

beard, jefferson and the tree of liberty

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In this essay I will discuss the role of Jefferson in originating a misunderstanding of American social conflict which underlay Charles Beard's misunderstanding of the United States Constitution. Beard's picture of the Constitution as a triumph of capitalists ("personalty") over farmers ("realty") was a version, I will contend, of the Jeffersonian mythos which Beard seemed triumphantly to debunk.¹

The distinction between "personalty" and "realty" emerged in a period when, under the influence of Populism, Turner and those like Beard who followed him pictured American history as a continuing contest between the city capitalist and the exploited farmer. But this vision of nature's nobleman, the yeoman farmer, fleeced and oppressed by paper speculators in the cities, did not appear *de novo* in the 1890's. The quest to grasp Beard runs back to Jefferson. The crux of Beard's exposition, his list of the security holdings of members of the Constitutional Convention, is a lineal descendant of Jefferson's 1793 "list of papermen."²

What Beard did was to adopt the Jeffersonian ideology of the 1790's and apply it to the events of 1787-1788. Compare the following passages, in which Jefferson characterizes the party battles of the 1790's and Beard the earlier ratification struggle:

(Jefferson)

Trifling as are the numbers of the Anti-republican party, there are circumstances which give them an appearance of strength & numbers. They all live in cities, together, & can act in a body readily & at all times; they give chief employment to the newspapers, & therefore have most of them under their command. The Agricultural interest is dispersed over a great extent of country, have little means of intercommunication with each other. . . .³

(Beard)

Talent, wealth, and professional abilities were, generally speaking, on the side of the Constitutionals. They resided for the most part in the towns or the more thickly populated areas, and they could marshal their forces quickly and effectively. The money to be spent in the campaign of education was on their side also. The opposition on the other hand suffered from the difficulties connected with getting a backwoods vote out.⁴

This was fatally to muddy the waters, for what happened in the 1790's (as I will demonstrate in a moment) was less the continuation of the 1787

alignment than the division of the Constitutional coalition into its Northern and Southern components.

Nor was Jefferson's portrait adequate even for the 1790's. As Federalist critics never tired in observing, Jeffersonians made the paradoxical assertion that the slave-holding South was the heartland of republicanism, and the plantation owner the sentinel of representative government. Beard, while insisting that Jefferson did not seek to give more political power to the poor, never freed himself from the assumption that the Jeffersonians—slaveholders or no—were defending economic democracy. This then became the source of another series of historiographical half-truths in the interpretation of Civil War and Reconstruction, giving rise to versions of the "Second American Revolution" which hardly noticed slavery and the Negro in their emphasis upon the conflict of Southern agrarianism and Northern industry.

My thesis, therefore, is that the failure of Beard's interpretation of the Constitution rests essentially upon an error in Jefferson's perception of his own time. My concern is to locate the source of that reverberating error. To this end I will examine, first, the economic basis of the split between Jefferson and Hamilton; second, Jefferson's explanation for it; and third, the intellectual origins of that explanation in English eighteenth-century thought.

i

Beard wrongly believed that the party struggle of the 1790's simply extrapolated a conflict between capitalists and farmers over the Constitution. When compared to the earlier *Economic Interpretation*, the *Economic Origins* shows more awareness of the role of slavery and therefore less naiveté about agrarian democracy. Yet, for example, in characterizing the Jeffersonian spokesman, Jackson of Georgia, Beard calls him an "Anti-Federalist leader," "the famous champion of agrarianism," and "the leader of the opposition to the funding bills";⁵ but does not mention that this same Jackson declared in 1790 that slavery is commanded by the Bible and that

the people of the Southern states will resist one tyranny as soon as another. The other parts of the continent may bear them down by force of arms, but they will never suffer themselves to be divested of their property without a struggle. The gentleman says, if he was a Federal Judge, he does not know to what length he would go in emancipating these people; but I believe his judgment would be of short duration in Georgia, perhaps even the existence of such a Judge might be in danger.⁶

Jackson's rhetoric indicates the inadequacy of any simple equation of Jeffersonianism and democracy, as in Main's statement that Anti-federalism was "peculiarly congenial to those who were tending toward democracy, most of whom were soon to rally around Jefferson."⁷

Beard failed to emphasize sufficiently the extent to which Jeffersonian Democracy was essentially Southern. Manning Dauer has shown that in the late 1790's non-commercial farmers in the Middle and Northern states deserted the Federalist party.⁸ But the original opposition to Hamilton, which played the same role in the genesis of Jeffersonian Democracy as had "personalty" in instigating the movement for the Constitution, was overwhelmingly sectional.

The key evidence for this contention is the votes of the Congresses of 1789-1792 which followed the Constitution's ratification. I think what they show is the intricate interaction of interest and ideology in the following three ways: 1) although the South—and subsequently Charles Beard—conceptualized the planter as a "farmer" and the regional interest of the South as a "landed interest," in fact the opposition which crystallized by 1792 did not include all farmers and was restricted almost exclusively to the South; 2) although the upper and lower South had quite different discrete interests, the tendency was toward the subordination of immediate pocketbook interests and increasing concern with the broader struggle for sectional dominance; 3) although in general the influence of slavery was in differentiating the entire institutional fabric of the South from that of the rest of the nation, still there was in this early period explicit anxiety about Federal interference with slavery which intensified resistance to expansion of Federal power in other areas.

Upper and lower South, Virginia and South Carolina, differed in 1789-1790 over tariff discrimination against British shipping, Federal assumption of state debts, and slavery. When on July 1, 1789 the House of Representatives voted on Madison's motion to insist that British shipping pay higher duties than vessels of other foreign countries, 9 of 14 Congressmen from the tobacco states of Maryland and Virginia voted for the motion while 6 of 7 from the rice states, South Carolina and Georgia, were opposed.⁹ When on March 23, 1790 the House voted—in rehearsal for the gag-rule struggle of the 1830's and 1840's—on whether to enter in its journal certain resolutions in response to two antislavery petitions, South Carolina and Georgia voted solidly in opposition while the Virginia delegation divided evenly.¹⁰ Similarly, voting on assumption of state debts on July 24, 1790, three of four representatives from South Carolina were in favor of sustaining the Senate's addition of assumption to the funding bill passed by the House, while 11 of 15 Congressmen from the tobacco states opposed.¹¹

Nevertheless, in the spring of 1790 the various discrete differences between the interests of upper and lower South began to be overshadowed by broader sectional concerns. Georgia split from South Carolina on assumption, voting solidly against it. North Carolina, as its representatives trickled into Congress during March and April 1790, aligned itself with Virginia on the issues both of tariff discrimination and assumption. And while the alignment of Congressmen in voting on the Bank in 1791 was

essentially similar to the pattern of voting on assumption in 1790, there is the important difference that for the first time a majority of every Southern state delegation voted against Hamilton on a major measure.¹² Not only were 19 of the Bank's 20 opponents in the House Southerners; not only did Southern Congressmen vote 19 to 5 against the Bank; but 2 of the 3 South Carolina delegates who voted joined their fellow-Southerners to form for the first time a solid South. In the debate before the vote, Jackson of Georgia, Stone of Maryland, Smith of South Carolina and Giles of Virginia all said that, consistent with Madison's observation in 1787, the votes of Congress were divided by the geographical line which separated North and South.¹³

By 1792, the whole South had adopted the philosophy articulated by Antifederalists in 1787-1788. In the fall of 1789, William Grayson wrote to Patrick Henry that Southern gentlemen in Congress were beginning to attend to the reasoning of the "antis," who had said that the South would be a milch cow for the North.¹⁴ In the debates on assumption the following February one Virginia Congressman said bitterly that had the Virginia ratifying Convention known that a direct tax would be laid so soon, and without necessity, it would have hesitated to approve the Constitution; while another cried: "This is the very thing which the opponents of the new Constitution thought they foresaw; this is that consolidation, as they called it, which they predicted."¹⁵ In the fall of 1790 the Virginia legislature articulated Southern opposition in resolutions drafted by Henry, the old Antifederalist, virtually identical with the philosophy which Jefferson, the new opposition leader, would begin to expound a few months later.¹⁶

The philosophy of Antifederalists, North and South, in 1787 had special charms for Southerners in 1790 because the issue of Federal interference with slavery had already appeared. Jackson of Georgia, previously quoted, expressed a common Southern response to the antislavery petitions of 1790 intermittently debated in the midst of the funding and assumption drama. Senator William Maclay wrote of the excitement in the House over one of the petitions. Under date of March 22, 1790, Maclay said: "I know not what may come of it, but there seems to be a general discontent among the members, and many of them do not hesitate to declare that the Union must fall to pieces at the rate we go on. Indeed, many seem to wish it."¹⁷ The same thing was true in the Senate. Two days later Maclay's entry recorded: "Izard and Butler both manifested a most insulting spirit this day, when there was not the least occasion for it nor the smallest affront offered. These men have a most settled antipathy to Pennsylvania, owing to the doctrines in that state on the subject of slavery."¹⁸ Thus the Senators from South Carolina, the Southern state hitherto staunchly Hamiltonian, were sensitized to the dangers of loose construction; and in the House, similarly, South Carolina's staunchest Federalist Congressman, William Smith, made a long speech March 17

which began and ended on the theme of Federal interference and in the middle developed every argument for slavery as a positive good which Calhoun would bring forward half a century later.¹⁹ Broadus Mitchell believes this conflict about slavery in the week of March 16 induced enough Southern Congressmen to stiffen in their attitude toward Federal power to account for the repudiation by the House of its initial acceptance of assumption by four or five votes on March 13.²⁰ John Bach McMaster merely observes that “from this wrangle the House came back in no good temper to the funding and assumption bills.”²¹ In either case, the episode must have been in the minds of Southern Congressmen as they haggled about the constitutionality of the Bank for a week the following February.

What Southerners counted on in 1787, what they still hoped for in 1790, was that—to use Madison’s words—in only a few years “the Western and S. Western population may enter more into the estimate” so that the South would have a majority in the House.²² But the results of the 1790 Census were not encouraging. The Northern majority of seven created by the Constitutional Convention’s apportionment in 1787 would become a majority of nine even if, as the Southerners hoped, Congress apportioned one Congressman for every 30,000 persons. If, as Northerners consistently voted, apportionment were on the basis of one Congressman to every 33,000 persons, then the Southern situation would be still worse. One or two votes were not trifling matters in a Congress where a switch of two or three votes had determined the fate of assumption. In the long debates on apportionment between October 1791 and April 1792 the discussion, as at the Constitutional Convention, began with abstract political theory, moved on to the interests of small and large states, and ended on the conflict between North and South. Never had sectionalism been so forcefully articulated. Williamson of North Carolina said the South “had suffered so much under the harrow of speculation” that he hoped it would not be denied the proportion of representation to which it was entitled. Murry of Maryland noted that the long debate had been “entirely constructed on the tenets of Northern and Southern interests and influence.” Sedgwick of Massachusetts said still more sweepingly that “there existed an opinion of an opposition of interests between the Northern and Southern states. The influence of this opinion had been felt in the discussion of every important question which had come under the consideration of the Legislature.” Summing up, William Branch Giles argued that a larger Congress would be more sympathetic to “the landed interest” and that “he felt a conviction that the agricultural or equalizing interest was nearly the same throughout all parts of the United States.” He was wrong: 31 of the 34 votes for a smaller House came from the North; 25 of their 30 opponents were Southerners.²³

Thus while one theme of these first Federalist years is Hamilton’s promotion of his closely-coordinated measures to enhance public credit, a

second theme is the resurrection of that chronic sectional antagonism which had plagued both the Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention. If from the first standpoint we can view these years as the completion of the Union, from the second we must see them as prefiguring its dissolution. Joseph Charles says of Congressional response to Hamilton's financial bills: "A sharp sectional division appeared in the voting upon the measures of that program, a division which foreshadowed the first phase in the growth of national parties."²⁴ John C. Miller's summary states explicitly:

The gravest weakness of the Federalists was that their power was based upon a coalition of northern businessmen and southern planters. In all probability, this uneasy alliance would have succumbed sooner or later to the strains and stresses generated by the divergent economic interests and social and political attitudes of Northerners and Southerners. As might be expected, victory—in this case, the adoption of the Constitution—hastened the dissolution of the coalition, but the event was not ensured until 1790, when Hamilton launched his fiscal and economic programs.²⁵

ii

Jefferson persistently misunderstood the developing party conflict.

From 1791 until his election to the Presidency Jefferson believed that Hamilton and his associates were attempting to create an American monarchy. Historians have found this view of American realities somewhat puzzling, if not paranoid. After all due allowance for the energy, devoutness and admiration of things English of Secretary Hamilton, there clings to the Jeffersonian rhetoric of the '90's something excessive for which Douglass Adair uses the word "obsession."²⁶

What might be called Jefferson's proto-Populism after 1791 is all the more odd when contrasted with his temperate pragmatism in 1790, the first year back from France. In his correspondence of that year there was no dichotomy of "purity" and corrupt "interest." Jefferson wrote to Lafayette in April, 1790: "I think, with others, that nations are to be governed according to their own interest; but I am convinced that it is their interest, in the long run, to be grateful, faithful to their engagements even in the worst of circumstances, and honorable and generous always." As in foreign affairs, so in domestic. "Energy in our government" was, as yet, welcome. Writing to the former Antifederalist, George Mason, about assumption and the location of the national capital, Jefferson said in June: "In general I think it necessary to give as well as take in a government like ours." Although funding would require direct taxation by the general government, "this, tho' an evil, is a less one than any of the others" which might result from the assumption crisis in Congress.²⁷

After as before his famous understanding with Hamilton, Jefferson was mentally prepared for compromise. He wrote to Francis Eppes on

Independence Day: "I see the necessity of sacrificing our ^{*}opinions some times to the opinions of others for the sake of harmony"; and told the same correspondent three weeks later: "It [assumption] is a measure of necessity." The mood, in another letter of late July, was still essentially that of successful North-South bargaining as in 1787:

I saw the first proposition for this assumption with as much aversion as any man, but the development of circumstances have convinced me that if it is obdurately rejected, something much worse will happen. Considering it therefore as one of the cases in which mutual sacrifice & accomodation is necessary, I shall see it pass with acquiescence.²⁸

Writing again to Mason in February, 1791, Jefferson had adopted a new vocabulary. Give and take, the lesser evil, "necessity" and "mutual accomodation" had given way to the perils of "sect" and "heresy," to a contest of "stock-jobbers" with the "untainted" mass. Fifteen months later, in his letter urging Washington to serve a second term, Jefferson added "profit . . . taken out of the pockets of the people," "barren" capital, a "corrupt squadron" of bribed Congressmen, and the explicit charge that the American monarchists, foiled at the 1787 Convention, "are still eager after their object, and are predisposing every thing for it's ultimate attainment." Jefferson had come to regard his opponents as "Conspirators against human liberty."²⁹

Why this change? Hamilton had brought in bills for an excise and a national bank. In themselves, however, these laws do not explain so startling an alteration in ideological Gestalt. Something symbolic about the measures beyond their financial consequences or their widespread unpopularity in the South, triggered an opposition ideology latent in Jefferson's mind. As when the pieces of a kaleidoscope are shaken and, although themselves unaltered, settle into parts of an entirely new pattern, so Jefferson reverted to a pre-Revolutionary mindset. His tone was no longer common-sensical, for he felt that he no longer shared the consensus of those who governed. Once more the world seemed divided into Whigs and Tories, conspirators and counter-conspirators.

The detection of conspiracy in high places was a major preoccupation of eighteenth century politics.³⁰ Jefferson himself, using language borrowed from the Glorious Revolution, had discerned behind the "long train of abuses" committed by the government of George III a fixed "design" of enslavement. "Excise" and "bank" were words charged with conspiratorial meaning for Jefferson because of their associations with English history. When U.S. Bank stock fell in 1792, he commented: "No man of reflection who had ever attended to the south sea bubble, in England, or that of Law in France, and who applied the lessons of the past to the present time, could fail to foresee the issue tho' he might not calculate the moment at which it would happen."³¹ Political results, more serious than financial ones, could be predicted on the basis of the same analogy.

Rome furnished the archetypal plot of republican corruption; viewed with Rome in mind, English history of the previous hundred years seemed one long tale of wicked kings and ministers using profits and offices provided by an inflated public debt to corrupt the representatives of the people. English “independent Whigs” or “commonwealthmen,” such as those dogged investigators of South Sea bubbles and Papist plots, Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, furnished Jefferson a model for his portrait of the Hamiltonia cabal. As Charles II (according to Trenchard) acquired “a vast Revenue for Life” which enabled him “to raise an Army, and bribe the Parliament,”³² so (according to Jefferson) would Hamilton employ his swollen public debt.

Yet Jefferson’s change of front toward Hamilton in 1791 was not a mere reversion to the ideology of English Whigs. Jeffersonian democracy linked political alienation to agrarianism: its central image was the independent farmer abused by the unholy combination of capitalist and bureaucrat. In the writings of Trenchard and Gordon one finds, instead, the unJeffersonian assertion that trade

in a grateful and beneficent Mistress; she will turn Desarts into fruitful Fields, Villages into great Cities, Cottages into Palaces, Beggars into Princes, convert Cowards into Heroes, Blockheads into Philosophers.

Trenchard and Gordon call for the election to Parliament of persons who are “interested in Trade and Commerce”; “give me the man,” they write, “that encourages Trade.”³³ *Cato’s Letters* were not addressed to an essentially rural constituency. And that is why the origins of the tradition which passed through Jefferson and culminated in Populism, Turner and Beard turn out to be Tory as much as Whig.

iii

The influence on Jefferson of Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, has been obscured by the epithet “Tory.” Other notorious Whigs borrowed heavily from him: John Adams said in 1813 that he had read Bolingbroke more than five times, the first time more than fifty years before. Did Burke cry that the influence of the Crown had increased, was increasing and ought to be diminished? Bolingbroke had written that “the power of the crown to corrupt” has “increased” and “must continue to increase” unless a “stop be put” to it.³⁴ Did Jefferson write that the tree of liberty must be watered with the blood of tyrants? Bolingbroke had invented the metaphor:

Though the branches were lopped, and the tree lost it’s beauty for a time, yet the root remained untouched, was set in a good soil, and had taken strong hold in it: so that care, and culture, and time were indeed required, and our ancestors were forced to water it, if I may use such an expression, with their blood. . . .³⁵

The works of Bolingbroke were among the first books Jefferson owned. He praised them chiefly for their style and for their intellectual courage in discussing religion; but in 1821 made the remarkable declaration:

You ask my opinion of Lord Bolingbroke and Thomas Paine. They are alike in making bitter enemies of the priests and pharisees of their day. Both were honest men; both advocates for human liberty. Paine wrote for a country which permitted him to push his reasoning to whatever length it would go. Lord Bolingbroke in one restrained by a constitution, and by public opinion. He was called indeed a tory; but his writings prove him a stronger advocate for liberty than any of his countrymen, the whigs of the present day.³⁶

Caroline Robbins excludes Bolingbroke from the succession of genuine Whigs. During the reign of George II, she says, "The journal most powerfully and prominently against the government was *The Craftsman*, run by Nicholas Amhurst, the disgruntled Oxford Whig, and adorned by the effusions of Bolingbroke." The writings of William Talbot, a Real Whig, "might almost come from Bolingbroke's *Dissertation On Parties* where the Revolution was termed 'a new Magna Charta.'" And again: "Bolingbroke was a freethinker and a Tory, albeit one who could put Scripture to his own uses and cite the canonical Whig writers in defense of his own devious ways."³⁷ Perhaps it would be simpler to conclude that Bolingbroke and the Whig remnant were saying the same thing. But no; for, according to Miss Robbins:

All Whigs until the French Revolution maintained that in theory at least tyrants could be resisted, and by so doing, justified the events of 1689. This was their chief advantage over Tories like Bolingbroke and Hume who accepted the Revolution without a logical defense for it.³⁸

This is just not true. Bolingbroke made himself quite clear:

The legislative is a supreme, and may be called, in one sense, an absolute, but in none an arbitrary power. 'It is limited to the publick good of the society. It is a power, that hath no other end but preservation, and therefore can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or designedly to impoverish the subjects; for the obligations of the law of nature cease not in society, etc.' [Here Bolingbroke cites: "Locke's Essay on civil Government, c. 11, of the extent of the legislative power."]—If you therefore put so extravagant a case, as to suppose the two houses of parliament concurring to make at once a formal cession of their own rights and privileges, and of those of the whole nation to the crown, and ask who hath the right, and the means, to resist the supreme legislative power? I answer, the whole nation hath the right; and a people who deserve to enjoy liberty, will find the means.³⁹

Is there any ambiguity here? If so, Bolingbroke seeks at once to dispel it:

From hence it follows, that the nation which hath a right to preserve this constitution, hath a right to resist an attempt, that leaves no other means of preserving it but those of resistance. From hence it follows, that if the constitution was actually dissolved, as it would be by such an attempt of the three estates, the people would return to their original, their natural right, the right of restoring the same constitution, or of making a new one.⁴⁰

Bolingbroke's political originality, and his essential contribution to Jeffersonian democracy, lay in his identification of resistance to centralized corruption with the landed interest. He said in his last, unfinished political pamphlet (in 1749): "The landed men are the true owners of our political vessel: the moneyed men, as such, are no more than passengers in it."⁴¹ The metaphor neatly expressed the vision of a commercialized society governed by agrarians. A similar ambiguity inhered in Bolingbroke's use of the word "country," as in his advocacy of "the representation of the country by the independent gentlemen of the country."⁴² What this meant was that the people should be represented by their landlords.

In Locke, according to Adair, the classical concept of "the struggle between the few and the many" was "translated into the conflict of the few as the rulers against the many as the ruled." Bolingbroke carried the translation one step further.

The idea of the balance of social classes so strong in Aristotle, still perceptible in Polybius, almost entirely disappeared in the writings of Bolingbroke, the most famous eighteenth-century English expounder of the system, whose view of the contemporary economic conflict was cast, not in terms of the rich against the poor, but of the landed versus the moneyed interest.

Adair concludes that "Bolingbroke's use of 'the separation of powers' theory to fight Walpole's use of the funding, debts, etc. to corrupt and manage Parliament set the pattern for the Jeffersonian opposition to Hamilton."⁴³

According to Bolingbroke's reading of party history, a unified "country party" had existed in opposition to Charles II but broke into Whig and Tory parties at the time of the exclusion crisis. The country party had been founded on principle, indeed a "party, thus constituted, is improperly called party; it is the nation, speaking and acting in the discourse and conduct of particular men." The Whig and Tory parties, on the other hand, were based on "the prejudices and interests of particular sets of men."⁴⁴ (One finds in this concept of two kinds of parties, I believe, the germ of that intolerance of opposition which Leonard Levy has noted in Jefferson.) The sole intention of his *Dissertation On Parties*, Bolingbroke said, was to break down the "ridiculous" and "nominal"

division of Whig and Tory parties, to reorganize English politics on the basis of opposition between court and country, to reduce "our present parties to this single division, our present disputes to this single contest."⁴⁵

Jefferson took from this tradition the identification of patriotic purity with the farmer which became a cliché of one strand of American radical thought. When Jefferson wrote to Mazzei that "the whole landed interest is republican,"⁴⁶ he meant something more than that the weight of numbers and wealth in the countryside was anti-Hamiltonian. He meant also that the nation should turn to rural men for political leadership. Like Bolingbroke a half century earlier, Jefferson declared in 1797:

All can be done peaceably, by the people confiding their choice of Representatives & Senators to persons attached to republican government & the principles of 1776, not office-hunters, but farmers, whose interests are entirely agricultural. Such men are the true representatives of the great American interest, and are alone to be relied on for expressing the proper American sentiments.⁴⁷

If city people adhered to the republican cause, they might be viewed as somehow agrarian, too. When the common people of Philadelphia flocked to the wharves to cheer a French frigate with British prizes, Jefferson described them as "the *yeomanry* of the City (not the fashionable people nor paper men)."⁴⁸ One hundred and twenty years later Beard, seeking to explain urban support for Jefferson in 1800, suggested that it came from the truck gardeners, laborers and farmers of the outlying districts—as it were, the city agrarians.⁴⁹

Bolingbroke's vision of a patriot king served Americans well during those years when their analysis of the English conspiracy placed the blame on Parliament. Thus Stourzh writes of Franklin:

The American interest obliged him to fight against Parliament—an aristocratic body in those days—while remaining loyal to the king; in recognizing the king's sovereignty while denying Parliament's rights over the colonies, Franklin by necessity was driven into a position which, historically speaking, seemed to contradict his Whig principles. The complaining Americans spoke, as Lord North rightly said, the language of Toryism.⁵⁰

When the time came to indict the "royal brute" as well, only a slight turn of the kaleidoscope was required. Burke had shown how to do it in 1770. One recognized that: "The distempers of monarchy were the great subjects of apprehension and redress, in the last century; in this, the distempers of parliament." One did not deny that the present danger was corruption rather than prerogative, or as Jefferson later put it, "that fraud will at length effect what force could not." What one did was simply to blame corruption on the king instead of (this had been Bolingbroke's theme) on his ministers. So Burke thundered: "The power of the

crown, almost dead and rotten as Prerogative, has grown up anew, with much more strength, and far less odium, under the name of Influence.” Conspirators were still at work, but they had “totally abandoned the shattered and old-fashioned fortress of prerogative, and made a lodgment in the strong hold of parliament itself.” The people’s cause, therefore, only seemed to be a contest between themselves and Parliament. “The true contest is between the electors of the kingdom and the crown; the crown acting by an instrumental house of commons.”⁵¹

In such fashion, a Whig ideology which Tories had transformed into political agrarianism was made Whig once more by recasting the chief conspirator as the king. The farmer continued as the protagonist of political purity. And the script came to be called Jeffersonian Democracy.

iv

Jefferson’s misunderstanding of his time had a long-lasting impact on American dissent. Even as early as the 1780’s there were two alternative sources for an American radical tradition. The first was the agrarian version of Whiggism inherited from Bolingbroke, and reinforced by Montesquieu (another favorite author of Jefferson’s student days). All three libertarian landlords stressed common themes: the protection of provincial autonomies, distrust of the commercial city, a cyclical theory of history based on the proposition that prosperity corrupts.

The second available vision was the artisan radicalism of Paine. As the friendship of Paine and Jefferson attests, agrarian and artisan radicalism agreed in many things. They shared a sociology “which divided society between the ‘Useful’ or ‘Productive Classes’ on the one hand, and courtiers, sinecurists, fund-holders, speculators and parasitic middlemen on the other.”⁵² Yet in the long run the two streams of thought diverged. The radicalism associated with city workingmen made affirmations—that strong central government accessible to the people was more democratic than decentralized rule by gentlemen; that common men, whether or not formally educated, had the capacity to govern; that slavery must stop—which agrarian radicalism proved unable to assimilate. By the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe, the historical perspective of a Bolingbroke or a Burke, a Montesquieu or a Tocqueville, was virtually dead. In America, sustained by the availability of Western land, Jeffersonian agrarianism lived on and became the recurrent ideology of dissent.

Beard, seen in this context, was a latterday Jeffersonian. The central thrust of his historiography was to impose on all periods of American history the static dichotomy of capitalist and farmer characteristic of the agrarian tradition. What was wrong was not so much Beard’s emphasis on economics as the Jeffersonian economics he espoused. “Personalty” and “realty” were a part of that system, as was the emphasis on conspiracy and corrupt self-interest. So too was an ultimate fatalism.

For all his well-known optimism about human nature, Jefferson ab-

sorbed and passed on to his Jacksonian and Populist successors a fundamentally pessimistic view of history. The Golden Age, when Saxon ancestors had lived "under customs and unwritten laws based upon the natural rights of man,"⁵³ was in the past. Revolutionary America approximated those conditions, but only for the moment.⁵⁴ The growth of commerce would corrupt manners in America as it had in Rome, and once manners were corrupted, the best of statesmen could not save the republic. In buying Louisiana one bought only time.

"Absolute stability is not to be expected in any thing human," Bolingbroke had written. "The best instituted governments, like the best constituted animal bodies, carry in them the seeds of their destruction." For Jefferson's agrarian radicalism, decay did not hold the promise of renewal, synthesis and transcendence. "All that can be done, therefore, [is] to prolong the duration of a good government."⁵⁵ The tree of liberty could be pruned and grafted, and this was the duty of men of public spirit. History taught, however, that in the long run the rot was irreparable. In the last analysis, one stood by and watched the great tree fall.

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footnotes

A slightly different version of this essay appears in Mr. Lynd's *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution: Ten Essays* (Bobbs Merrill; New York, 1968).

1. A more familiar view of Beard's relation to Jefferson may be found in Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image In The American Mind* (New York, 1960), especially 316, where Peterson argues that Beard, critical of American liberals' "commitment to an outworn Jeffersonian ideology," sought to dispel "the aura that surrounded Jefferson" by hard-headed economic analysis. I believe that Beard himself exemplified that outworn ideology.

2. Jefferson's list is in the "Anas" for March 23, 1793, *The Works Of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York, 1904-1905), I, 262-263.

3. "Notes on Prof. Ebeling's Letter Of July 30, 95," *Works*, VIII, 210.

4. Charles Bear, *An Economic Interpretation Of The Constitution Of The United States* (New York, 1913), 251-252. I have rearranged the order of Beard's sentences but not in a way that does violence to his argument.

5. For these and other references to Jackson, see *Economic Origins Of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1915), 136-138, 147-149, 150-153, 191, 248-249.

6. *Annals Of Congress*, I (Washington, D.C., 1834), 1229, 1242.

7. Jackson Main, *The Antifederalists, Critics Of The Constitution 1781-1788* (Chapel Hill, 1961), 281.

8. Manning Dauer, *The Adams Federalists* (Baltimore, 1953).

9. *Annals Of Congress*, I, 643.

10. *Annals Of Congress*, II, 1523.

11. *Ibid.*, II, 1753.

12. *Ibid.*, II, 2011.

13. *Ibid.*, II, 1970, 1979, 1982, 1989.

14. William Grayson to Patrick Henry, September 29, 1789, *Patrick Henry. Life, Correspondence And Speeches*, ed. W. W. Henry (New York, 1891), III, 405.

15. *Annals Of Congress*, II, 1396, 1403.

16. *Statutes At Large Of Virginia*, ed. W. W. Hening, XIII (Philadelphia, 1823), 237-239. See also Henry to James Monroe, Jan. 24, 1791: "As to the Secretary's Report with which you favored me, it seems to be a consistent part of a system which I ever dreaded. Subserviency of Southern to N-n Interests are written in Capitals on its very Front. . . ." (*Henry*, ed. Henry, II, 460).

17. *The Journal of William Maclay, United States Senator From Pennsylvania, 1789-1791* (New York, 1927), 216.

18. *Ibid.*, 217.

19. *Annals Of Congress*, I, 1503-1514.

20. Broadus Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton. The National Adventure 1788-1804* (New York, 1962), 73.

21. John Bach McMaster, *A History Of The People Of The United States From The Revolution To The Civil War*, I (New York, 1883), 579.

22. The South's hope in 1787-1788 that it was "growing more rapidly than the North" and Jefferson's hope in 1792 "that the census returns would . . . strengthen the South," are described in John Alden, *The First South* (Baton Rouge, 1961), 75, 131.

23. *Debates And Proceedings . . . Second Congress*, I (Washington, D.C.; 1855), 244, 269, 272, 546, 548 and (final vote in the House) 548-549.

24. Joseph Charles, *The Origins Of The American Party System* (Williamsburg, Va.; 1956), 23.

25. John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era 1789-1801* (New York, 1960), 100-101.

26. Douglass Adair, "The Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1943, 2: ". . . the Jeffersonians' obsession that the result most greatly to be feared from the Federalist fiscal policy was not the obvious—to us—plutocracy, but an American monarchy."

27. Thomas Jefferson to the Marquis De Lafayette, Apr. 2, 1790, to Thomas Mann Randolph, May 30, 1790, to George Mason, June 13, 1790, to George Gilmer, June 27, 1790, *Works*, VI, 40, 64, 75, 84. On June 20, the approximate date at which Jefferson invited Hamilton and Madison to dinner to effect a sectional compromise, Jefferson wrote to James Monroe: "in the present instance I see the necessity of yielding for this time to the cries of the creditors in certain parts of the union, for the sake of union, and to save us from the greatest of all calamities, the total extinction of our credit in Europe" (*ibid.*, VI, 80).

28. Thomas Jefferson to Francis Eppes, July 4, 1790 and July 25, 1790, to John Harvie, July 25, 1790, *ibid.*, VI, 85, 107, 109. Writing to Edward Rutledge on Independence Day, Jefferson said that he hoped that, with assumption and the location of the capital settled, "nothing else may be able to call up local principles [i.e., sectional conflict]" (*ibid.*, VI, 88).

29. Thomas Jefferson to George Mason, Feb. 4, 1791, to George Washington, May 23, 1792, to James Madison, May 12, 1793, *Works*, VI, 186, 490-491; VII, 324.

30. See Bernard Bailyn, "The Transforming Radicalism Of The American Revolution," *General Introduction to Pamphlets Of The American Revolution, 1750-1776*, I (Cambridge, Mass.; 1965), especially 86-89.

31. Thomas Jefferson to Francis Eppes, Apr. 14, 1792, *Works*, VI, 478-479.

32. John Trenchard, "A Short History Of Standing Armies In England," *A Collection Of Tracts, By The Late John Trenchard, Esq.; And Thomas Gordon, Esq.* (London, 1751), I, 59. See, more generally, H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp Of Experience: Whig History And The Intellectual Origins Of The American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1965).

33. *Cato's Letters; Or, Essays On Liberty, Civil And Religious, And Other Important Subjects*, third ed. (London, 1733), II, 267; *Tracts*, II, 8, 276. See also: "Merchants [are] a Sort of Men always in the Interests of Liberty, from which alone they can receive Protection and Encouragement" (*Letters*, II, 272).

34. "As the means then of influencing by prerogative, and of governing by force, were considered to be increased formerly, upon every increase of power to the crown, so are the means of influencing by money, and of governing by corruption, to be considered as increased now, upon that increase of power, which hath accrued to the crown by the new constitution of the revenue since the revolution. Nay farther. Not only the means of corrupting are increased, on the part of the crown, but the facility of employing these means with success is increased, on the part of the people, on the part of the electors, and of the elected. Nay, farther still. These means and this facility are not only increased, but the power of the crown to corrupt, as I have hinted already, and the proneness of the people to be corrupted, must continue to increase on the same principles, unless a stop be put to the growing wealth and power of one, and the growing depravity of the other" ("A Dissertation Upon Parties," *The Works Of The Late Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* (London, 1809), III, 290).

35. "A Dissertation Upon Parties," *ibid.*, III, 254-255. The tree of liberty, incidentally, came from the Teutonic forests: "Both their [the French] ancestors and ours came out of Germany, and had probably much the same manners, the same customs, and the same forms of government. But as they proceeded differently in the conquests they made, so did they in the establishments that followed" (*ibid.*, III, 251).

36. Thomas Jefferson to Francis Eppes, Jan. 19, 1821, *Works*, XII, 194. There are more than fifty pages of extracts from Bolingbroke's philosophical writings in Jefferson's student notebooks, and it is the general opinion of his biographers that Bolingbroke more than any other writer stimulated Jefferson to question received religious opinions (see *The Literary Bible Of Thomas Jefferson. His commonplace Book of Philosophers And Poets*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (Baltimore, 1928); Dumas Malone, *Jefferson The Virginian* (Boston, 1948), 106-109; and Marie Kimball, *Jefferson The Road To Glory, 1743 To 1776* (New York, 1943), who dates Jefferson's Bolingbroke extracts 1764-1767 and comments: "With the exception of Montesquieu, whose works he did not acquire until December 1769, no writer had greater influence on the formation of Jefferson's ideas" (p. 113). In the first of the several lists of books which Jefferson recommended to friends throughout his life, the works of Bolingbroke are suggested for both

religious and political study (Thomas Jefferson to Robert Skipwith, Aug. 3, 1771, *The Papers Of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton, 1950—), I, 76-81.

37. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman . . .* (Cambridge, 1959), 274, 284, 295.

38. *Ibid.*, 8. I believe that Miss Robbins not only exaggerates the conservatism of Bolingbroke, but also the radicalism of the "commonwealthmen." On p. 125 of her book Miss Robbins quotes several sentences from *Cato's Letters* and sums up their content with the phrase: "The time had not come for a more equal commonwealth." But the conclusion which "Cato" himself draws is: "the Phantome of a Commonwealth must vanish, and never appear again but in disordered Brains" (*Cato's Letters*, III, 162). In what sense were Trenchard and Gordon commonwealthmen? Gordon said of his collaborator: "he was sincerely for preserving the Established Church, and would have heartily opposed any Attempt to alter it. He was against all Levelling in Church and State, and fearful of trying Experiments upon the Constitution. He thought that it was already upon a very good Balance; and no Man was more falsely accused of an Intention to pull it down. The Establishment was his Standard; and he was only for pulling down those who would soar above it, and trample upon it" (*ibid.*, I, liii-liv). Bolingbroke turned the concept of the "balance" to at least as radical an end as did the commonwealthmen. He writes of Rome: "How inconsistent, indeed, was that plan of government, which required so much hard service of the people; and which, leaving them so much power in the distribution of power, left them so little property in the distribution of property? Such an inequality of property, and of the means of acquiring it, cannot subsist in an equal commonwealth; and I much apprehend, that any near approaches to a monopoly of property, would not be long endured even in a monarchy" (*Works*, III, 220).

39. "A Dissertation Upon Parties," *ibid.*, III, 271-272.

40. *Ibid.*, III, 272.

41. "Some Reflections On The Present State Of The Nation," *ibid.*, IV, 388.

42. "Remarks On The History Of England," *ibid.*, II, 370.

43. Adair, 172, 202n.

44. "A Dissertation Upon Parties," *Works*, III, 82-83.

45. *Ibid.*, III, 305.

46. Thomas Jefferson to Philip Mazzei, Apr. 24, 1796, *Works*, VIII, 239.

47. Thomas Jefferson to Arthur Campbell, Sept. 1, 1797, *ibid.*, VIII, 337-338.

48. Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 5, 1793 and to Thomas Mann Randolph, May 6, 1793, *ibid.*, VII, 309, 312.

49. Beard, *Economic Origins*, 246, "Note to Chapter VIII," 387, 466. I am indebted for this insight to Alfred Young.

50. Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin And American Foreign Policy* (Chicago, 1954), 28. When one recalls that Madison (according to Douglass Adair) and Hamilton (according to Clinton Rossiter) were intellectually indebted to the Tory David Hume above all others, one begins to wonder whether any of the ideologues of the American Revolution drew on an essentially Whig tradition.

51. "Thoughts On The Cause Of The Present Discontents," *The Works Of The Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (Dublin, 1792), I, 490, 420, 466, 478; Thomas Jefferson to Aaron Burr, June 17, 1797, *Works*, VIII, 312.

52. E. P. Thompson, *The Making Of The English Working Class* (London, 1963), 99.

53. *The Commonplace Book Of Thomas Jefferson. A Repertory Of His Ideas On Government*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (Baltimore, 1926), 55-56.

54. See the significant letter to William Branch Giles, Dec. 17, 1794: "The attempt which has been made to restrain the liberty of our citizens . . . has come upon us a full century earlier than I expected" (*Works*, VIII, 155).

55. "The Idea Of A Patriot King," *Works*, IV, 272-273.