, the Federalists did not care for their fellow men residing in the United States and France.

Rather, the Federalists were attempting to sour relations between the two nations through their sorrow and their attacks upon France. In the eyes of the Democratic-Republican Party, the Federalists “only tend[ed] to create a jealousy between two friendly republics” in hopes of

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<sup>54</sup> In response to this declaration, Fenno publicly challenged Bache on June 8, 1795 to print that very apology within the pages of the *Aurora*.

<sup>55</sup> The Democratic-Republican equation of sorrow for those executed within France with monarchist and aristocratic sympathy also extended beyond that shown by the Federalists. In fact, Thomas Jefferson went so far as to label the French Foreign Minister to the United States, Jean-Baptiste Ternant, a “perfect Counter-revolutioner” for mourning Louis XVI’s beheading in a letter to James Monroe on May 5, 1793.

<sup>56</sup> Philip Freneau, “From the (Boston) Columbian Centinel,” *National Gazette*, (Philadelphia, PA), May 4, 1793.

<sup>57</sup> Freneau, “For the National Gazette: To the Citizens of the United States.” May 4, 1793.

driving the United States back into the arms of the British Empire.<sup>58</sup> To their horror, the Federalists seemed intent upon rendering the United States “a party in the confederacy of despots against liberty ... [and] surrender[ing] the rights of an independent nation into the hands of Great Britain.”<sup>59</sup> As such, Democratic-Republicans ardently wished “the coalition of hypocritical federalism and malignant toryism” that constituted the Federalist Party “be speedily strangled by the genius of liberty.”<sup>60</sup>

While fascinating in and of itself, the United States’ interest in the French Revolution had less to do with foreign affairs and more to do with American fears and desires. Viewed as an expansion of liberty into Europe, the French Revolution was treated as a test of the principle’s feasibility and sustainability both at home and abroad. However, due to divided public opinion on the affair and the means with which to best preserve liberty, the American populace simultaneously believed that only the success and failure of the French Revolution would maintain the ideal in the United States. As a result, American partisans upheld the Revolution as either the glorious – though not completely perfect – advancement of mankind towards a brighter and freer future or the unilaterally disastrous results of an excess of liberty and an all too deferential ear to the public will.

In fighting to preserve the republic’s liberty, the parties ultimately used the French Revolution to divide the public. The Democratic-Republican Party widely embraced the French Revolution as a light bringing hope to unenlightened and despotic Europe and aligned

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<sup>58</sup> Philip Freneau, “From the New-York Journal.” *National Gazette*. (Philadelphia, PA), June 22, 1793.

<sup>59</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, “From the Independent Gazetteer – Letter I. – To the Freeman of the United States. – [Republished by desire.]” *General Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, PA), July 17, 1795.

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin Franklin Bache, “Wilmington, July 8,” *General Advertiser*, (Philadelphia, PA), July 13, 1795.

themselves with their revolutionary compatriots. Believing that expansive liberties and the will of the people made for good governance, the party invoked and defended the Revolution, often while attacking the current administration and its policies. However, the reigning Federalists, though initially albeit hesitantly supportive of the French Revolution, denounced France and her American supporters as the Revolution became increasingly violent. Faced with the tales of mob massacres and state-sanctioned beheadings perceivably prompted by the popular will, the party viewed French Revolution as the product of chaos and anarchy. Federalists, rooted in their belief that order and stability were the best means of preserving liberty, upheld these stories within their press as a warning to the American public of the excesses of liberty. Attaching their political opponents to these dangers, Federalists invoked unpopular French revolutionaries and examples of popularly willed public violence when attacking the Democratic-Republicans. One and the same to the Federalist Party, the Democratic-Republicans and the French revolutionaries were painted as irrational and dangerous.

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