Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

LO 1 Define Jeffersonian Democracy, and explain how Jefferson's presidency both defined and contradicted that political philosophy.

LO 2 Discuss the reasons for and results of the War of 1812.
Jefferson’s election in 1800 marked a reversal in American politics. Jefferson’s apprehension of an overly strong centralized government led him to advocate a vision of a farmers’ republic, led by an agrarian upper class. He hated cities, thinking they were “sores” on the body politic, places where corruption and vice would tarnish the purity and benevolence earned by a farmer who labored in the earth. His vision was of a nation of small farmers who were economically self-sufficient, personally independent, and beholden to no one.

To realize this vision, Jefferson attempted to roll back several of the Federalist policies, although he did not go as far as many of his supporters hoped. At the same time, Jefferson dramatically expanded the boundaries of the nation to allow for continued westward expansion. All this occurred during a similarly dramatic expansion of America’s social and economic life, which is the subject of Chapter 10. This present chapter, however, examines Jefferson’s presidency, the meaning of “Jeffersonian Democracy,” and the rule of the Jeffersonians through the War of 1812.

**What do you think?**

Jefferson’s attempts to create an idealized agrarian republic proved disastrous.

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Jeffersonian Democracy

Innovation introduced by Jefferson’s Democratic-Republicans when they eagerly cultivated popular opinion by campaigning at the grass roots.

**LO1 Jefferson’s Presidency**

In addition to being the beneficiaries of the country’s first bloodless revolution, the Democratic-Republicans were instrumental in transforming the political culture of America. This new political culture earned the name “Jeffersonian Democracy.”

**Jeffersonian Democracy**

Since George Washington, the Federalists had never relished the notion of making appeals to the public, preferring instead for the people to call on their leaders to act on their behalf. In contrast, Jefferson’s Democratic-Republicans eagerly cultivated popular opinion. They founded highly partisan newspapers that spread throughout the country. They campaigned at the grass roots, staging political barbecues and clambakes. They also led virulent attacks on their Federalist opponents. The Federalists never mastered this aggressive art of politicking, a failure that made them appear increasingly out of touch with the people. Thus, although the vote remained restricted to white male property holders over the age of twenty-one, the Democratic-Republicans brought politics to the people in a new, more personal way. This is what historians mean by Jeffersonian Democracy.
Jefferson’s Domestic Policies

Jefferson’s domestic policies focused on (1) reducing the size of government, (2) expanding what he saw as the agrarian republic, and (3) navigating the development of the first national court system.

Reducing the Size of Government

Although Jefferson and his supporters changed America’s political culture, they retained much of Hamilton’s ambitious economic plan. However, Jefferson did seek to make the small federal government even smaller. He proposed two major cutbacks. First, he repealed many of the taxes Hamilton had imposed, which allowed Jefferson to reduce the number of federal employees (especially the hated tax assessors). Under Jefferson’s plan, tariffs from trading partners, not internal taxes, would fund government operations. Second, Jefferson cut back the military, maintaining just a small army on the western frontier and a tiny navy that could protect only America’s coast. He would pay a substantial price for these two changes, but there was no way for him to know this during his first term. The Federalists, having lost both houses of Congress, could do nothing to prevent these actions, despite the fact that many New England Federalists were concerned that their shipping industry would be jeopardized by the weakened naval fleet. Perhaps taking pity on their powerful status, Jefferson refused to use the Alien and Sedition Acts against the Federalists, as he was legally entitled to.

The Courts

Federalists still had power in the courts, though. This situation birthed two of the most important developments in U.S. judicial history: (1) judicial review, which gave the courts the right to declare an act of Congress unconstitutional and thereby make it void; and (2) the idea that partisanship was not a crime.

Judicial review. The first of these developments emerged in 1800, when the outgoing president, John Adams, made a number of last-minute “midnight appointments” of Federalist judges. Adams hoped to ensure that the Federalist Party could retain a strong position in the judiciary. But Jefferson and his Democratic-Republicans swiftly repealed the appointments. William Marbury, one of the frustrated judges, sued James Madison (Jefferson’s secretary of state) for denying his appointment. This dispute reached the Supreme Court as Marbury v. Madison (1803).

Chief Justice John Marshall, a Federalist, headed the Supreme Court from 1801 to 1835. Marshall, suspecting that Jefferson would ignore his decision whatever it might be, issued a decision, in 1803, declaring that Marbury deserved his appointment but that the Court could not force the president to grant it. He said that the original Judiciary Act of 1789, which supposedly gave the Court the right to enforce appointments, exceeded the powers granted to the Court in the Constitution. Thus, the original Judiciary Act of 1789 was unconstitutional.

In this roundabout way, Marshall ultimately declared that the courts had the right to judge the constitutionality of federal laws, a right called the doctrine of judicial review. Based on that ingenious decision, the Supreme Court refused to engage in the partisan bickering of the time, while at the same time carving out its position as the ultimate interpreter of constitutional questions.

The legality of partisanship. The second important judicial precedent was established when Jefferson sought to impeach the most politically biased Federalist judges. To Jefferson’s chagrin, in 1805, the Senate refused to convict Federalist judge Samuel Chase on purely political grounds. This set the precedent that partisanship was not a crime and that, once appointed, judges could be as partisan as they wished in their decisions without facing rebuke or retribution.

Expanding the Agrarian Republic

Given the republican belief that farming provided the moral basis for good citizenship, Jefferson felt it essential that the United States continue to open new territory to settlement. Without access to new land, Jefferson reasoned, crowding would pressure people into working for others as urban wage laborers. In contrast, territorial expansion allowed every American the chance to be a self-sufficient farmer. Jefferson believed the new nation was likely to expand and should continue to do so, dislodging Spanish claims to territory in Florida and northern Mexico and French claims in the Mississippi.
The Louisiana Purchase. The first step Jefferson took to realize this vision was to purchase the city of New Orleans from France. New Orleans was a vital port city at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and the Mississippi was the country's main north-south inland waterway, providing a means of transportation from the Gulf of Mexico to present-day St. Paul, Minnesota. The United States could never guarantee control of the Mississippi unless it controlled New Orleans as well.

In 1803, Jefferson sent emissaries to France to negotiate the purchase of New Orleans. Much to Jefferson’s surprise, the French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, wanted to sell not only New Orleans, but the rights to all of Louisiana, which was at the time a huge tract of land that stretched from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, land that was of course occupied and claimed by a variety of Native American tribes but which was nevertheless laid claim to by the French. The French treasury was nearly empty, and another war between France and Britain loomed imminently. In addition, after the Haitian Revolution (see Chapter 8), France had learned how costly it was to maintain colonial possessions. Napoleon asked only $15 million for the claim to 830,000 square miles of Louisiana.

The Constitution did not give the president power to buy new territory, but Jefferson pushed ahead with the Louisiana Purchase. Although he claimed to believe that federal power was dangerous and that the Constitution had to be followed strictly, Jefferson was willing to bend his own rules to expand America’s western boundary all the way to the Rockies (Map 9.1). The purchase nearly doubled the geographic size of the nation.

The Lewis and Clark expedition inspired generations of Americans to move westward.

Lewis and Clark. Jefferson took responsibility not only for acquiring new territory, but also for exploring it. In 1803, before the Louisiana Purchase was completed, Jefferson sent his private secretary Meriwether Lewis with William Clark as co-commander on an exploratory mission to the Pacific. In 1804, Lewis and Clark, along with forty-eight other men, left St. Louis and journeyed northwest toward the Rockies. With the help of Sacajawea, a Shoshone Indian woman who served as their guide, Lewis and Clark traveled to the Pacific. In 1806, the expedition returned to St. Louis with an immense amount of information about the American West. Their journey inspired generations of Americans to move westward and lay claim to the nation’s interior.

Land policies. Jefferson also made access to western lands easier through a revised land policy. The Land Act of 1800, signed by President Adams, had set up land-selling offices in the West, made the parcels smaller (and more affordable), and allowed...
for payment over time (rather than in a single large lump sum). In 1804, the Democratic-Republicans again reduced the minimum amount that could be purchased, making western land even more affordable. In a sense, the federal government had become the real estate agent for the nation’s interior. And, as always, increased westward expansion meant increased contact, and battles, with Native Americans.

Tecumseh and the Prophet

In the early 1800s, two Shawnee brothers, Tecumseh and the Prophet, proposed to unite tribes from the Old Northwest (in Ohio and Michigan) and the South (Georgia) to resist the perpetual encroachment of American settlers. The brothers toured across the land preaching a revival of old ways in a **revitalization movement reminiscent** of Neolin’s (Chapter 4). The brothers opposed the acceptance of European and American habits, including whiskey and guns.

They set up pan-Indian towns across Indiana, the most famous of which was called “Prophetstown” by the surrounding American settlers and was situated alongside the Tippecanoe River. As white Americans moved further west they would eventually run into a united force of Indians.

Reelection

Taking advantage of the new culture of politics, the expansion of the nation, and the good economic times of the early 1800s, Jefferson coasted to an easy reelection in 1804. The Federalists had once again been beaten badly, and some Federalists were so dismayed at their reversal of fortune that they persuaded Aaron Burr to run for governor of New York and then, if victorious, to separate New York and New England from the rest of the nation. This, in 1804, was the country’s first serious plot of secession. Alexander Hamilton—ever the nationalist—learned of the plot and politicked against Burr in New York, leading to Burr’s defeat.

The Louisiana Purchase nearly doubled the geographic size of the nation.
In his fury, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. In the duel, Burr shot and killed Hamilton, who, disapproving of duels, had fired his gun into the air. Burr subsequently lost all political respectability because most Americans believed that politics was meant to occupy the realm of discussion and law, not violence and vigilantism. Cast out from political society, Burr moved west, plotting further secession attempts, until he was tried for treason in the nation’s first “Trial of the Century.” He was found not guilty by Chief Justice John Marshall, but his widespread unpopularity prompted him to decamp to Europe.

Although Burr is an extreme case, his actions illustrate the bitter divisions between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. His very extremity and singularity, however, also demonstrate that, despite partisanship, the new nation was a nation of laws.

Jefferson’s Foreign Affairs

While the new nation was weathering the few internal storms that arose (and enjoying good economic times), international events seized attention during Jefferson’s two terms.

Jefferson’s Problematic Diplomacy

Shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, the long-expected war between France and Great Britain erupted. At first, the United States benefited. With Britain and France fighting each other, America (as a neutral power) took control of the shipping trade between the Americas and Europe. Many American traders grew wealthy. Soon, however, the United States found itself caught in the middle.

England controlled the seas, and France controlled the continent of Europe. With no land to fight on, each nation attempted to starve the other into submission. They restricted other nations from trading with their enemies, raided ships, and prevented them from entering European ports. American shipping was particularly punished. By 1807, about eight hundred American ships had been raided by French and British fleets. Meanwhile, the British began impressing American sailors into the Royal Navy, much as they had in the early 1790s. Estimates of the number of Americans eventually impressed range from 4,000 to 10,000. After one highly publicized attack on the U.S.S. Chesapeake, Americans were so angered that some called for war, but it was not to be, for the simple reason that Jefferson had...
dismantled the U.S. military and was sure to lose any such battle.

The right of neutrality. Eager to save face, Jefferson reiterated the rights of a neutral party and initiated a program of “peaceable coercion,” which he hoped would get both England and France to stop tormenting America’s shipping industry. His plan turned out to be his administration’s biggest mistake.

The plan centered on the **Embargo Act of 1807**, which stopped American exports from going to Europe and prohibited American ships from trading in foreign ports. Jefferson reasoned that depriving France and Britain of American commerce would force them to recognize America’s neutral rights. In essence, he was saying that, if England and France would not respect American rights, Jefferson would punish them by shutting down a large portion of the American economy.

**Results.** The Embargo Act was a disaster. Europe was not deprived of very much, and British ships took over the Atlantic sea trade. The act imperiled the American economy, though, especially in the Federalist stronghold of New England, where shipping was a major part of the local economy. Angered by the embargo, American traders began smuggling goods out of the country, an act the Democratic-Republicans denounced.

Despite the policy’s shortcomings, Jefferson refused to admit his mistake. All of these frustrations bubbled into the presidential election of 1808.

>> Burr assassinated Hamilton, who, disapproving of duels, had fired his gun into the air.

**LO2 James Madison and the War of 1812**

The Federalists hoped to capitalize on the unpopularity of the Embargo Act to reclaim the presidency in 1808, but, despite solid support in New England, they did not have the national strength to defeat the Democratic-Republicans.

**The Election of 1808 and Declaration of War**

Like Washington, Jefferson had chosen not to run for a third term. Instead, he ensured that the nomination would go to his friend and fellow Virginian, James Madison. Madison handily defeated the Federalist candidate, Charles Pinckney, but Pinckney did better than projected, worrying the Democratic-Republicans, who became aware of the widespread anger stirred up by Jefferson’s Embargo Act.

**The Repeal of the Embargo Act**

To prevent the Federalists from gaining ground on the issue of the Embargo Act, Congress repealed it in 1809, shortly before Madison became president. In its place, Congress passed the **Non-Intercourse Act**, which allowed American ships to trade with all nations except Britain and France and authorized the president to resume trade with those countries once they began respecting America’s neutral trading rights.

France Makes Amends

In a brilliant tactical move, France’s emperor, Napoleon, announced that he would respect America’s neutrality rights, whereupon Madison resumed trade with France and vehemently prohibited trade with Britain. With British trade banned from both continen-
tal Europe and the United States, the British economy suffered a depression. On June 16, 1812, the British vowed to respect American neutrality. But it proved to be too little, too late.

In the West

It was events in the West that proved determinate, though. Tecumseh and the Prophet had grown popular with young Indians, and the few British who remained in the American West encouraged the growth of the revitalization movement, hoping it would prove too formidable for the American frontiersmen and curb further expansion. But the American settlers had a strong presence in Indiana. In 1811, Indiana governor William Henry Harrison attacked Prophetstown, setting the town ablaze.

Declaration of War

Madison had been incensed by Britain’s refusal to recognize American neutrality. Moreover, he had been influenced by westerners who wanted war with Britain because they felt the British were to blame for increased Indian violence in the Midwest. These westerners, led in Congress by Kentuckian Henry Clay, were called “war hawks.” They wanted the British evicted from the West, and they hoped to annex Canada as well. Their influence meant that the war would be fought against both the British in the Atlantic and hostile Indians to the west.

Under these pressures, James Madison went to Congress on June 1, 1812 (two weeks before Britain pledged to honor America’s neutrality), to ask for a declaration of war. Congress split over the question along party lines, with Democratic-Republicans favoring war and Federalists condemning it. Federalists were convinced that war would only hurt American trade further. They believed an expansionist war would not address the problem of impressments or the violation of neutrality rights. In contrast, Democratic-Republicans were convinced that a “second war for American independence” was necessary before Britain would recognize America’s rights as a neutral nation. Despite Federalist opposition, the Democratic-Republicans carried the vote, and the United States declared war against Britain on June 14, 1812. (For more, see “The reasons why...” on the next page.)

The regional support for the war emerged a few months later, in the presidential election of 1812. Madison and the Federalist candidate DeWitt Clinton split the votes of all the eastern states, while the five western states voted solidly for Madison, catapulting him to a second term.

Ships lie idle, and grass grows on the wharves in Portland, Maine, during the embargo.
The War of 1812

With Britain still embroiled in conflict with France, many Americans expected to win the War of 1812 handily. In reality, winning the war proved more difficult.

Early Defeats

Jefferson's reduction of the American military had left the United States poorly prepared. Nevertheless, American forces initiated an assault on British-controlled Canada in 1812, hoping to conquer it quickly and make it one of the United States (Map 9.2).

The invasion of British Canada was a complete fiasco. Instead of striking directly at the St. Lawrence River—the lifeline that linked Canada's principal cities to the Atlantic Ocean—the Americans split into three forces, each too small to crush the opposition. They were further handicapped by Britain's willingness to sign treaties with Native Americans if they would fight against the Americans.

Surprising Victories and Indian Decimation

The following year, the picture brightened for the United States. American forces held their own against the British and won a crucial naval battle at Put-in-Bay on Lake Erie. American naval control of the waters in the region made defense of the area north of Lake Erie impossible for the British. The British defeat spelled disaster for a group of Indian tribes that had united with the British to fight for tribal rights, as the victorious Americans now felt entitled to plunder their villages.

In the South in 1813, a frontier army under Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek Indians (who viewed the War of 1812 as an opportunity to take advantage of a distracted American army and finally secure land in Georgia). At the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, in today's Alabama, in March 1814, Jackson's troops forced the Creeks to accept a treaty that ceded their best lands to the Americans. The Creeks had divided over the issue of who to support in the war, leading to a civil war between the Upper Creeks and the Lower Creeks. This division did not matter much to Jackson, though, who, upon winning, took the land of all the Creeks, including those who had helped him at Horseshoe Bend.

Culmination

Just as the Americans had seemed to turn the tide of battle, their position teetered when the British forced the abdication of Napoleon, briefly ending European hostilities and freeing the British to focus on their war with the United States. British leaders planned a three-pronged strategy: attacking Lake Champlain, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans.

At Lake Champlain, in September 1814, the British ground force of 15,000 men faced stiffer-
than-expected resistance from American advance units, while U.S. naval forces under Captain Thomas Macdonough defied all expectations and destroyed the British fleet as they waited for ground support. The British assault on Washington, D.C., was more successful. The U.S. militia was overwhelmed and essentially vanished during the fight, leaving only a small force of American soldiers and sailors to serve as the region’s defense. President Madison and his wife Dolley were among those compelled to flee the city. The British burned the White House, the Capitol, and other government buildings, but the ultimate objective of the invasion—to capture the port city of Baltimore—eluded them. During the failed invasion of Baltimore, Francis Scott Key wrote the poem “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Later set to the tune of an English drinking song, this became the national anthem.
Andrew Jackson and the Battle of New Orleans

The most startling upset took place at New Orleans in January 1815, where the British bungled their invasion plans and were mowed down by American troops serving under Andrew Jackson. The Americans suffered only twenty-one casualties in the Battle of New Orleans, but the British incurred more than two thousand. Jackson became an instant national hero and a symbol of America's determination to be permanently independent of Great Britain.

The Hartford Convention

As Jackson and his men defended New Orleans, Federalists in New England held a meeting at Hartford, Connecticut, to discuss their problems with the Democratic-Republicans. At the meeting, called the Hartford Convention, Federalist leaders expressed their frustrations with the proceedings of the War of 1812, which they had protested from its inception. They were fed up with the government’s economic policies, which had hurt the mercantile interests of New England. They had also witnessed their increasing alienation from southerners and westerners, as indicated in the electoral map of 1808. To remedy this problem, some Federalists proposed a series of constitutional amendments limiting the government’s ability to restrict American commerce and repealing the three-fifths clause in order to limit the power of the South in Congress. Some representatives even broached the idea of seceding if these measures failed.

Jackson’s victory, followed by an announcement that the United States and Britain had negotiated terms for peace, made a mockery of the Hartford Convention. The Federalist Party was immediately tainted with treason, and nearly all support for the party vanished. The nation’s first two-party era was over, as only the Democratic-Republicans remained viable. The period of nonpartisan politics that followed became known as the “Era of Good Feelings.” This lasted a few years, and, although the seeds of factionalism would blossom again in 1819 and 1820, historians generally consider the Era of Good Feelings to have lasted until the presidential election of 1824.

The Treaty of Ghent

In 1814, the Treaty of Ghent formally ended the War of 1812, but it did not settle any of the significant issues, principally naval impressments and America's right to neutrality. It did, however, end hostilities, which was a relief to both sides. With the war over, the United States was able to turn its attention away from Europe and back to affairs at home.

The Significance of the War of 1812

The War of 1812 was significant for at least four reasons: (1) in politics, it affirmed the importance of a strong national
government; (2) it vacated the British from the West; (3) it shaped America's role in world affairs; and (4) it unified the nation and boosted American patriotism.

**Political changes.** Politically, the War of 1812 demonstrated the weakness of the Republican-Democrats' insistence on a small federal government. It prompted four immediate changes from James Madison: (1) he recognized that having a stronger standing army and navy would have served the country better than the scanty forces that had eked out a victory against Great Britain; (2) he recognized the need for a new national bank to centralize banking, which he chartered as the Second United States Bank in 1816; (3) he agreed to new protective tariffs designed to support the growth of American industries; and (4) he realized the need for a system of national improvements, such as roads and canals to facilitate transportation between the newly settled West and the East Coast. Each of these lessons (some of them very Hamiltonian and Federalist) would play an integral role in the future development of the United States.

**Vacating the West.** In the West, the War of 1812 produced decisive defeats against the most powerful Native American tribes in the Southwest (in today's Tennessee and Arkansas) and the Northwest (in the Ohio River Valley). The conclusion of the war also meant that Britain would no longer impede settlement in the American interior, leaving the United States free to expand in the West—at the continued cost of Native Americans, who were running out of room further to the west.

**America's role in the world.** The War of 1812 also showed the European powers that the United States was a relatively strong, modern nation. Twice in three decades the United States had defeated Britain. The United States had earned greater respect and entered a prolonged period of relative isolation, safe from invasions and incursions from abroad.

**American patriotism and American culture.** And fourth, pride in their victory in the War of 1812 generated a strong urge to define the United States as fundamentally different from England. Hatred of the British prompted some to propose that the United States make German its official language. This movement obviously did not succeed, but during the course of the 1800s, Noah Webster developed a more practical solution. He noticed that a new American idiom had arisen over the 150-year colonial period; in 1828 he codified this new idiom in his Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Webster's dictionary included such uniquely American words as *skunk* and *squash*, and replaced British spellings, such as *colour*, with American versions, such as *color*.

At the same time, a group of poets called the "Hartford Wits" became the first well-known creative authors on American soil. The most prominent of the Hartford Wits was Francis Scott Key. Other "Wits" composed such enduring songs as "Hail Columbia."
At the same time, the first American magazine of note—the *North American Review*—began publication in 1815. The very title of the magazine denoted Americans’ attempt to separate culturally from Europe.

In the graphic arts, talented painters in early America crafted pictures with patriotic themes, expressing their gratitude for liberty. The best remembered are the portraits of the founding fathers, many of them painted by Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) and John Trumbull (1756–1843). Trumbull was also known for his patriotic images, the most popular of which is *The Signing of the Declaration of Independence* (1819), which today appears on the back of the two-dollar bill.

The most notable artistic expression of early American nationalism developed in architecture, as American architects, identifying with the ancient republican Romans, revived classical architecture styles and motifs. Both Thomas Jefferson, who designed the University of Virginia and his home, Monticello, and Charles Bulfinch, who designed the Massachusetts State House in Boston, excelled in this flourishing realm. Pierre l’Enfant, the French architect commissioned to design the capitol buildings in Washington, D.C., also participated in this revival, which explains the plethora of classical architecture found today in Washington, D.C.

And in the end . . .

With the rise of the Democratic-Republicans in the early 1800s, the American nation had survived its first significant transfer of power. The Democratic-Republicans had also introduced a new, livelier style of politics into the political culture, one that focused on courting voters and asserting a specific kind of patriotism.

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But Jefferson’s attempts to create an idealized agrarian republic proved problematic. By curbing the size of the military and limiting federal income to only tariffs, Jefferson exposed the nation to a variety of geopolitical upheavals taking place in Europe. Only heroic fighting and some good luck during the War of 1812 kept the young nation politically solvent.

Shortly thereafter, the nation would turn another corner and embark on a period of economic growth that ran counter to the image idealized by Jefferson and his followers. In place of an agrarian republic governed by large landholders who disdained city life, the nation developed into a trading center, bustling with markets and commerce. America was still largely a nation of farmers, but these farmers became more intent on bringing their product to market than on merely remaining self-sufficient. Although the Democratic-Republicans established much of the political and diplomatic security for the new nation, their vision for the nation would not carry the day. It is to the Market Revolution and its manifestations that we now turn.