Chapter 9: Liberty and Empire, 1800 - 1815

Overview
By 1800 Americans were working through the meanings of liberty. Some took freedom for granted; others, for whom liberty was either limited or denied, sought a redefinition of freedom. The election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800 ushered in a new administration in more ways than one. For many Americans, geographical expansion enlarged the opportunities for freedom; for others it enlarged the area where slave labor could expand. Jefferson’s second term was begun with high hopes: the economy was growing, the physical size of the U.S. had grown with the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, and the nation’s debt was falling, but all of this halted because of events in Europe.

Key Topics
- Expanding expectations of liberty
- The decline of the Federalists and the rise of Jeffersonian Republicanism
- The growth of commerce in the United States
- The cotton boom and the expansion of slavery
- The Louisiana Purchase
- Indian resistance and Tecumseh's Confederation
- The War of 1812

Review Questions
- In what specific ways did Jefferson’s philosophical emphasis on the importance of agriculture and commerce reflect everyday life in the United States in 1800?
- What was the “empire of liberty”? What did it represent to Jefferson? To potential white settlers? To enslaved African Americans? To Indians?
- Why did many westward migrants and members of new evangelical sects perceive the Jeffersonian Republicans as preferable to the Federalists? What aspects of Republican thoughts and/or style might have appealed to them?
- In his first inaugural address, Jefferson said “We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists.” In what ways was this an accurate statement?
- Characterize the differences between Jefferson’s first administration and his second.

Annotated chapter outline
Gabriel's Conspiracy for Freedom: Gabriel was a slave in Virginia who dreamed of freedom. His dream resulted in his execution on October 10, 1800. Like other later slave revolts, Gabriel’s plans involved other slaves and they wanted to free not just themselves but other slaves as well. Like other rebellions, Gabriel’s plans were disclosed by co-conspirators who were also executed.

Voluntary Communities in the Age of Jefferson: By 1800 Americans were working through the meanings of liberty. Some took freedom for granted; others, for whom liberty was either limited or denied, sought a redefinition of freedom. One of the earliest ways Americans had begun to act on their changing conceptions of liberty was by forming new communities of faith. Americans came to see politics in religious terms.
- For no other group of Americans were the promises of liberty emptier than for African Americans. Free blacks endeavored to establish their own communities in spite of widespread racial discrimination.
- Changes in the American manufacturing economy changed the nature of work for many American laborers. The economic changes and forces of the market were felt in many areas of American society.
**Jeffersonian Republicanism: Politics of Transition:** The election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800 ushered in a new administration in more ways than one. The Republicans were committed to “the principles of limitation.”

- Jefferson was the first president inaugurated in Washington, D. C., at the nearly completed Capitol. Jefferson recognized the importance of national commercial independence if the republic was to remain free and socially virtuous. He was also a democrat, willing to experiment with social institutions such as slavery.

**Liberty and Expanding Commerce:** Wars in Europe and new traffic to the Indian Ocean produced new markets for American products. The economy grew and for the time being Jefferson’s advocacy of a political economy based on free international trade seemed vindicated.

- Before 1793, cotton was not important to the nation’s economy. After the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, cotton was the United States’ largest single export item. Profits set off an explosion of migration into the interior of the south which caused land prices to soar. Cotton also reinvigorated the institution of slavery.
- America’s other industry was shipping. Whether in direct exports, re-exports, or simply carrying goods between two ports, maritime trade brought prosperity to the U.S. as American vessels sailed the world.
- The expansion of economic opportunity went hand in hand with advances in science, technology, and the law.

**The Political Economy of an “Empire of Liberty”:** For Jefferson the right of empire was fundamental to the political economy of the republic. The purchase of Louisiana in 1803 illustrates the many consequences of expansion.

- The U.S. purchased all of Louisiana from France for $15 million.
- The purchase of Louisiana presented Jefferson with the opportunity to put into place a plan of exploration that he had been working on for some time. Leading the expedition west was Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Jefferson was interested in Lewis and Clark coming back with two things: detailed descriptions of the natural environment including geology and an assessment of the possibilities of American trade with the Indians. He also wanted Lewis and Clark to ascertain the existence of a river route to the Pacific.
- Vice President Aaron Burr looked to the west for personal enrichment and self-aggrandizement. When his actions and rumors of his actions reached Washington, D.C., Jefferson ordered Burr’s arrest for treason. With the absence of any witnesses to Burr’s plans, Burr was acquitted.
- American expansion into the Northwest Territory and the upper regions of the south collided with Native American land claims. Both groups were convinced that their existence depended on access to the land and the result was armed conflict. Two Shawnee leaders, Tecumseh and his half-brother Tenskwatawa, organized a pan-Indian alliance to reject all aspects of white culture. Tecumseh’s resistance to Americans caused him to ally himself and his followers with the British during the War of 1812. His death on the battlefield marked the end of organized Indian resistance east of the Mississippi River.

**The Second War with England:** Jefferson’s second term was begun with high hopes: the economy was growing, the physical size of the U.S. had grown, and the nation’s debt was falling. The Republicans controlled both houses of Congress and Jefferson and the Republicans were favorably inclined to use some federal money for internal improvements, but all of this halted because of events in Europe.

- The U.S. found itself caught in the middle of a European conflict between England and France and their allies. Neither nation respected American neutrality and both nations seized American ships and impressed sailors into their navies. Congressional actions designed to protect American shipping caused the economy to settle into depression in 1808.
- President James Madison inherited the nation’s international problems of his friend Thomas Jefferson. Madison continued to follow the same policies of neutrality and free trade as well as
the occasional commercial coercion. The Federalists, angry over declining profits, opposed the war. Britain signaled a readiness to end the war and the war ended with the Treaty of Ghent in 1814. The treaty was silent on the issues that caused the war.

**Conclusion:** Buoyed by American successes in the war of 1812, the market grew, social constraints loosened, and the foundations of an industrial political economy were laid.

**Analytical reading** These questions refer to the passage “Jeffersonian Republicanism: Politics of Transition” on page 206-207.

1. Describe early Washington, D. C.
2. In what ways was the new capital symbolic of the young nation?
3. In what ways did President Jefferson belong to both eras, the European Age of Reason and the birth of the American market revolution?

**Lecture Strategies**

Thomas Jefferson is the topic of this chapter which means that you can discuss his personality and nature, his views on government and science, and slavery. The Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition (and Sacagawea) provide more than enough material for classroom study. With the evolution of the nation's economy you also have the discussions of workers and employers; the birth of the market economy. Aaron Burr is also an interesting topic as is Chief Justice Marshall's development of a very narrow definition of treason. Burr's and Hamilton's relationship as well as the radical Federalist plans for separation are also interesting. The importance of the War of 1812 to subsequent events and subsequent chapters must be considered.

**Supplements:** Prentice Hall has developed a number of supplements that can enhance your lectures as well as your students’ comprehension and performance.

- **Penguin Classics** Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited and abridged by Richard D. Heffner, New York: A Mentor Book, 1984. Perhaps the first ethnographic account of the early republic, de Tocqueville's study of America and Americans remains prophetic, insightful, and fresh. It offers much for discussion whether you assign written questions or use it to spark classroom discussion.

**American Stories: Biographies in United States History** by Katheryn A. Abbott and Patricia Hagler Minter. See Chapter 8, Democracy and Expansion, 1824-1840, for biographical sketches of DeWitt Clinton and Davy Crockett.

**Documents Collection** see Part Eight: Jefferson and the Republic

- *Memoirs of a Monticello Slave, as Dictated to Charles Campbell by Isaac 1847
- *Thomas Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address” 1801
- *Margaret Bayard Smith Meets Thomas Jefferson 1801
- *Constitutionality of the Louisiana Purchase 1803
- *The United States Navy and the Bombardment of Tripoli 1803
- *A Matter of Honor or Vengeance? 1804
- *Sacagawea Interprets for Lewis and Clark 1804
- *An “Uncommon Genius” Advocates Indian Unity 1809
- *Indian Hostilities 1812
- *The British Attack Baltimore 1814
- *Reports and Resolutions of the Hartford Convention 1814
- *Davy Crockett, Advice to Politicians 1833
The documents of particular relevance to this chapter are identified with an asterisk, although previous and subsequent parts have relevant documents.