



5-4-2016

# The Fallacy of the Ideological Press: How American National Newspapers Reacted to the French Revolution From 1789-1793

Aaron R. Senior  
*University of Pennsylvania*

THE FALLACY OF THE IDEOLOGICAL PRESS:  
HOW AMERICAN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS  
REACTED TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION  
FROM 1789-1793

*Aaron R. Senior*

---

INTRODUCTION

“Many people read newspapers who read little else—They live in retired situations, and feel a strong curiosity to know the news, and to join in the opinions of the day. To a retired man, a newspaper is always company—sometimes instruction.”<sup>1</sup>

– Benjamin Franklin Bache

According to Benjamin Franklin Bache, newspapers in the United States sat at a vital juncture between the citizens and their government. Newspapers gave citizens the opportunity to learn about current events and gave politicians and newspaper editors the chance to publicize their opinions through editorials. However, as Benjamin Franklin Bache noted, newspapers not only provided a prominent method for education, but also commanded public participation. As political leaders in the United States competed with each other for power and influence, they used local and national newspapers to express their opinions to the public. With the explosion of newspapers during the 1790s and the introduction of partisan national newspapers, competing political communities formed as the gap between the government and the public closed. Newspaper editors, therefore, had an unprecedented amount of influence during this time and this thesis will analyze such influence.

\*\*\*



By Wm. Sheldon

# Gazette of the United States.

[No. XLIII.] WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1789. [Published on Wednesday and Saturday.]

THE TABLET.—No. XLIII.

"The passions and prejudices of men often make themselves under the names of virtuous qualities."  
MY last number exhibited to the view of the reader two characters, who, without any bad intentions, were instrumental in keeping alive a spirit of jealousy and uneasiness among the people, relative to the affairs of government. I shall now introduce some more of my acquaintance, whose motives perhaps are not quite so unexceptionable.

The noisy FUMOSUS is more troublesome, if not more dangerous, than either of the characters just mentioned. His passions are so tumultuous that he can never examine any circumstance with candor, and deliberation. He carries every thing to extremes. Whether he is in or out of office, he creates many enemies against the government, by his rashness and indiscretion. If he or some of his particular friends should happen to have a leading influence, he runs into a vehemence of applause on public men and measures. Should the reverse take place, the whole fury of his passions takes a different course. He joins the discontented and factious, and reproaches public proceedings with acrimony and revenge. Though he enters into no systems to overthrow the government, and though his passions will vary or subside, yet he is a great fonder of jealousy and uneasiness among the people. His reluctance to see systems to overthrow the government, and though his passions will vary or subside, yet he is a great fonder of jealousy and uneasiness among the people. His reluctance to see systems to overthrow the government, and though his passions will vary or subside, yet he is a great fonder of jealousy and uneasiness among the people.

My acquaintance FACUNDUS puzzles many people exceedingly. No person can penetrate more readily into the views of another.—He is cool, designing and mysterious. His favorite theories must not be called in question; and he approves or disapproves of any public transaction, according as it will promote or frustrate his peculiar system of politics. Such characters as FACUNDUS are not common. It requires researches to elaborate, and an attention to objects so minute and persevering to form abstract systems, that a small proportion of mankind will ever make the attempt. Few men have patience and application, and fewer still have the abilities and address to proceed systematically.—Such speculative men often lend others alms; because their plans, when compared with practice and experiment, are fallacious. I entertain a good opinion of the talents of PROUDUS, and I have no reason to scruple his integrity. But he is so dark and incomprehensible, that when he happens to take a wrong way of thinking, he draws others into the same error, by flaring difficulties, which which common minds are perplexed and alarmed. I would recommend it to the hands of my readers, who love tranquility, to have little to do with men, whom they cannot understand. Plain, practical politicians, who are more noted for good actions than for loud or fair words, are the safest guide and counsel.

The vanity and ostentation of OPINUS is very disgusting. His dislike to public measures proceeds from an affected singularity of opinion. It is his highest aim to recommend himself to the world as a person of more than ordinary discernment. This easily accounts for the spirit of opposition which is so predominant in any measure, which he did not originally propose, it would prevent the pride and triumph of opposing the current opinion of mankind, and making his own faculty more conspicuous. The only conclusion that can be drawn from his disapprobation of any measure, is, that he did not introduce it; but it is no argument that the thing is wrong. Thus have I delineated some of the motives and qualifications of a few individuals, for whose friendship, I have a great value. Their conversation, however, sometimes makes me unfavorable claims catch their faults. The peevishness of FACUNDUS fours the temper of some people against the government. The incapacity of PROUDUS, makes him unequal to give such advice, as the mildness of his disposition tempts his acquaintance to ask of him. The turbulence of FUMOSUS, frightens his companions into a dread of imaginary evils. The mystery of FACUNDUS entangles many an honest man in doubts. The vanity and pomp of OPINUS allures the shallow and facile-minded into error and instability.

It would be well for people to obtain a satisfactory solution to this question: whether there are not more causes that induce public men to seek the public prosperity, than probably induce either of the characters marked out in this speculation.

## NEW-YORK, SEPTEMBER 9, 1789. SKETCH OF PROCEEDINGS OF CONGRESS. IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES.

MONDAY, AUGUST 31. IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON THE JUDICIAL BILL. THIRD SECTION UNDER CONSIDERATION.

MR. LIVERMORE: I think this law will entirely change the form of government of the United States. Several observations have been made on the clause: it is said to be the hinge on which the whole turns; Some of the objections which I have thrown out, have been attempted to be answered—among others the great expense—by expense) do not mean the salaries of Judges—this will however be greater than the whole expense of the Judiciary throughout the United States; but I refer to the general expenses, which must be borne by the people at large, for jails, court houses, &c.—the expenses of jurors and witnesses, and other incidental charges will be another great burthen: This is a present burse without repining, as the people receive compensation in personal security and public justice; but if all these are to be doubled throughout, it will be justly considered as intolerable. Another burthen is the rapidity of the course of prosecution in these courts, by which debtors will be obliged very suddenly to pay their debts at a great disadvantage: Something like this, occasioned the infurrection in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; in other States similar modes of rapidly in the collection of debts have produced convulsions: This has been the case to the Northward, and as I have been informed, has also to the Southward.

This new fangled system will eventually swallow up the State Courts, as those who are in favor of this rapid mode of getting debts will have recourse to them. He then adverted to the clashing circumstances which must arise in the administration of justice, by these independent courts having similar powers. Gentlemen, said he, may be factious respecting dividing the horse—but these are serious difficulties—the instances mentioned by the gentlemen from South Carolina, do not apply—the officer here is the same—the Game Sheriff has the precepts committed to him—and the execution does not clash—the same goal answers for both, &c.

I do not think that the difficulties have been answered by any of the examples brought for the purpose: As to the instance of the trial for piracy in the State of South Carolina, that was a particular case, which could not otherwise be provided for; but these so rarely happen, that no precedent can be drawn from them, to render it necessary to establish these perpetual courts.

He then referred to the observation which had been made respecting those who are opposed to the clause, offering a substitute, and said, he thought upon the whole that the motion made by an Hon. Gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. Burke,) that there should be no district courts, is better than any substitute.

It may be proper here to refer to the Constitution: He then read the clause upon this subject.—The Supreme Federal Court is to have original jurisdiction only in certain specified cases—in all other, it is to have only appellate jurisdiction: It is argued from this, that there are to be inferior Federal Courts, from which these appeals are to be made: If the Constitution had taken from the State Courts all cognizance of federal causes, something might be said; but this is not the case. The State Courts are allowed jurisdiction in these cases.

It has been objected that bonds taken by the Judges of the Supreme Court, cannot be sued in the State Courts: I do not see why this cannot be done: Similar processes have been usual among us in times past, and there has been no difficulty.

Admiralty Courts should have cognizance of all maritime matters, and cases of seizures should also be committed to their decision. I hope therefore that the clause will be disagreed to, or struck out, and that the bill may be rejected, that a short concise system may be adopted.

MR. VINING: I conceive that the institution of general and independent tribunals, are essential to the fair and impartial administration of the laws of the United States.—That the power of making laws, of executing laws, and a judicial administration of such laws, is in its nature, inseparable and indivisible, if not "to be done as well as blind among us." The only plausible argument which has been urged against this clause, is the expense: It is true, that expense must in some degree be necessarily incurred, but it will chiefly consist and end with the organization of your courts, and the erection of such buildings as may be essential—such as Court-Houses, Jails, and Offices, as the gentleman has mentioned—and what, at all events, do such expenses amount to—they are the price which is paid for the fair and equal administration of your laws: From your amazingly encroaching system of government, causes must necessarily multiply in a proportionately extensive ratio: These causes must be tried some where, and whether it is in a State Court, or a Federal Judiciary, case, in the article of expense, make but little difference to the parties: It is only (for the sake of more impartial justice) transferring the business from one tribunal to another.

The gentleman has said, that the people do not like courts—that they have been opposed and prevented by violence—may, by an infurrection in Massachusetts: Surely this operates as a powerful reason to prove that there should be general, independent, and energetic judicature—otherwise, if either the State Judges should be so inclined, or a few sons of fiction choose to assemble, they could ever frustrate the objects of Justice—and besides, from the different periods fixed by the Constitution of the United States, and the different Constitutions of the several States, with respect to the continuance of the Judges in office, it is equally impossible and inconsistent, to make a general uniform establishment, so as to accommodate them to your government.

I wish to see Justice so equally distributed, that every citizen of the United States should be fairly dealt by, and so impartially administered, that every subject or citizen of the World, whether foreigner or alien, friend or foe, should be alike satisfied: By this means you would expand the doors of justice, encourage emigration from all countries into your own, and in short, would make the United States of America, not only an Asylum of Liberty, but a Sanctuary of Justice: The faith of treaties would be preserved inviolately—your extensive fanning system would have its intended operation—and your revenue, your navigation, and your import laws would be executed to receive their many advantages—and in effect establish the public and private credit of the Union.

MR. STONE: I have given the arguments all the attention which their weight demands, considering the respectability of the characters which have spoken upon the subject. It has been said that the clause in the Constitution is imperative—if this is the case, let us see where it will carry us: It is conceded on all hands that the establishment of these Courts is immutable: but the Constitution says, that Congress shall constitute such inferior Courts from time to time.

The Constitution gives you a right to extend the judiciary power to all those cases specified; but it does not say that these powers shall be exercised over all these cases. He then extended this idea to the Legislative Power, which it cannot be pretended (said he) is incomplete, because it is not extended to all possible cases: Do you divert yourself of the power by not exercising it? Certainly not. This idea involves the principle mentioned by the gentleman from New-York, (Mr. Beaufort,) that the establishment of these inferior tribunals or district courts, will draw the whole judiciary power along with them; so that the clause which restricts their cognizance to a certain sum, is a nullity.

State Judges may be considered in two respects, as men, and as Judges: As men, they are to submit to the modification of the Constitution, as it respects them as citizens: As Judges, they are to consider their relation as such to the Constitution, and are to administer Justice agreeable to that Constitution, or they may resign. I can hardly bring myself to consider the subject in a reverse point of view: If it is admitted that the Judges of the several States cannot take cognizance of a law of the United States, because they are laws *de novo*, you annihilate their judicial capacity at a blow.

It appears to me that there is something that the State Courts are not competent to, but certain cases which are specially designated.

He then went on to shew that there was no species of treason which could be committed against

September 9, 1789 issue of the Gazette of the United States

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

From the establishment of the original colonies through the ratification of the Constitution in 1788, local newspapers served their purpose in providing the relevant political, commercial, and miscellaneous news to their readership. In 1789, however, John Fenno, a young businessman from Boston, Massachusetts, decided to launch the new country's first federal newspaper. With the help of Rufus King and the support of Alexander Hamilton, Fenno hoped that his newspaper, the *Gazette of the United States*, would be just that: a newspaper that covered and supported the newly formed government of the United States. As Fenno wrote to King, the newspaper was "for the purpose of demonstrating favorable sentiments of the federal constitution and its administration."<sup>2</sup> For this reason, Hamilton gave Fenno full access to the government's resources; in return, Hamilton was given a public forum to express his own political opinions. Indisputably, the *Gazette of the United States* was courted, sponsored, and favored by the new government.

Toward the end of 1790, Benjamin Franklin Bache, decided to launch his own newspaper after returning from years spent in France. Bache originally launched his *General Advertiser* as a local Philadelphia newspaper, but it soon took on national distribution and significance. Bache was a staunch Republican and by the middle of 1791, Bache's paper became fiercely partisan, arguing for the restoration of republican principles in the government. Bache and his republican peers specifically disliked Hamilton's fiscal plans, as they believed that a national bank would place too much power in the hands of the national government and favor business elites over working class citizens. Instead, Bache and others argued for republican principles that would place more power in the hands of the states.<sup>3</sup>

Yet Bache's republican newspaper was not sufficient as the sole voice for the entire Republican Party. In October of 1791, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison sought to launch a government-sponsored national newspaper that officially

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

represented their own republican views. They found their editor in Philip Freneau, a revered Revolutionary War poet and writer. Jefferson even hired Freneau as a translator in the State Department and gave him access to exclusive dispatches and government information. Freneau's *National Gazette* directly opposed Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*, bringing Jefferson's republican principles in direct public conflict with Hamilton's federalist arguments. As this debate became transcribed in national newspapers, it was clear that partisanship had moved from President George Washington's cabinet to the country-wide public square.<sup>4</sup>

Almost every scholar who studied these national newspapers has made one key observation: as opposed to today's strict separation between the government and the media, these Early-American gazettes served as unequivocal mouthpieces for the political elites. In describing Fenno's relationship with Hamilton, historian Eric Burns writes, "Fenno was Hamilton's employee, but he was federalism's servant, and on one occasion, he went to extraordinary lengths, even in these times of scorched-earth journalistic practice, to do what he believed would promote his master's interests."<sup>5</sup>

This scholarly orthodoxy extends to the republican newspapers as well. Historian Jeffery Pasley writes in *The Tyranny of the Printer*, "The Virginia leaders [Jefferson and Madison] became so closely involved in Freneau's operations that several subscribers wrote to Madison rather than the editor with complaints about delivery problems."<sup>6</sup> Scholars note that Jefferson and Madison maintained some distance from their newspapers, so as not to seem subversive to the federalist government. Yet they gave Freneau a job in the government, absolved him of all financial risk by finding the newspaper a financial backer, and even helped Freneau assemble a list of subscribers. Burns further points out that Jefferson and Freneau "virtually [had] the same relationship that Hamilton had with Fenno."<sup>7</sup> Madison published regularly

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

in the *National Gazette* on every topic, from fiscal policy to the French Revolution to his general dislike of the federalists.

Scholars point to Benjamin Franklin Bache, ironically the national editor not directly associated with government affairs, as the most partisan editor of the three newspapers. Pasley explained that by the end of 1791, Bache took the liberty of outwardly polemicizing with Fenno, criticizing Washington, vilifying Hamilton, and supporting Jefferson's republican principles.<sup>8</sup> Although Bache did not take orders from Jefferson and Madison directly, Bache toed openly with the Republican Party line, denouncing politicians by name instead of by their policies. For example, when the *National Gazette* launched an attack on Hamilton's fiscal plans, Bache followed suit with an even stronger criticism of Hamilton's plan for a national bank.<sup>9</sup> Bache was a more extreme version of Freneau and thereby a more extreme editor supporting the Republican Party line.



Benjamin Franklin Bache (1769-1798),  
founder of the *General Advertiser*

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

There were moments when these three editors published something that diverged from the opinions of their government patrons and their ideological pastors. For example, Fenno published a peculiar letter defending Jefferson, which said that criticisms leveled at Jefferson were “founded in the basest calumny and falsehood.”<sup>10</sup> However, these moments were exceptional, as many scholars still maintained that Fenno, Freneau, and Bache aligned themselves ideologically on almost every major issue.

One of the major issues that occupied the pages of all three national newspapers was the French Revolution. Beginning in July of 1789, the French Revolution became an American obsession. In the Capitol, after violence broke out in 1791 and after factions in France began to develop, major disagreement arose within Washington’s cabinet. Broadly, Jefferson supported the French revolutionaries strongly, arguing that the French attempt to secure liberty and to check the monarchy was a laudable project worthy of the American government’s backing. Hamilton and John Adams, on the other hand, criticized the radical and violent factions in France, proposing that they were leading the revolutionaries down a dangerous path. Quickly, support for France became the central partisan issue within the government. The issue became more polarized over time; from the Citizen Genêt Affair of 1793-94 to the Neutrality Proclamation of 1793 to the ensuing debates regarding military support for France, Washington’s advisors bickered about this issue throughout Washington’s entire presidency and beyond. Furthermore, Jefferson himself admitted to Washington that he helped establish the *National Gazette* in the hope that it would cover French affairs more sympathetically than the *Gazette of the United States*.

Several historians over the past decade have covered the American reaction to the French Revolution, but almost none of them devote research exclusively to the reaction of these national gazettes. Historian James Tagg, as well as Burns and

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Pasley, all give examples of newspaper coverage of the French Revolution, but this research is done as just another example of how these editors mimicked the opinions of their respective political elites. Scholars David Waldstreicher and Simon Newman discuss American celebrations of the French Revolution and the coverage of those events in newspapers, but these historians do not spend any time analyzing the opinions of the newspaper editors themselves.<sup>11</sup> Seemingly, they concur with the traditional narrative: the celebrations and their respective coverage in the newspapers fell along party lines with the Republicans supporting the French Revolution and the Federalists opposing it. Finally, historians Matthew Rainbow Hale and Colin Wells, among others, have devoted time to examining the American reaction to the French Revolution, but none of them examine the nuances between any of the particular newspapers.<sup>12</sup> Each of these historians thereby assumes that across the board, politicians, editors, and citizens alike fell into either the Federalist or Republican camp at almost the exact same time and in the same manner. Overall, historians have spent time examining the American reaction to the French Revolution and the debates that went on surrounding this issue, but none have analyzed the reactions over time of the national gazettes themselves.

Do the three national gazettes between 1789 and 1793 truly align themselves with the opinions of the party leaders on the issue of the French Revolution? Within the current scholarship we have no reason to assume that they did not align, but this essay will take a closer look.

Partisan politics in Early America has too often been studied through the lens of political decision makers. This has allowed so many historians to mistakenly assume a homogeneity within each of the emerging parties. The realities of partisanship are often much more complicated. The diverse reactions of the first national gazettes to the French Revolution is only one small, but important way of complicating this conventional approach.



## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

The opinions of political elites are valuable and warrant further study, but these ideologically-driven politicians do not speak for everyone. Analyzing other political players within their own contexts and through their own words is therefore a necessity.

Devoting my analysis solely to these newspapers' commentary on the French Revolution and the differences that existed between these newspapers on that very question, I hope to give a definitive answer to this currently underexplored and over-assumed topic. I hope to demonstrate that newspapers' alignment with party ideology and political sponsors is an insufficient explanation of each newspaper's early thoughts on the French Revolution.

### AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS LOOKING OUTWARD: THE INADEQUACY OF IDEOLOGY

Despite the more than three-thousand-mile distance between Philadelphia and Paris, France, American newspapers were filled daily with news concerning French affairs. From military updates to legislative changes to open letters and anecdotes, editors during the early 1790s sometimes filled several pages of their four-page newspapers with French matters. The three national newspapers of the time were of course no exception, and even had an advantage over local newspapers due to their closer proximity to and better relationship with the government. Although news took about three months to travel from France to the United States, these national newspapers had first access to everything, from French intelligence to private letters exchanged between political elites from both countries.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, quantitative evidence further supports the claim that the French Revolution was a significant chunk of newspaper reporting and discourse. Key words and phrases such as "France," "French," and "Louis" were prolific. The *National Gazette*, with only 207 issues in total, mentioned the

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

word “France” 1,166 times, the word “French” 1,340 times, and the word “Louis” 213 times. A similar search of *The General Advertiser’s* 1,232 issues produced the same key words 3,743, 6,557, and 557 times, respectively. Lastly, within the *Gazette of the United States’* 447 issues, these words appear 1,469, 1,531 and 293 times, respectively. When examined on average usage per day, each newspaper produced similar results—using the first two words between three to six times an issue and the last word about once an issue.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the French Revolution was a major topic, if not *the* major topic, of American national newspapers between 1789 and 1793.<sup>15</sup>

The basic questions follow: why were American newspapers nearly obsessed with the French? Was it the historical connection between the United States and France? Was it the shared values and principles of liberty, equality, and hatred for despotism? Or did newspapers highlight the topic because everyone around the world was writing about it too? American historians, unsatisfied with these cursory answers, provide insight into editors’ true interest in French affairs. The conventional scholarly account states that just as partisanship began to rise between Federalists and Republicans, each side looked at the French Revolution through its own ideological lens—using the French Revolution to argue for its respective philosophy.<sup>16</sup> In essence, the ideological approach that Washington’s cabinet members took toward the French Revolution was replicated in the national newspapers.<sup>17</sup> On one hand, the Republicans supported the French Revolution due to shared principles of popular sovereignty and anti-monarchy. On the other hand, the Federalists opposed the French Revolution because it bred violence and it overthrew law in favor of chaos. The French Revolution also abolished the orderly and hierarchical structure of a stable government. In essence, this standard explanation views ideology as the main catalyst for the debates surrounding the French Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

This conventional approach is supported by overwhelming evidence, from the American thoughts on the Thomas Paine–Edmund Burke debates of 1789–95, to the letters of Jefferson and Adams, to the Citizen Genêt Affair, to the Neutrality Proclamation, and to the Jay Treaty of 1794–95. However, this perspective analyzes the political elites and assumes that every political actor below them—newspaper editors and citizen leaders alike—took the same approach.<sup>19</sup> The Federalist and Republican newspapers say something much more complex though. As I will show through this essay, newspaper coverage of the French Revolution—and particularly, the three main themes of universal liberty, friendship, and monarchy—did not always mimic these partisan divides based on ideology. This chapter will show in both the data and the reading of the sources that this conventional approach does not apply well to the national newspapers of the time.

### Universal Liberty

One of the most popular themes in American national newspapers was the French move toward universal liberty. The conventional account, therefore, claims that while both Federalist and Republican politicians and newspapers agreed in the beginning of the French Revolution on the merits of France's move toward universal liberty, the Federalists, when violence arose, ceased their support for liberty in favor of order. While the Republicans remained strong in their support of the French cause since their ideology championed liberty, the Federalists, due to their ideological support for government stability, could not support the French Revolution's actions any longer. However, as one will observe, there are two problems with this explanation. First, the Federalist press' turn away from the French fight for liberty did not coincide with the beginning of violence and radicalism in France. Additionally, opinions published in the *Gazette of the United States* on French matters did

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

not coincide with the ideological debates of leading politicians such as Adams and Hamilton in mid-1791. Rather, the Federalist and Republican newspapers agreed on the merits of the French Revolution for much longer than expected—through the middle of 1792. Thus, the basic contention of scholars does not hold up; while one would have expected the Federalist press to oppose the French Revolution as early as 1791, the *Gazette of the United States*' opposition surfaced much later.

Across all three newspapers, including the federalist *Gazette of the United States*, the usage of the word “liberty” rose over the beginning years of the French Revolution. While in the 1789 issues of the *Gazette of the United States*, “liberty” was used in the French context only 9 times, it was used 29 times in the 1793 issues. Similarly, in 1791, “liberty” was used in the French context only 8 times by the *National Gazette*, but 30 times in 1792 and 50 times in 1793. Finally, the *General Advertiser* mentioned “liberty” in the French context 20 times in 1790, but 56 times in 1792 and 49 times in 1793.<sup>20</sup> While these numbers may appear small, it is important to note that two of the three newspapers published only four-page newspapers twice a week. Using “liberty” and “France” together in 50 articles over the course of a year is a clear indication of the rise of this rhetorical connection. Violence began in July of 1791 with the killings at the anti-royalist demonstration at Champ de Mars and continued through 1792 and 1793 with the September Massacre and other counterrevolutionary feuds. Additionally, in June of 1791, Federalists such as John Quincy Adams wrote in opposition to Paine’s celebration of the French cause, while simultaneously Jefferson despised the federalist newspaper coverage of the French Revolution; but despite all of this, opinions surrounding liberty during the French Revolution continued to rise in usage across the board. The supposed ideological divide is absent from these years. A further examination of the newspaper content will shed a more complex light on both Federalist and Republican

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

support over these five crucial years.

From the very beginning of the *Federalist Gazette of the United States*, Fenno's newspaper praised the French Revolution for its support of universal liberty. As one will observe, the rhetoric from 1789 through 1792 consistently remained positive and even increased in frequency over time. The apparent violence in France and partisanship in Washington's cabinet apparently did not affect Fenno. Buried on Page 2 of the July 29, 1789 issue of the *Gazette of the United States*, was a short but powerful passage, praising King Louis XVI of France for calling the Estates-General to order on April 27<sup>th</sup>. The passage began:

The magnanimous policy conspicuous in the above speech—the openness, candor, and paternal affection which breathes in every line of it, contrasted with edicts of former Kings of the same nation, evince the liberality, enlightened policy, and superior wisdom of the present age—THE ERA OF FREEDOM—OF UNIVERSAL LIBERTY! In the Western world, she first broke the chains which held mankind in servitude—and having fixed her temple in our favored country, she is spreading her salutary reign throughout the world.<sup>21</sup>

American writers viewed this calling of the Estates-General in an exceedingly positive light. Three unique elements emerge from this celebratory piece. First, the American writer saw the French Revolution as a major shift away from tyranny and towards liberty by calling a meeting between the three French Estates—the clergy (First Estate), the nobility (Second Estate), and the common people (Third Estate). Second, the author specifically praised the King of France as the “wise and magnanimous monarch of France.” Despite not altering the very structure of the French monarchy, the Americans still praised the French

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

monarch and considered the King's move to be one of "paternal affection." Third, the author noted that this new French liberty was an extension of American efforts, a symptom of the ripples caused by the American Revolution.<sup>22</sup>

Over the course of the French Revolution, the *Gazette of the United States* became almost obsessed with its global impact. On Page 3 of the January 2, 1790 issue, three of the seven articles in the folio discussed the French Revolution and its recent accomplishments. As the New Year's edition of the newspaper, the editor published several poems and articles that reviewed the previous year of 1789.

If one had any doubt about the American interest in the French Revolution, one should look no further than the "Ode to the New Year." With a full stanza dedicated to the French Revolution, the ode celebrated 1789 as the year that "saw our rights secured, and Europe freed." Only months after the Storming of the Bastille, the author shrewdly noted the immense historical significance of the French Revolution's beginnings, stating, "Long shall thy numbers, in our annals shine." The author continued, "It almost finished; Europe almost free, / May Frenchmen use their power, so late retrieved, / In Humbling pride, and righting the aggrieved." This dramatic applause of French accomplishments also demonstrated a deeper connection between the Americans and the French; the author used the viewpoint of "ours" and not of "theirs"—"in our annals shine" and "that saw our rights secured"—indicating a shared goal and project.<sup>23</sup>

Although it started more than a year after the *Gazette of the United States* began, the *General Advertiser* under Benjamin Franklin Bache employed similar rhetoric. On October 4, 1790, Bache published a letter by Madame La Chevaliere D'eon that stated, "Louis XVI: thou art the first Monarch in the world who has confirmed in the face of heaven and earth the liberties of thy people...worthy the love of the whole human race."<sup>24</sup> On

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

the next day, the newspaper printed additional letters and a toast about France. One letter claimed, “Liberty is a plant of quick growth, takes deep root in short time, and spreads rapidly.”<sup>25</sup> The toast read as follows:

The Majesty of the People. Universal Liberty. Those who have lost their lives in defense of it. The father of our constitution. Those who have laid its foundation in their immortal works: Locke, Milton, Rousseau, Sidney, Needham, Mably, Price...The memory of those who perished in the dungeons of the Bastille. The United States. May the closest union, founded on a solid basis of commerce and friendship, subsist between them and France.<sup>26</sup>

Similar to the *Gazette of the United States*, the author of the toast used many of the same themes: universal liberty, the United States’ role in that liberty, a celebration of the Bastille, and the friendship between the United States and France.<sup>27</sup>

This optimism and praise remained consistent through 1791. On July 6, 1791, Fenno published an article that showed how individual writers were successful in both predicting and catalyzing the French Revolution through the spread of their ideas. The article ended,

The Philanthropist and Philosopher are highly gratified in reflecting that this Revolution has taken place, and upon such principles as must ensure its success; and may safely conclude from this pleasing prospect, that similar revolutions, in favor of the rights of humanity, and founded on similar principles, will soon pervade not only Europe but the world.<sup>28</sup>

Despite reported violence and conflict at this time in France, the

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

federalist newspaper maintained this identical rhetoric.

On November 30, 1791, the *Gazette of the United States* continued to praise the French Revolution, remarking, “Liberty is not only secured against many former dangers, but it has fewer enemies to contend with. As knowledge spreads through Europe, it gains authority over the hearts of its adversaries; Kings begin to talk like good republicans—they give a tone to the fashion of being free.”<sup>29</sup> Fenno cited republican sentiments themselves, making it clear that even in late 1791, positive sentiments toward the French remained. While the conventional historical approach expects Federalists to contend strongly with republicanism at this point, this is clearly not the case.

In his letters, Jefferson claimed that in April 1791 he and Madison commissioned Freneau to form a republican newspaper because he disliked Fenno’s coverage and opinion of, among other things, the French Revolution.<sup>30</sup> However, when looking at Fenno’s newspaper up until this point, the supposed turn against the French Revolution is not found. From 1789 through 1791, Fenno remained true to the French Revolution’s effects and potential. This is further proof of a divide between the ideology of leading politicians and the opinions of newspapers and their editors.

Some may point to the Publicola debates, however, as proof that the federalist newspapers did turn against the French Revolution in 1791. At the end of June 1791, John Quincy Adams penned an article under the pseudonym Publicola, which eventually was published in the *Gazette of the United States*.<sup>31</sup> In the article, he sharply criticized Paine’s *Rights of Man* and drew a distinction between the American reformation of the English constitution based on enlightened principles and (contrary to?) the French radical revolution that wished to overthrow an entire governmental structure. Adams argued that the French Revolution’s reforms would not take root because they did not impose natural and comprehensive change of government.



## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Immediately, Publicola became a public focus, receiving no fewer than 25 responses under the pseudonym Brutus, whose articles were published in the *General Advertiser* in July and August of 1791. Critics took issue with almost every claim Adams made. However, the *Gazette of the United States*' support for the French Revolution and the liberty it produced did not change after Adams' article was published. While Republicans were fast to criticize, they were indeed criticizing politicians including Adams, not the newspapers or their editors themselves.

Through 1792, praise of French activities still remained, though most articles were relegated to the sides of the newspapers under the "Philadelphia" section, which discussed events happening in the nation's capital. Seemingly, the Publicola article was an exception, as praise for the French cause continued. On April 28, 1792, for example, the *Gazette of the United States* defended the people of France against governmental and religious censors. The article stated, "Two things are clear—that the people adopted, and that they support the present government. It is the glory of Americans that they have done this...The people of America have as many good reasons to approve their own deliberate work, as the French nation."<sup>32</sup> Invoking the principles of republicanism, the author gave full support behind the revolutionaries who exercised their power to establish the government and tailor it to their will. Additionally, in celebration of Bastille Day (July 14), the *Gazette of the United States* recounted "various demonstrations of joy," as well as seventeen toasts, which included toasts to "The French Nation; their Constitution and King. May the Freedom which dawned encircle the globe. Victory to the French armies over the foes of Liberty. Liberty or Death. The President of the United States."<sup>33</sup> Indistinguishable from the toasts of 1791, this utterance further proves the extreme regard for liberty that the Federalists had and their strong alliance with the French cause.

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Furthermore, Federalists maintained hope for the French Revolution, writing,

The people of the United States are now in possession of what [a] great part of the European world are laboring to obtain—a government of their choice...and while every real friend to the happiness of mankind most ardently wishes success to the struggles of oppressed humanity in the eastern hemisphere, he will spurn with indignation every insidious attempt to blast the prospects of this country under the auspices of that government whose basis is freedom, and equal rights of man.<sup>34</sup>

With caution, Fenno's newspaper remained in strong support of the French Revolution, not only for France's past accomplishments but for its future potential.

Fenno's rhetoric was almost identical to that found in the *General Advertiser* and the *National Gazette* alike. Historians have explained that "During its two-year existence, the *National Gazette* was almost identical to the *General Advertiser* in its praise of the French Revolution."<sup>35</sup> Established only at the end of 1791, the *National Gazette* immediately began covering and commenting on the French Revolution extensively.<sup>36</sup> On December 12, 1791, Freneau published an article under the pseudonym Aratus, who claimed that the "assent of the King to the constitution has completed the French Revolution." With immense praise for French progress, Aratus linked it to human progress, asserting, "As the friend of humanity, I rejoice in the French Revolution." However, Aratus went on to write,

But as the citizen of America, the gratification is greatly heightened. From a variety of circumstances, I have been led to believe, that if their effort had failed, the calamity would not have been confined to themselves alone, but

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

have communicated its destructive influence to the noble fabric we have raised. The fate of the two governments has appeared to be intimately linked together; and that of either dependent on the other. What their circumstances are, that should warn every good republican to stand on his guard.<sup>37</sup>

The rhetoric surrounding humanity's progress and the United States' influence were similar, but the *National Gazette* went a step further than Fenno and Bache. Aratus claimed that the results of the French Revolution would be extremely impactful on the American project; if the French were to fail, Aratus warned, then the American Constitution and its principles will be questioned. Accordingly, the French Revolution's principles cannot and should not merely be admired from afar, but deeply and closely monitored. This indicated a slight shift in the thoughts of American newspapers, but surely not in any partisan proportions.

If the federalist support for the French did not turn during the early chaos, riots, and wars abroad, as well as during the early partisan bickering at home, when does their support for universal liberty halt? Within the *Gazette of the United States*, the first major criticism came on October 3, 1792, from an article published under the pseudonym Cato. This finding presents an immense sixteen-month lag between the violence in France in July of 1791 and Fenno's eventual turn away from the French Revolution in October of 1792. During this period, Fenno expressed almost identical sentiments toward France and its praiseworthy pursuit toward universal liberty. This gap between Fenno and the partisanship of elites, as well as the violence in France demonstrates that Fenno was not predominantly animated by Federalist ideology, nor was he the mouthpiece of Adams or Hamilton. This lag indicates that Fenno acted autonomously when it came to the French Revolution, allowing the newspaper to express its own opinions and pursue its independent agenda.

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Finally, when Fenno's newspaper turned against the French Revolution, the author known as Cato expressed "deep concern" over the progression of the insurrection. Cato not only recounted and despaired over the violence, frenzy, and chaos in France, but also applied it to the United States in two ways. First, he stated that

as men anxious for the happiness of our fellow men,... as Americans who gave example to twenty-five millions of people,...as individuals possessed with sensibility, we cannot be indifferent to the future of those individuals who...are endeavoring to procure for their own country a participation in that freedom, which they assisted in procuring for us.<sup>38</sup>

As Americans who both inspired the French Revolution and benefited from French assistance in the past, Americans must feel concerned with French affairs, which were in "extreme disorder and jeopardy." Cato here maintained universalist rhetoric, but argued that the world was failing to achieve that universalism. Second, Cato argued that the factionalism and the chaos in France should worry Americans now, since the United States has men just like those in France who are "discontented" with the government and who wish to destabilize it.<sup>39</sup> Cato thought that Americans should guard the country from those people, namely the Republicans, or else events that happened in France will unfold in the United States. Cato used the French Revolution as a polemical device, not because others disagreed with his analysis of the French Revolution, nor because Cato and the *Gazette of the United States* suddenly realized that their ideology did not fit with the French Revolution.

Additionally, in early November of 1792, the *Gazette of the United States* took its first shot at Bache's understanding of the French Revolution. On Saturday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

newspaper published a letter to Fenno signed by Philanthropis. The letter criticized the French Revolution, noting, “that the people of France have swerved from the original principles of their revolution—that the new constitution has essentially been violated—and that reason and judgment are overwhelmed by the boisterous voice of faction.” The Federalist view clearly shifted here against the violent wars and treatment of the King. Furthermore, Philanthropis responded to those who claimed the violence was all due to the tyranny of the monarchy by asking,

But what despotism bears half the ills in its train as that of anarchy and confusion, where every sacred mound raised for the security of life, liberty and property, is levelled [sic] by the torment of lawless power? The unhappy situation in France, while it demands our sympathy, presents a thinking example of what is to be expected from the passion of men uncontrolled by government and laws.

While the revolutionaries claimed that their actions were in line with liberty and security, in fact, they violated those principles by creating chaos and torment. The federalist newspaper here, therefore, completely flipped away from its original support of the French Revolution.<sup>40</sup>

In the next issue of the *Gazette of the United States*, a Federalist reader used the Philanthropis article to parody and to criticize the Republicans. The author wrote, “Mr. Fenno, please re-publish the following parody on the piece signed Philanthropis.” The new article was addressed to Bache and noted “that the people of France have improved upon the original principles of their revolution, by a bold step of rational republicanism, and a dereliction of the gothic system of inviolability in the supreme executive.” The author continued parodying the republican stance, adding, “As to the late excesses, they are the natural

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

effects of the flings of old wounds, received from the hands of despotism” and further showed a “striking example of the excesses that may be expected from the efforts of men, rising from oppression and breaking the shackles imposed on them by lawless ambition.” The author closed the parody with a supposed message to Americans: “May America continue that happy country, where the supremacy of the people, the best securities of their liberties, shall always be superior to the restless efforts of an aspiring law.” In a scathing and almost humorous parody, the author mocked what a Republican may write to Bache—not only are the excesses justified, but also that law in general may be disposed of in favor of the wishes of the people. To that line of argument, the author broke from the parody in an asterisk below, stating, “One of the first principles of republicanism is, that the Law is Supreme.” If one assumed that the will of the people is supreme, this writer argued, it would therefore create two Supremes—an impossible situation according to the author, citing the English playwright William Shakespeare. Without the sole supremacy of the law, “Liberty almost expires in the contemplation—confidence is annihilated, and existence hangs upon a thread.” As Fenno turned against the French Revolution, he not only criticized the French themselves, but also poked fun at the domestic supporters of the French Revolution.<sup>41</sup>

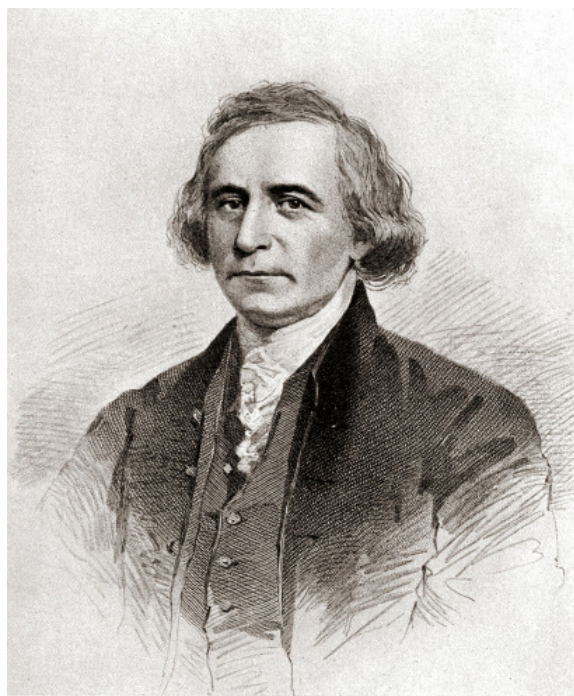
While criticism of France came from the *Gazette of the United States*, the republican newspapers stayed steady in their support for the French Revolution. The *General Advertiser* called the French Revolution “a glorious cause of liberty” and led celebrations to commemorate every French act from the establishment of the French Constitution of 1791 to the anniversary of the establishment of the French Republic in 1792.<sup>42</sup> The newspaper not only kept the language of liberty intact throughout, but also frequently mentioned the strong connection between the French and American Revolutions. On January 2, 1793, the *General Advertiser* published a piece that

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

covered a large republican celebration of the French triumph at Valmy—a crucial French victory. The article enumerated fifteen “truly republican toasts” including a toast to France, “may her republican form of government last as long as the sun shines or the waters run,” and to President Washington, “because he is a friend to the rights of man.” Additionally, toasts were given to ideas, including, “the undisguised political principles of 1776” and “May the sun of liberty illuminate the universe.”<sup>43</sup> In this toast and several others, Republicans showed that not only were their republican principles being applied in France and throughout the world, but also that the very principles of the American Revolution and the Spirit of ’76 were being applied in France. Thereby, the Republicans claimed to be the authentic carriers of the American Revolutionary tradition. Throughout 1793, the *General Advertiser* covered all major celebrations including the Franco-American Alliance, the Storming of the Bastille (July 14, 1789), and the Insurrection of August 10, 1792.<sup>44</sup>

Freneau’s *National Gazette* shared similar sentiments. In 1793, the *National Gazette* recognized a strong uptick in the popular sentiments around the French Revolution. An author wrote in 1793, “a year ago, the merits and importance of the French Revolution, were confined...to but a few speculative politicians in this country. But at present...thousands who were then scarcely affected by its animating influence are now warmed and invigorated.”<sup>45</sup> Although the tens of celebrations from the beginning of 1791 debunk this theory of popular inactivity, the author’s thought still shows how the French Revolution was central in 1793. This supposed increase in celebrations coincided with the federalist turn against the French Revolution. While some may claim it was the violence, wars, or King that caused this split, the newspapers themselves do not hint it, nor would this line of thought explain the sudden republican rise from “a few speculative politicians” to the “thousands” of supporters. Therefore, this phenomenon does not suggest a sudden

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press



Philip Freneau (1752-1832),  
editor of the *National Gazette*

ideological divide between the newspapers, but a political one in which the Republicans highlighted their support for the French Revolution to break with the Federalists.

In 1793, familiar rhetoric was used by the *National Gazette* including statements such as, “it is natural for every American to feel a peculiar interest in the affairs of France since besides the common motives of philanthropy and love of liberty, he must consider the struggles of France as a continuation of the glorious struggles of his own country.”<sup>46</sup> The author, writing under the pseudonym of Philadelphus argued that Americans should not only care about the humanitarian concerns and the common principles of both Revolutions, but also about the contemporary well-being of the country. Another author urged readers to “aid the causes of republicanism in France, if not from principles of gratitude... [then] from motives of your own prosperity.”<sup>47</sup> Seemingly, the United States’ prosperity hinged on the outcome of the French Revolution. Whether it tangibly hurt



## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

the United States economically or it just theoretically called the vitality of republican principles into question, the writer here showed that care for the French Revolution went beyond the classical principles of republican ideology and fundamentally impacted American prosperity.<sup>48</sup>

In their reactions to the French Revolution, national newspapers used the language of liberty to celebrate the French cause. The language used in opinion pieces and celebrations typically repeated the concept of universal liberty and the deep connection between the Americans and the French. Although a split over France did eventually fall along party lines, the split did not come when the politicians themselves split; between the end of 1791 through the end of 1792, the French Revolution was violent, the American political parties were forming, and yet everyone agreed on the French Revolution and its merits. Furthermore, even after the split occurred, both federalist and republican writers seemed to go beyond ideology in their rhetoric—hinting at more complex and political motives. By ignoring the day-to-day opinions of newspapers, the conventional historical account fails to see the divide between republican and federalist newspapers and the ideological politicians of the period. As one will later observe, the newspaper editors were more beholden to the ideas of journalistic nonpartisanship than were their patrons.

### Friendship and Sympathy

Reading through the philosophical and political discourse on the French Revolution, it is almost impossible to miss the language of sensibility, friendship, and brotherhood. After all, one of the three French principles was *fraternité*, or brotherhood. While sensibility, friendship, and brotherhood are not synonymous with one another, they each imply a connection between the United States and France that runs deeper than just outside viewers and commentators.<sup>49</sup> American newspapers

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

declared shared motives, goals, principles, and outcomes with the French Revolution. Toasts, poems, and celebrations not only served as intellectual congratulations, but also displayed emotional and familial relations between the countries. Additionally, these sentiments not only pervaded the top echelons of American politics, but also were latent in the newspaper coverage of the French Revolution. Interestingly, however, politicians and newspapers used these phrases differently and at different times. This section will provide further proof for the phenomenon displayed above—the commentary of newspaper editors on the French Revolution was not driven by ideology, but by some other factor. According to Wells,

The language of liberty owed its ascension in the 1790s to a very different discursive source as well: notwithstanding the political origins of the discourses of liberty and rights in Enlightenment thought more generally, it also drew particular power from the degree to which it also overlapped with another emerging discourse of the time—that of sensibility or sentimentalism, which had pervaded literary discourse (if not political) throughout the 1780s in Britain and elsewhere.<sup>50</sup>

Several other historians have also discussed this era of sensibility, sentimentalism, and feelings and have shown its pervasiveness in popular political culture.<sup>51</sup>

On October 27, 1789, the *Gazette of the United States* published an article entitled, “Authentic Information,” discussing the concept of sensibility in the United States. It declared, “A happy revolution of sentiments is observed to have taken place throughout the United States: Local views, and narrow prejudices are universally reprobated—A generous national spirit pervades the whole Union...even the distinctions of the states are scarcely heard...we are proud to be distinguished by the name

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

of the Country we inhabit, Americans.” In a newspaper filled with local news and opinion articles, a sociological observation seems strange and out of place. This puzzlement regarding the relevance of the rise in national culture and sensibility was answered in the next paragraph though. According to the author, the United States in its sentimental and national state has the ability and the obligation to look past its borders and recognize its influence worldwide. When looking at France, the author claimed, “America may indulge [in] a laudable pride on this occasion” due to its ability to spread the ideas of liberty through friendship.<sup>52</sup>

Picking up on the existing discourse of the time, American newspapers like the *Gazette of the United States* applied the language and ideas of sentimentalism to their brethren across the Atlantic Ocean who seemed to be engaging in a similar revolution. This was the perfect opportunity for Americans to express their care not only for those within their own borders, but also those fighting for similar causes, no matter their location. As Wells noted, the form of sentimentalism was a natural continuation from universal liberty—once a universal community is formed to fight for liberty, people within the community will sympathize with the struggles of others within it.<sup>53</sup> As the *Gazette of the United States* commented in 1789, “Every citizen of the world—every friend to the rights of mankind—and more especially every citizen of the United States, must feel interested in the important transactions in the Kingdom of France.”<sup>54</sup> Friendship and citizenship, in short, require feeling and sensitivity.

In this section, I hope to support two separate, but related, claims. First, the language of sensibility does not seem to follow the supposed partisan divide, as Republicans failed to invoke the language of friendship and sympathy until the end of 1791. This furthers the claim that the French Revolution was not as ideologically driven as many people think. Second, the very nature of these discussions brings the parties beyond ideology.

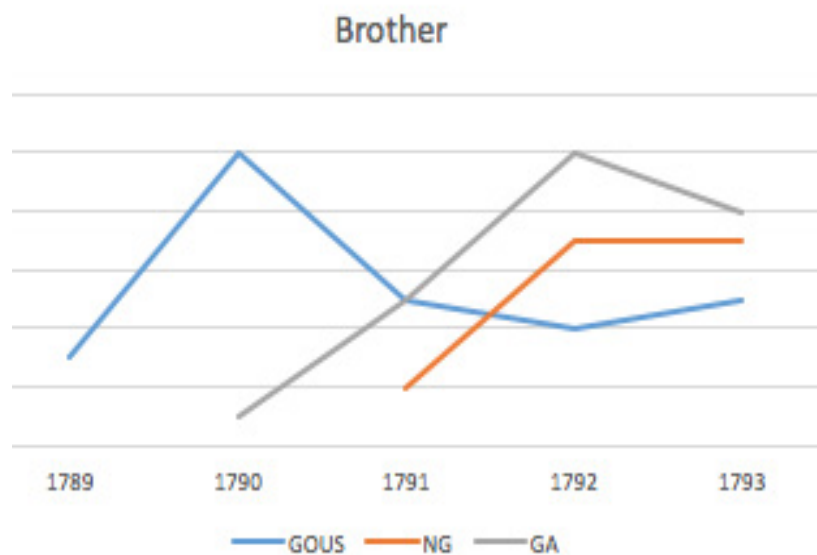
## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Through the language of friendship and sensibility, newspapers showed not only their support for the French Revolution, but also a deep connection to it. From 1789 through 1791, the partisan paradigm flipped, as federalists displayed this deep, sensible connection while republicans did not. Then in 1792, the parties exchanged positions on this very issue. Whereas there was little partisan difference until late 1792 between the federalist and republican newspapers on the topic of universal liberty, partisan difference existed immediately on the topic of friendship. The question is what motivated this partisan divide: differing ideology or some other factor? This back and forth between the newspapers indicates much more than ideological differences, as no ideological change was even reported at this time. The eventual departure on lines of friendship shows that the terms of this debate were about political legitimacy—an argument not over philosophy, but over who were the true friends of the American project.

One observes this trend explicitly in the usage of the terms “friendship” and “sensibility” over this period. The *Gazette of the United States* used “friend” and “France” in the same context 4 times in 1789, up to 8 and 7 times in 1790 and 1791, respectively, and down again to 4 and 5 times in 1792 and 1793, respectively. Conversely, the *General Advertiser* used “friend” in the same context only 1 and 11 times in 1790 and 1791, respectively, but then 15 and 25 times in 1792 and 1793, respectively. The *National Gazette* also associated “friend” with “France” 9 and 17 times in 1792 and 1793, respectively, as opposed to only 1 time in 1791.<sup>55</sup> Although the changes seem small and possibly insignificant, taken in relation to each other, there is a clear inverse trend between the federalist and republican national newspapers.

The same analysis with the words “brother” and “France” uncover similar results. The federalist newspaper used “brother” and “France” together 1 time in 1789, then 10 times in 1790 and 5, 4, and 5 times in 1791, 1792, and 1793, respectively—

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press



The usage of the word “brother” by all three newspapers in the context of the French affairs

indicating a peak in 1790. The opposite is found in the republican papers. In 1790, the *General Advertiser* used these words together 1 time, while it used them 5, 10, and 8 times in 1791, 1792, and 1793, respectively. Similarly, the *National Gazette* used the words together only 2 times in 1791, but used them 7 times in both 1792 and 1793. While no such trend exists in terms of liberty over the same period, the trend within friendship is apparent—indicating a partisan proclivity in terms of American sensibility to the French Revolution, not a mere ideological difference. Only once republican usage went up while federalist usage went down. The graph below elucidates this trend for the word “brother.”

Further analysis of the usages of friendship, brotherhood, and sensibility will illuminate these trends even more. As Americans became aware of the French Revolution, writers urged their readership to support it. The line of argument often went as follows:

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

The friends to the rights of human nature, and particularly every American, must feel interested in the commotions which now agitate the Kingdom of France. The prospect that opened upon that people, of a complete emancipation from a state of abject despotism, impressed the most pleasing sensations upon every philanthropic mind. That they may finally establish a free government, is most devoutly wished.<sup>56</sup>

Writers argued that as friends of human nature, and ostensibly of the enlightenment values of human nature and freedom, Americans must be interested in the French Revolution. Not only are Americans believers in human nature, but they are also friends of it—implying a deep connection and care for it. Additionally, authors invoked feelings of interest, wishes of free government, and pleasing sensations of emancipation—all phrases expressing an authentically personal care for the French cause.

This type of wishing and interest was a typical motif of the federalists at the beginning of the French Revolution. As opposed to acting or urging, the federalists watched with interest and pride as a caring friend.<sup>57</sup> However, this motif slowly lost popularity within the *Gazette of the United States*, as support for the French Revolution eroded—at least, that is the approach most historians hold. In my view, the federalist shift within their newspaper is only in response to the republican change of heart; therefore, we must first examine the republican shift.

While the federalist newspaper discussed friendship and the French Revolution, the recently founded *General Advertiser* scarcely mentioned it in 1790 and throughout most of 1791. Some mentions spoke of people as “friends of the Revolution” or “friends of mankind,” but seldom did the newspaper discuss deep sentiments between the United States and France.<sup>58</sup> The lack of sentimental care in these newspapers did not go unnoticed.

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

On November 24, 1791, the *National Gazette* published a letter which stated,

It has been observed by several foreigners, that, considering the immense benefits which the French Revolution promises to the human race, that grand event has passed in America with less éclat, less sympathy of joy, than could have been reasonably expected from a people, who but seven years before, had almost by dint of mere enthusiastic bravery, emancipated themselves from the chains prepared for them by the parent state.<sup>59</sup>

With similar values and experiences, one would have expected the Americans to be more sympathetic, the author thought. In reality, the federalist press recounted sympathy, but for some reason the republican press had not. The explanation the author gave for the lateness in sympathy is even more telling, remarking that

...characters were not wanting in this country who exerted such abilities as they possessed, in endeavoring to persuade the people that the principles for which they had so recently fought and bled, were nugatory—and the right of enacting laws and governing themselves lay not with the multitude of any nation, but with certain favorites of heaven, certain political magicians...the establishment of a free government in France, has thrown a damp upon the advocates of such doctrines.

In essence, the writer pointed to some people who did not want others in the United States to learn and to advocate for the same solution the French were promoting—namely, “the pure doctrines of Republicanism” and the sovereignty of the people. In a purely partisan and polemical fashion, the author

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

unjustly and maliciously blamed federalists—who apparently did not want others to find out about republicanism—for the lack of sympathy in the United States. Ironically, the federalists had been the only ones using the language of sympathy so far.<sup>60</sup> With this malicious attack on federalists though, sympathy was used not as an ideological point of departure, but as a political point of controversy.

Not surprisingly, around the time of this article, the republican usage of sympathy and sentimentalism soared and these articles typically had a federalist jab attached as well. The main source for these sentimental articles was from the coverage of celebration and toasts to the French Revolution and its various anniversaries. With the July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration in 1792 rained out in Philadelphia, local officials decided to move the celebration ten days later to Bastille Day. Both republican newspapers covered the day extensively and their coverage was filled with references to friendship and sympathy. In the July 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *National Gazette*, after hearing that the firework show would be delayed to July 14<sup>th</sup>, a writer commented that on the anniversary of the French Revolution, “it is expected, there will, in future, be a general rejoicing in every part of the United States, by *all* who are friends to the French Revolution, and consequently *real friends* to the revolution in America.”<sup>61</sup> The two words, “real friends,” packed a sympathetic connection to the French Revolution with a partisan polemic all in one. By celebrating the French Revolution, the republicans thought of themselves both as the friends of the French and as the true protectors of the American Revolution.<sup>62</sup> Clearly, the unfounded invocation of “real friends” highlights the political jousting that took place between the republican and federalist press. These debates were not the same ideological debates that political elites were having at this time; rather, the partisan press, by couching their rhetoric in true friendship, was engaging in a debate over which political party was truly legitimate.



## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

In 1793, these celebrations further intensified with the visit of Citizen Genêt to the United States. Genêt arrived to sway American opinion toward France, as opposed to neutrality. While hundreds came out to celebrations for him across the country, this did not change President Washington's decision in favor of neutrality. However, aside from the foreign policy outcomes, the result of Genêt's visit could be seen as more significant and impactful in terms of the reaction of the American populace. Genêt's ability to bring scores of people out to celebrations and festivals led historian David Waldstreicher to conclude that Genêt "enabled the people to celebrate themselves and their participation in national politics. It seemed to make ordinary Americans into makers of foreign policy."<sup>63</sup> With such popular appeal, both Genêt and the population expressed feelings of brotherhood and friendship between the nation of the United States and the people of France. Genêt wrote in the *General Advertiser*,

I have received abundant proofs on my journey from Charleston to Philadelphia. In every place the general voice of the people convinced me, in a most sensible manner, of their real sentiments, and sincere, and friendly dispositions toward the nation which I have the honour to represent, and for the advancement of that common cause which she alone supports with so much courage...I assure you that the day your brethren in France shall receive it [your sentiments], will be a day of gladness to them.<sup>64</sup>

Saturated with references to sensibility and friendship, Genêt's speeches served as the emotional conduit between the American public and the French people. Several citizens also published their letters to Genêt in the newspaper. One letter from Charles

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Biddle stated, “For such feelings, sir, we have been naturally led to contemplate the struggles of France with a paternal eye, sympathizing in all her calamities, and exulting in all her successes.”<sup>65</sup> Biddle claimed that not only was France a brother and friend to the United States, but also that the United States was a paternal figure—caring for France and taking pride in all its successes. Another letter from P.S. Du Ponceau, the Citizen Minister of the French Republic, contained an outpouring of feeling and connection between the French and the Americans. He wrote that when France still had its despotic government, many Frenchmen fled to the United States and were accepted openly. De Ponceau continued, “But in becoming Americans, they have not ceased to be Frenchmen; for no individual can be more intimately connected with either than the two nations are with each other...An union cemented by the blood of the citizens of both nations and founded on so solid a basis as similarity of sentiment and principle.”<sup>66</sup> Again, sentiment was central to the connection between France and the United States.

For republican newspapers, Genêt’s visit was not seen primarily as a rally for tangible involvement in French affairs, but as a rally to express affection for the French. “An Old Soldier” wrote, “The bosoms of many hundred freemen beat high with affectionate transport, their souls caught the celestial fire of struggling liberty, and in the enthusiasm of emotion, they communicated their feelings to the worthy and amicable representative of the French nation.”<sup>67</sup> The writer’s words display the broad-based excitement Genêt and the French cause brought to the United States. The celebration around Genêt, in summary, was not just a political rally to show support for his cause; rather, it was an outpouring of American emotion, enthusiasm, and brotherhood. Consequently, these rallies had more of an effect on its participants than on the policies for which they attempted to advocate.

However, the purely emotional explanation behind

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

the Genêt visit obscures one key aspect of this period: the partisan portion of it. While I do not deny that some of the popular display was genuine, the publication of these long-winded articles seems positioned for a different purpose. The article from the “Old Soldier” only dedicates the first paragraph praising Genêt and France, while it spends the rest of the two-page column discussing the federalists and their “royal folly.” Genuine philosophical feelings were not the only, or even the main, reason for publishing the articles related to the French Revolution; rather, political jousting seemed to be the true goal. By denouncing the federalists, this author and other republicans hoped to legitimize their own opposition. As one has seen throughout, rhetoric surrounding friendship rose among republicans when partisanship was at stake. Additionally, not only did rhetoric rise, but it also skyrocketed. The May 22<sup>nd</sup> issue of the *National Gazette* spoke almost solely about Genêt and did so in a repetitive fashion. This extreme coverage and verbose language describing the French cause indicates a more complex yet fundamental motive.

Once the republicans politicized friendship and searched for the “real friends” of the Revolutions, the federalists were out of options. The republicans had co-opted the 1780s language of sentimentalism for their own partisan agenda.<sup>68</sup> Broadly, the partisan flip-flop within the realm of sentimentalism hints at something beyond ideology that moved back and forth.

### Monarchy

In the practical sense, the many onlookers regarded the issue of monarchy as the most important issue of the French Revolution. From the Storming of the Bastille until the end of 1792, the revolutionaries attempted to salvage the monarchy, albeit curbing its powers through a constitution and a new legislative structure. However, with growing frustration, the revolutionaries abolished the monarchy, executed the King and

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Queen, and established a new French Republic.

Watching closely, American newspapers commented extensively on the French monarchy, its merits, and its relation to the United States' past, present, and future. The *Gazette of the United States* between 1789 and 1793 used the words "King" and "France" in the same context 190 times; between 1790 and 1793, the *General Advertiser* used them 224 times, and the *National Gazette* between 1791 and 1793 used them 140 times. In other words, discussions of the King were extremely common. Additionally, as expected, usage increased over the years, as the revolutionaries slowly began to consider terminating the monarchy. For example, during 1791 and 1792, respectively, the *Gazette of the United States* made 40 and 54 mentions of the King, the *National Gazette* 21 and 66 had mentions, and the *General Advertiser* contained 84 mentions during both years.<sup>69</sup> As the monarchy became more relevant, American newspapers spoke about it more often.

As expected, many historians argue that the federalists favored the monarchy and considered the beheading of the King barbaric, while republicans favored the abolition of a powerful monarchy that perpetuated hierarchy, limited popular liberty, and perpetuated tyranny. Historians such as Wells even point to proof from national newspapers. Wells cites Peter Pindar's poem in the *Gazette of the United States* entitled, "The Captive King" and Freneau's article published under the pseudonym Brutus, "Louis Capet has lost his Caput." Ostensibly, these articles show that "the ideological distance between this growing number of critics and the Revolution's unwavering supporters would be even more pronounced."<sup>70</sup> However, upon examination, neither of these articles display a sharp ideological divide. "The Captive King" was written as a song that King Louis XVI recited while imprisoned. The song is surely dramatic, with lines like "No more these walls my grief shall hear" and "When sorrow dies, and ruthless Fate can give the parting pang no more!" It also expresses empathy for the King and even states, "Behold,

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

a brighter crown is thine;” but lacks any deliberate claims that would align it with the supposed federalist position.<sup>71</sup> The song never explicitly supported the monarch or the monarchy, nor did it make any partisan claims. Brutus’ article “Louis Capet has lost his Caput” does not align with the republican position either, as it begins, “From my use of a pun [in the title] it may seem that I think lightly of his fate. I certainly do. It affects me no more than the execution of another malefactor.” However, the article was not meant to be the mainstream republican opinion. By his own admission and admonishment, Brutus ended the article, “Why then such a noise even with republicans about the death of Louis?” Apparently, many people, including republicans, pitied or even opposed the execution of the King. While Brutus cannot comprehend such pity, this article nonetheless goes to disprove the conventional approach with respect to republicans, whose position on the monarchy, even in 1793, was not agreed upon by all.<sup>72</sup>

In searching for the true positions of federalist and republican newspapers, one discovers two things. First, the supposed federalist support for the King is oversimplified and misunderstood. The federalist newspaper did at first support the King, but later came not only to dislike him, but also to call for the establishment of a French Republic in his place. Second, there was never consensus among republicans on the issue of the monarchy. The *General Advertiser* and *National Gazette* present two different positions on the issue. Consequently, the complex issue of the monarchy as told through the newspapers went beyond the straightforward ideology that was espoused by many of the political leaders of the time.

At the very beginning of the French Revolution, the federalist and republican positions were indistinguishable. On November 21, 1789, the *Gazette of the United States* published a letter from Marquis de Caseaux, which proclaimed, “in very simple terms” that “the people is everything. No legitimate power

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

can exist but from them and for them.”<sup>73</sup> Shockingly to some, this paradigmatic republican statement was a featured topic in a federalist newspaper. However, this line of argument did not call for an immediate abolition of the monarchy, but rather an end to tyranny and despotism. As the *Gazette of the United States* declared, “At all men are tyrants by nature,” and it is up to the people to curb this tyranny.<sup>74</sup> With statements such as, “Deliver from vestige of feudal tyranny” the *Gazette of the United States* was distinctly opposed to the French tyranny of the past, not to the institutional monarchy itself.<sup>75</sup>

Republicans and federalists alike simultaneously supported King Louis XVI and the French Revolution. Despite the thoughts of some historians, republicans were not always opposed to the monarchy.<sup>76</sup> For republicans, the form of government was not as significant as the amount of liberty that was provided to the people. On October 4, 1790, the *General Advertiser* wrote, “Louis XVI: thou art the first Monarch in the world who has confirmed in the face of heaven and earth the liberties of thy people, which God and Nature have bestowed upon us all. Beloved Monarch! Worthy of the love of the whole human race, enjoy this day and the reward of thy glory and thy virtue!”<sup>77</sup> Not only did these proto-republicans tolerate King Louis XVI, but they also adored him and wished him to continue his policies of liberty.

Despite favoring an orderly, strong, and centralized presidency, as exemplified by the popular George Washington, the federalist newspaper also supported the deposition of the King—a break from the traditional understanding of the federalist position.<sup>78</sup> On November 7, 1792, the *Gazette of the United States* published a piece of French intelligence describing the popular march to the King’s palace in order to arrest him and his family. The march was bloody, as the entire Swiss Guard was murdered. As the author described, “the walls and floors were stained with blood, covered with broken weapons, and

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

the limbs of men.” However, the scene was a “horror not to be exceeded. Yet even this horror might be endured, by recollecting who had been the inhabitants.” Amidst the chaos, the author recalled, “a strong mixture of harmony, fraternity, sensibility, vengeance, generosity, and barbarity.” Even during the violent turn of the French Revolution, the author published in the federalist newspaper still managed to see the positive qualities of the event. This is explicitly because the author blamed the King for all the violence in France. As the author noted, “By the side of this scene sat Louis XVI, the author of all these lamentable tragedies.” Lastly, the author closed by hoping that the royal palace and surrounding barracks would be used as the future hall for the assembly of Bureaus and the apartments for “the Ministers and President of the Republic.” Even as partisanship roared and violence was in clear sight, the author not only opposed the King—the supposed republican position—but also favored the establishment of a French Republic.<sup>79</sup> The federalist position, therefore, was not so simple.

Astonishingly, the *National Gazette* also maintained its support for the King through the beginning of 1793. Almost all published toasts in Freneau’s paper were toasts to the King himself and to his health.<sup>80</sup> However, the *General Advertiser* seemed to turn against the King much more quickly—beginning their criticism in 1791. The toasts Bache published did not toast the King.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, many articles Bache published in 1791 by Brutus severely criticized the monarchy.<sup>82</sup> While the *General Advertiser* favored Washington in the toasts it covered, calling Washington “the Father of Freemen” and “friend to the rights of man,” this can be seen as a polemic against the French King—the National Assembly and Washington were praised, while King Louis XVI was omitted.<sup>83</sup> By 1793, the *General Advertiser* published a toast stating, “May royalty and priest-craft expire together.”<sup>84</sup> As one observed earlier in the article entitled “Louis Capet has lost his Caput,” republicans were split on the issue

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

of the monarchy from 1791 through the execution of the King in 1793. The support from the *National Gazette* shows that the republican position regarding the King was also not as simple as the consensus theory makes it out to be.

Overall, the expectations surrounding the positions of these newspapers on the French Revolution were not met in terms of timing, content, or even ideological polarization. When discussing universal liberty, the *Gazette of the United States* departed from the ideologies of its political patrons by supporting and praising the French Revolution for much longer than many historians predicted. Despite rampant violence and the denouncement of the French Revolution by many politicians, including John Adams, the *Gazette of the United States* still praised the French pursuit of universal liberty until October of 1792. This sixteen-month lag is unaccounted for within the conventional approach offered by historians. Additionally, republican writers used the concepts of liberty often to polemicize with their federalist counterparts, hinting at something more complex at hand than just republican expressions of ideology.

When analyzing the usage of friendship and sentimentalism in relation to the French Revolution, ones expectations were also not met, as the conventional approach cannot account for several aspects of the analysis above. First, the newspapers were in much more agreement on this issue than the conventional approach would have one believe. Second, when the newspapers did disagree, the timing of their departure did not line up with the violence and leading political partisanship of 1791. From 1789 through the middle of 1792, the federalist newspaper used these terms of friendship and sentimentalism often to praise the French Revolution, while the republicans seldom used them. In the middle of 1792, one observes a flip, where republican newspapers began using these phrases often to polemicize with federalists, and thus, the *Gazette of the United States* nearly stopped using these words altogether.



## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

The conventional approach fails to explain this odd pattern. Friendship, it seems, was not used by the republican newspapers to express their ideology, but instead to delegitimize the other party while legitimizing its own opposition.

Finally, in terms of the newspapers' opinion on monarchy, the newspapers agreed for much longer than the conventional approach predicted. Indeed, the republican newspapers showed that there was no consensus among Republicans regarding the institution of monarchy. While the *General Advertiser* opposed the King in France as early as 1791, the *National Gazette* supported and even praised the King well into 1793. Additionally, the federalist newspaper even supported the deposition of the King, contrary to what many historians would have expected from a federalist journal commissioned and supported by Hamilton.

In short, the conventional approach cannot account for the complex and nuanced opinions of these newspapers on the French Revolution.

### CONCLUSION

“The revolutionary wars of Europe, commencing precisely at the moment when the Government of the United States first went into operation under this Constitution, excited a collision of sentiments and of sympathies which kindled all the passions and embittered the conflict of parties till the nation was involved in war and the Union was shaken to its center.”<sup>85</sup>

– John Quincy Adams

In his 1825 presidential inaugural address, John Quincy Adams made essentially four claims in one sentence. First, the revolutions of Europe—most prominently the French Revolution of 1789—coincided with the ratification of the

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

American Constitution. Although Adams did not tell the audience why this is significant, it is safe to assume it related to his next claims. Adams then stated that the revolutions in Europe excited American sympathy toward those revolutions, and that those sentiments toward Europe's revolutions led to a partisan divide that caused conflict between those parties. This third assertion likely relates to the significance of the first claim, as only in a federal union under a constitution could the entire nation become divided along partisan lines. Lastly, partisan conflict became so bad that war broke out because of it—shaking the very foundation of the United States.

These four simple claims, comprising a single sentence, may be seen by many as a restatement of the conventional approach on the impact of the French Revolution on the United States. Since the 1790s, politicians and historians alike saw the French Revolution as a partisan divider within the new nation, creating such an ideological rift that the sentiments toward a revolution thousands of miles away caused bitter political divide and culminated in a violent war.<sup>86</sup> At its heart, the conventional approach claims that political philosophy and ideology are at the center of the American political square. Looking outward, many American citizens and politicians understood the French Revolution through the lens of their own political philosophies—federalist or republican. To be fair, most of the writings of the political elite make this explicit. But the national newspapers paint a more complicated picture—a picture that Adams, if read more closely, seemed to understand thirty years after the fact.

In analyzing the federalist and government-sympathetic *Gazette of the United States* alongside the republican *General Advertiser* and *National Gazette*, the expected reaction of each newspaper to the French Revolution's events was not always observed, especially between 1789 and 1793. Historians who take the conventional approach may have expected to see the republican newspapers tout French sympathies immediately,

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

while in reality, they only began expressing such sympathies in 1792. They also expected these republican newspapers to oppose monarchy and support the deposition of the King, when in truth the Republicans could not come to agree on this issue, even in 1793. Additionally, the Federalists supported the French Revolution for much longer than expected, championing the pursuit of universal liberty until 1793. Finally, the federalist newspaper itself supported the deposition of the King even after witnessing the bloodshed involved in his execution.

What is clear from this analysis is that the republican and federalist newspapers had their fair share of agreements and disagreements, but ideological differences between the factions were insufficient to explain them. Adams himself admitted that the reaction to the French Revolution was not based on ideology, but instead pervasively expressed in sentiments and sympathies.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, Adams said that the parties only formed after sentiments over the French Revolution were expressed and not beforehand. Furthermore, historians claimed that party ideology led the different parties to react in the unique way that they did, while Adams and the national newspapers claimed that the French Revolution itself helped form these parties in the first place. This explanation is in disagreement with many other politicians and historians who claimed that the partisan split happened in 1791—only two years after the beginning of the French Revolution. This analysis departs from the conventional approach not by refuting its claims about politicians and their beliefs, but by showing that when looking at other realms of political discourse and controversy—namely, the partisan national newspaper editors—the narrative is much more complicated than assumed by these historians.

The simultaneous shift in the global and American political landscapes allowed American political elites and citizens to use international events to help shape the American trajectory. National newspaper coverage of the time reflected the American

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

obsession with the French Revolution, but ideological alignment does not suffice to explain this obsession. Rather, the newly formed opposition party, the Republican Party, was faced with an impossible task—maintain the American sense of unity while simultaneously opposing Federalist Party policies and opinions. To uphold unity, republican newspapers often agreed with the federalist government and even denounced faction at almost every opportunity. However, the Republicans had several points of disagreement with the Federalists, including Hamiltonian fiscal policy, Federalist favoritism toward economic elite, and the Federalist proclivity toward monarchy and aristocracy.

In order to express disagreement while still maintaining the perception of unity, the republican newspapers often displaced their factionalism to the French context. Thus, the republican newspapers used their comments on French affairs to polemicize with Federalists and their policies. Primarily, the republican newspapers used the language of friendship and sentimentalism to show that Republicans were the “real friends” of the French and in turn republicanism, while the Federalists upheld the un-American ideals of monarchy and despotism. The republican newspapers knew that the Federalists also used the language of friendship and sentimentalism to refer to the French, but the republican newspapers hoped to show that federalist monarchical policies made these sentiments worthless. Adams’ explanation was thus precise—sympathies and sentiments surrounding the French Revolution did draw the parties apart, specifically allowing the Republicans to oppose and polemicize with the Federalists.

Furthermore, as Adams pointed out, these partisan developments were only possible with the creation of a national government. Accordingly, the newly established centralized government was now in charge of setting policy for the entire nation. This naturally opened up debate, not only within the government itself, but also within the populace. This

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

phenomenon thereby placed national newspapers at the center of the partisan conflict. These newspapers were commissioned by the government and provided citizens with the information they needed to inform their individual opinions. The newspapers themselves explained their significance: “Many people read newspapers who read little else—they live in retired situations, and feel a strong curiosity to know the news, and join in the opinions of the day.”<sup>88</sup> With this in mind, newspaper editors had tremendous influence on public opinion and in shaping the partisan landscape of the time. This type of national partisan conflict was only possible, as Adams noted, after the ratification of the Constitution.

President Adams continued his speech, “This time of trial embraced a period of five and twenty years, during which the policy of the Union in its relations with Europe constituted the principal basis of our political divisions and the most arduous part of the action of our Federal Government.”<sup>89</sup> According to Adams and other historians, European affairs, namely the conflict between Great Britain and France, served as the key issue of partisan conflict from 1789 until the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. This essay calls that claim into question. The above argument shows that the partisan divisions of 1789 through 1793 were not equivalent to the partisan divisions of 1793 and onward. After 1793, the newspapers indeed divided themselves based on their views regarding geopolitics, but from the very beginning of the nation, the newspapers often used European affairs as a vehicle for partisan displacement, not as the source of ideological quarrel.

This narrative also serves as a case study on both the rise of partisan politics in new republics, as well as the gap between political elites and the public. Partisanship in Early America was not welcomed by the newspapers, but rather discouraged and stigmatized. In turn, a two-party system was not established from the outset; instead, there was one party—the governing

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

party. Despite what Federalist No. 10 stated and despite being founded for partisan reasons, the national newspapers fought against the existence of factionalism. While politicians such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison explicitly broke on ideological ground with Alexander Hamilton and John Adams, republican newspaper editors attempted to uphold a more balanced approach of unity and displaced partisanship. In order to maintain a perception of unification and to follow, to some extent, the journalistic imperative of impartiality, these editors opposed faction. The positions of the newspapers eventually came into line with the opinions of the political elites, but only when factionalism became more solidified and accepted within American political culture. In light of what Adams discussed in his presidential inaugural address, the geopolitical issue of the upcoming decades did become the central partisan divider for both the elites and the public alike, but it took four years for this to emerge.

The emergence of partisanship during the first four years after the signing of the Constitution was not revolutionary, but evolutionary: it did not happen immediately, but rather became publicly more pronounced and accepted over time. In a new republic, opposition does not arise in full strength all at once. Only through evolutionary opposition can dissenting newspapers pronounce their disagreement while simultaneously maintaining a perception of good intentions. As seen in the American context, those who favor the governing politicians will strongly resist any oppositional move. The federalist newspaper clearly understood the republican newspapers' plan for displacement and accused them of being enemies of the republic. Striking the balance between opposition and unity may be extremely difficult, but it is an imperative step on the road to full-fledged partisanship and oppositional legitimization. As Adams noted in his presidential inaugural address, partisanship became an integral part of American politics, but it did not start that way.

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

<sup>1</sup> *General Advertiser*, December 1, 1791 [henceforth referred to as *GA*].

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Eric Burns, *Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Father and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism* (New York: 2006), 267.

<sup>3</sup> James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*, (Philadelphia: 1991), Chapter 7.

<sup>4</sup> Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, Chapter 16. Also see Jeffrey Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: 2002), 66-73.

<sup>5</sup> Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 268.

<sup>6</sup> Pasley, *The Tyranny of the Printers*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 282.

<sup>8</sup> Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 83-87.

<sup>9</sup> Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*, 236-241.

<sup>10</sup> Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 272; *Gazette of the United States*, September 8, 1792 [henceforth referred to as *GOUS*].

<sup>11</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: 1997) and Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: 1997), Chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Rainbow Hale, “Neither Britons Nor French: The French Revolution and American National Identity” (PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University: 2002) and Colin Wells, *The Poetry Wars: Verse, Politics, and Public Discourse* (Philadelphia: forthcoming), Chapter 4.

<sup>13</sup> While the main focus of this paper is on newspapers, it should be noted that American newspapers are not the only proof of the American infatuation with the French. Simon Newman notes in his book *Parades and Politics of the Street* (Chapter 4) that citizens, particularly Republicans, held hundreds of public celebrations and feasts all over the country from 1790 through the end of the eighteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> More precisely, the *NG* used the words 5.6, 6.47, and 1.02 times per issue. The *GA* used the words 3.03, 5.3, and 0.45 times per issue. Finally, the *GOUS* used these terms 3.28, 3.42, and 0.65 times per issue. The *NG* is clearly the most fixated on the issue of the French.

<sup>15</sup> Comparing these numbers to other topics can also assist in understanding the French Revolution’s prominence relative to other key issues. For example, the words “debt” and “bank” (since centralized fiscal policy was a key issue during this time) were not nearly as popular as the French Revolution. “Debt” appears 1,056 times in the *GOUS*, 373 times in *NG*, and 731 times in *GA*. “Bank” appears 958 times in the *GOUS*, 1,995 times in the *GA*, and 346 times in the *NG*.

<sup>16</sup> I argue that public partisan divide occurred in 1791 with the founding of a

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

competing national newspaper. However, for the sake of consistency, I will always refer to the *GOUS* as federalist (or supporters of the government) and the *NG* and *GA* as republican. As shown in chapter one, while this nomenclature is not entirely consistent with what they were called during the early portion of this period, it is consistent with their broader self-ascribed ideologies.

<sup>17</sup> When I write “ideology,” I mean the series of philosophical beliefs that would inform one’s opinion on contemporary affairs. The conventional approach assumes that the republican ideology led political actors to support the French Revolution and the federalist ideology to oppose it over time. I hope to challenge this assumed relationship between political ideology and political opinion within the three newspapers. Consequently, this analysis will break with many who claim that the parties at this time were only ideological in nature. I argue that the newspaper editors had something different in mind.

<sup>18</sup> Some may accuse this argument of being a straw man. Indeed, most scholars do deliver more insightful analysis on the topic, but many of these assume the basic theory presented as a basis for their claims. For example, see Simon Newman and David Waldstreicher, who posit arguments about the political and social implications of celebration coverage, but always assume a clear ideological partisan divide between Federalists and Republicans. David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: 1997), Chapter 3. Simon Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, Chapter 4. Also see Matthew Rainbow Hale, “Neither Britons Nor French”; Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, (Albany: 2002); James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*. Hale writes more strongly that the French Revolution was itself the cause for the formation of party ideology: “The French Revolution was now more than a moderate spur to and indicator of partisan loyalties; it was very nearly their *raison de etre*.” (p. 52) Please also note that throughout the paper, I refer to the French Revolution monolithically. Though I realize historians argue that the French Revolution was not monolithic, the American newspapers assume that it was and so in analyzing the newspapers, I follow their understanding.

<sup>19</sup> While there is not much of a “low politics” at this point, there were several individuals who were politically active and yet, were not considered politically elite (i.e. the newspaper editors).

<sup>20</sup> See methodology section for more details. This search is called a proximity search, searching for the words “France” and “Liberty” within a thirty-word proximity or less. Although the republican papers use the term twice as often in 1793 than the *GOUS*, the upward trend of the federalist press proves the point nonetheless.

<sup>21</sup> *GOUS*, July 29, 1789.

<sup>22</sup> Additionally, see the *GOUS*, October 17, 1789 with lines such as, “bless-



## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

ings of American freedom seem already to spread its influence far and wide; doubtless its national character will be held in high estimation by all succeeding ages, and its name revered by generations yet unborn.” Similar sentiments are also found in *GOUS*, August 29, 1789; October 17, 1789; November 18, 1789.

<sup>23</sup> *GOUS*, January 2, 1790.

<sup>24</sup> *GA*, October 4, 1790.

<sup>25</sup> *GA*, October 5, 1790. The comparison of liberty to a plant is also extremely appropriate in the French context since the planting of liberty trees by French Revolutionaries and Americans who celebrated their accomplishments was widespread. This allusion hints at the fact that Americans planted the first liberty tree with the American Revolution and the French have assumed their efforts.

<sup>26</sup> *GA*, October 5, 1790.

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the *GOUS* included its own toasts and account of American fanfare surrounding the French Revolution. For example, the *GOUS* spent three whole columns describing the celebrations in Charleston, South Carolina on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> of 1791. Visiting Charleston, President Washington attended a celebratory dinner toasting to “The United States, The Fourth of July, Lewis the XVI King of France, The National Assembly of France” and others. Other articles included similar toasts to “The sufferers in the cause of freedom, The Marquis de la Fayette, liberty’s viceroy...[and] the family of mankind.” *GOUS*, May 21, 1791.

<sup>28</sup> *GOUS*, July 6, 1791.

<sup>29</sup> *GOUS*, November 30, 1791.

<sup>30</sup> Jefferson remarked in his letter to Washington that he established a new newspaper to provide a “juster view of the affairs of Europe than could be obtained from any other public source.” Jefferson to George Washington, September 9, 1792.

<sup>31</sup> *GOUS*, June 25, 1791.

<sup>32</sup> *GOUS*, April 28, 1792.

<sup>33</sup> *GOUS*, July 18, 1792.

<sup>34</sup> *GOUS*, May 26, 1792.

<sup>35</sup> Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*, 289 n.1.

<sup>36</sup> Freneau himself was enthralled with the topic of the French Revolution and universal liberty even before he began the *National Gazette*. In 1790, he published a poem called, “On the Prospect of a Revolution in France.” He wrote, “From that bright spark which first illum’d [sic] these lands, See Europe kindling, as the blaze expands, Each gloomy tyrant, sworn to chain the mind, Presumes no more to trample on mankind.” Freneau does praise King Louis XVI too, calling the King, “the generous Prince who made our

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

cause his own.” In May of 1791, Freneau published another poem called, “Lines Occasioned by Reading Mr. Paine’s Rights of Man,” which praised Paine and American republicanism, remarking, “In raising up mankind, he pulls down kings...So shall our nation, formed on Virtue’s plan, Remain the guardian of the Rights of Man.”

<sup>37</sup> *NG*, December 12, 1791.

<sup>38</sup> *GOUS*, October 3, 1792.

<sup>39</sup> Notably, in 1793, none of the newspapers give much attention to the Reign of Terror as a new and broad phenomenon. The *GOUS*, *GA*, and *NG* mentioned “Reign” and “Terror” in the same article 2, 3, and 5 times, respectively. Ironically, the republican newspapers recognized systemic violence the most often, while the federalist newspaper least often.

<sup>40</sup> *GOUS*, November 3, 1792.

<sup>41</sup> *GOUS*, November 7, 1792.

<sup>42</sup> *GA*, July 7, 1792 and August 1, 1794.

<sup>43</sup> *GA*, January 2, 1793.

<sup>44</sup> *GA*, February 7, 1793; August 13, 14, 19, 24 1793.

<sup>45</sup> *NG*, August 24, 1793.

<sup>46</sup> *NG*, July 15, 1793.

<sup>47</sup> *NG*, May 18, 1793.

<sup>48</sup> On May 8, 1795, the *NG* stated, “if the combined despots of Europe succeeded in destroying French liberty, there would be nothing to prevent Great Britain from renewing her claims to this country.” However, this was already in the throws of the French-British conflict. It is hard to say that Americans expected this in 1793.

<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, these terms are used interchangeably by newspapers throughout the period, so for the purposes of the study, I will assume that they are all similar.

<sup>50</sup> Colin Wells, *The Poetry Wars of the early Republic: Verse, Politics, and Public Discourse* (Philadelphia: forthcoming), 197. Wells further shows the source of sensibility: “This overlap would arise in large part from a common eighteenth-century origin: the moral philosophy of Pelagianism, as popularized in the early part of the century by Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury. In Shaftesbury’s famous account, human nature is not only morally benign but naturally sociable, controlled by a powerful sense of sympathy for one’s fellow humans.”

<sup>51</sup> See Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: 2009); David Waldstreicher’s *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, Chapter 3; Caleb Crain, *Sympathy in America: Men, Friendship and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven: 2001).

<sup>52</sup> *GOUS*, October 27, 1789.

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

<sup>53</sup> Wells, *The Poetry Wars of the early Republic*, 197.

<sup>54</sup> *GOUS*, September 26, 1789.

<sup>55</sup> See the methodology section for more. This proximity search looked at the words “friend” and “France” within 100 words of each other. The search for this study is 100 words apart, since articles about friendship are naturally much longer than articles about liberty. Furthermore, the consistency across newspapers allows for the necessary comparison between newspapers on this specific topic.

<sup>56</sup> *GOUS*, November 28, 1789.

<sup>57</sup> For similar examples see *GOUS*, August 29, 1789; October 5, 1790. The Federalists, who supposedly favor hierarchy and centralized authority, even describe Washington as a “brother, father, chief and friend.” *GOUS*, January 3, 1790.

<sup>58</sup> In general, the *GA* used the concepts of friendship and sentimentalism just as often as the *GOUS*. However, its specific application to the French is the exception. See the brief mentions at *GA*, October 21, 1790; January 28, 1791; February 1, 1791; July 5, 1791; August 17, 1791.

<sup>59</sup> *NG*, November 24, 1791.

<sup>60</sup> *NG*, November 21, 1791.

<sup>61</sup> *NG*, July 7, 1792. Also see, July 18, 28 and August 1, 1792, February 12, May 1, 1793 for extensive coverage of this celebration and others. The celebration was also covered in the *GA*. Toasts and celebrations are described in full on July 4, 19, 21, 23, August 1, 1792. Also see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, Chapter 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 133.

<sup>64</sup> *GA*, May 20, 1793. See *NG*, May 18, 1793 and *GA*, May 17, 1793 for more on the Genêt celebrations.

<sup>65</sup> *NG*, May 22, 1793.

<sup>66</sup> *GA*, May 18, 1793.

<sup>67</sup> *NG*, May 22, 1793.

<sup>68</sup> See *GOUS*, October 31, 1792. The *GOUS* nearly stated this explicitly. Chapter three will explore this in greater detail.

<sup>69</sup> See the Methodology section for more details. Here, proximity search was again used—determining how many times the words “France” and “King” were used within 30 words of each other.

<sup>70</sup> Wells, *The Poetry Wars*, 206.

<sup>71</sup> *GOUS*, May 18, 1793.

<sup>72</sup> *NG*, April 20, 1793.

<sup>73</sup> *GOUS*, November 21, 1789.

<sup>74</sup> *GOUS*, October 24, 1789. Also see *GOUS*, October 3, 1789 in discussion

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

of curbing men's extremes to prevent oppression and tyranny from the monarch.

<sup>75</sup> *GOUS*, October 10, 1789.

<sup>76</sup> Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 238-241.

<sup>77</sup> *GA*, October 4, 1790.

<sup>78</sup> See *GOUS* October 31, November 4, November 11, December 2 1789; April 28, 1792 for the federalist fondness for Washington. Many of these articles called for the whole world to learn from Washington's example. These positions do not need to be in contradiction with the deposition of the King of France, since the establishment of a Washington-style leadership may necessitate a removal of monarchy. However, historians have traditionally understood that the Federalists were in favor of maintaining a checked monarchy. See Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding* (Boston: 2014).

<sup>79</sup> *GOUS*, November 7, 1792.

<sup>80</sup> *NG*, July 18 and August 1, 1793.

<sup>81</sup> *GA*, October 5, 1790; May 19, 1792; January 1, May 18, 1793.

<sup>82</sup> *GA*, July 1, 2, 7, 1791. These were in the midst of the Publicola debates.

<sup>83</sup> *GA*, July 19, 1792; January 2, 1793.

<sup>84</sup> *GA*, January 2, 1793.

<sup>85</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1825.

<sup>86</sup> Adams was likely referring to the War of 1812.

<sup>87</sup> Adams was likely referring to the emotion expressed in articles, toasts, and celebrations surrounding the French Revolution. This expression of emotion is inherently different than ideology and philosophy.

<sup>88</sup> *GA*, December 1, 1791.

<sup>89</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Inaugural Address*, March 4, 1825.

### Images:

Page 95: "Gazette of the United States," picture, 9 September 1789, John Fenno, via Wikimedia Commons, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/43/Gazette\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States.gif](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/43/Gazette_of_the_United_States.gif) (accessed May 4, 2016).

Page 98: "Benjamin Franklin Bache," portrait, circa 1798, via Wikimedia Commons, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/Benjamin\\_Franklin\\_Bache.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/88/Benjamin_Franklin_Bache.jpg) (accessed May 4, 2016).

Page 116: "Philip Freneau," engraving, 1901, Frederick Halpin, via Wikimedia Commons, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/14/Philip\\_freneau.jpg/818px-Philip\\_freneau.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/14/Philip_freneau.jpg/818px-Philip_freneau.jpg) (accessed May 4, 2016).

## The Fallacy of the Ideological Press

Page 121: “Usage of the Term “Brother” in All Three Newspapers,” graph, created by Aaron R. Senior.