

1 Competing Conspiracy Theories in the Early American Republic

2 I. Fear and Loathing in the Age of Federalism

- ★ Early decades after the Constitution were most conspiracy-minded in U.S. history.
 - ★ Contributing beliefs
 - ★ Enlightenment conviction that human history was driven by human action, not God.
 - ★ Paranoia about the fragility of republics & their vulnerability to plots by evil, ambitious men.
 - ★ Belief in the need for virtue in rulers & people. Virtue = moral strength or ability to put common good ahead of private desires & interests.
 - ★ Strong fear & disapproval of political parties, or any other political competition. A healthy & virtuous republic was unified. Division had to mean conspiracy.
 - ★ Contributing factors
 - ★ Weakness of U.S., susceptibility to manipulations by great powers of Europe, like 3rd World in 20th-c.
 - ★ Semi-hidden cultural & ideological differences among the Founders & regions of the country, over religion, slavery, type of government, democracy, immigration, French Revolution.
 - ★ First political parties, Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans and Hamilton's Federalists, each believed the other was in league with a foreign power, D-R's with France, Feds w/Britain.
- ★ The Federalist Internal Security Program, 1798
 - ★ Sparked by naval conflict with France (Quasi-War) that broke out after Jay Treaty & election of John Adams as president in 1796. Federalists expected/sought a land war as well.
 - ★ Alien Acts to easily deport dangerous immigrants, especially refugee radicals who were active in the Jeffersonian movement as writers and editors.
 - ★ Naturalization Act raised period needed for citizenship from 5 to 14 years.
 - ★ Sedition Act made criticism of the government a criminal offense, aiming to silence the Republican opposition through the next election. 25 editors & others arrested.
 - ★ A&S Acts were backed up by boycotts & violence against the Republicans.
 - ★ Military build-up against France included plans to federalize the militia & creates a huge Additional Army aimed largely at crushing internal dissent or rebellion.

3 II. Federalist CT: The Illuminati Scare

- ★ Federalist fears also escalated to include a full-scale conspiracy theory.
 - ★ Origins: *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe* by John Robison (1797), blaming French Revolution & other troubles on:
 - ★ The Order of the Illuminati, an organization founded in Catholic-controlled Bavaria in 1776 by Dr. Adam Weishaupt (university professor), dedicated to spreading Enlightenment principles, by secretly educating European elite in non-Catholic ideas, infiltrating masonic lodges & other positions of influence.
 - ★ Elector of Bavaria suppressed the Illuminati in 1780s & police seized many juicy documents full of wild material: claim of life or death powers over members, recipes for secret ink, poisons, abortions.
 - ★ Robison & other conservative writers (Abbé Barruel) believed Illuminati had just gone further underground, taking over European Freemasonry & controlling Jacobin Clubs.
 - ★ Robison's ideas were picked up and applied to the American "Jacobins" by Jedidiah Morse (America's leading geographer) & other New England clergymen concerned about the rise of "infidelity."
 - ★ Goals of the Illuminati were said to be despotic control of all governments, redistribution of property, spread of sexual indulgence, destruction of religion, corruption of youth.
 - ★ Illuminati scare used to justify A&S Acts, and themes became major part of the campaign against Jefferson & his followers, conducted from pulpits in New England.
 - ★ Illuminati was theme of 1798 Harvard commencement address
 - ★ With Jefferson the sure Republican candidate in 1800, Federalists painted the results of Jefferson

victory as anarchy, rape, pillage, mass murder, & the death of religion.

- ★ Jefferson & Republicans won 1800 election, but still distrusted Federalists as monarchists and would-be tyrants conspiring to seize power again.
 - ★ Federalist flirtations with electing Burr during 1801 electoral college tie.
 - ★ Song "Jefferson and Liberty" as example of Jeffersonian fear and militance.

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The French Revolution in America

- ★ Summary of French Revolution, beginning 1789
 - ★ Began moderately, establishing a constitutional monarchy. Initially, had warm support of all Americans and British and European liberals.
 - ★ Jacobin Clubs (network of debating societies) rose & made FR more radical.
 - ★ *The Conspiracy of Kings*: France goes to war with Austria & Prussia in April 1792.
 - ★ Summer-Fall 1792: Paris uprising, September Massacres of political prisoners, France declared a republic, new revolutionary calendar established. Today's date.
 - ★ Jan. 1793: After French victories in war, King was executed, Britain entered war.
 - ★ Summer 1793-Summer 1794: "Reign of Terror" led by Committee of Public Safety head Robespierre, featuring mass executions of nobility, priests & political opponents.
 - ★ Robes. also led Enlightenment-based attack on Christianity, declaring the "Cult of the Supreme Being" as national religion & converting churches into "temples of reason."
 - ★ In July 1794, "Thermidorean" reaction set in. Terror ended, Robespierre beheaded, and slide towards military dictatorship under Napoleon Bonaparte began.
- ★ Severe repression of FR sympathizers in Britain exiles many radical political agitators and journalists to America.

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The French Revolution in America (cont.)

- ★ American Response to French Revolution & The Rise of Political Parties
 - ★ AH &c. shied away from FR early, TJ &c. remained supportive as long as they could.
 - ★ Pressures of the French Revolutionary Wars for U.S.
 - ★ French expected support of an old ally, as did U.S. public, who loved France.
 - ★ Despite British mistreatment of U.S. after 1783, British pressured U.S. to stay out, especially by using their Navy to interfere with U.S. shipping.
 - ★ Hamilton undermined Jefferson's foreign policy by talking to British behind his back.
 - ★ Establishment of French Republic led to wave of popular support in U.S.
 - ★ Beg. 1792, Democratic-Republican Societies appeared to support liberty, democracy & revolutionary France, inspired by arrival of French ambassador "Citizen" Edmond Genet.
 - ★ Jefferson supported FR even after it turned violent: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." An American Robespierre?
 - ★ But even Jefferson opposed Genet's efforts to involve U.S. in war & bypass US gov.
 - ★ Horrified GW & AH saw D-R Societies as subversive organizations like Jacobin clubs, blamed them for 1794 Whiskey Rebellion, PA tax rebellion crushed by largest army yet.
 - ★ Proclamation of Neutrality (1793) & Jay Treaty (1794-95) seemed to cave in to British pressure, led to massive protests across country and organization of opposition party.
 - ★ Competing c.t.'s: pro-administration forces (Hamilton, Federalists) were seen as monarchists and/or British agents, opponents (Jefferson, [Democratic] Republicans) as revolutionaries and/or agents of France.
 - ★ Charge that British had bribed negotiator (& Chief Justice) John Jay.
 - ★ Jefferson's letter to Mazzei
 - ★ Emerging party labels: Federalists for administration and Republicans against. Called each other "Monocrats," "Jacobins," and conspirators.