THE "REVOLUTION" OF 1800

Continuity and Change in the Jeffersonian Era

Thomas Jefferson considered his victory in the presidential election of 1800 to be a "revolution" in American politics. What follows is a historical analysis of continuity and change resulting from this critical election.

Election of 1800 as CHANGE

CONTROL OF THE POLITICAL BRANCHES

The Jeffersonians became the majority party in the elected branches (the presidency and Congress). The Federalist Party would never control the federal government again.

DEMISE OF THE FEDERALIST PARTY

The ill-fated **Hartford Convention** signaled the end for the Federalist Party as a political force in the United States after Jeffersonians labeled it as treasonous. The 1816 election was the last time the Federalists nominated a presidential candidate.

FOCUS ON WESTWARD EXPANSION

While Washington and Adams prioritized relations with Europe over westward expansion, Jefferson made expansion a key national priority.

The **Louisiana Purchase**, which nearly doubled the size of the United States, was the first expansion of US territory beyond the original 1783 borders.

FISCAL POLICY AND AUSTERITY

Jefferson favored a **"wise and frugal government"** that would be almost invisible to ordinary Americans. Under his leadership, Congress cut both taxes and spending.

Even after spending $15 million on the **Louisiana Purchase**, Jefferson succeeded in making progress in paying down the national debt (rather than just making payments on the balance).

FREE SPEECH AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Jefferson and Madison were strong supporters of freedom of speech and the press. They did not seek to renew the Sedition Act.

REPUBLICAN SIMPLICITY

Jefferson famously walked to his own inauguration and refused to wear a ceremonial sword in portraits (as his predecessors had done).

RELIGION AND THE GOVERNMENT

Jefferson did not issue any proclamations of days of prayer, thanksgiving, or fasting, believing they went beyond the federal government's constitutional role.

Election of 1800 as CONTINUITY

FEDERALIST CONTROL OF THE JUDICIARY

Chief Justice **John Marshall** continued to exert Federalist influence over Supreme Court decisions into the 1830s. Jefferson's attempt to remove a Supreme Court justice through impeachment failed.

ENDURANCE OF HAMILTON'S IDEAS

Although the Federalist Party ceased to exist as a political entity after the War of 1812, Hamilton's economic ideas saw a resurgence after the War of 1812 demonstrated the vulnerability of an economy that was heavily dependent on foreign trade.

FOREIGN POLICY

Although Jefferson had opposed Washington's **Neutrality Proclamation** in the 1790s, he was firmly committed to maintaining the policy as president.

The **Embargo Act** was a failed attempt by Jefferson to use economic coercion to keep the United States out of the Napoleonic Wars.

NO WAR ON THE BANK

Rather than declaring war on the Bank of the United States (as Andrew Jackson did later), the Jeffersonians quietly let the bank's charter expire in 1811.

In 1816, James Madison signed the legislation creating the **Second Bank of the United States** in order to deal with the massive debts that the United States had taken on during the War of 1812.

EXPANSION OF FEDERAL POWER

The Louisiana Purchase and the Embargo Act demonstrated Jefferson's willingness to expand federal power in times of opportunity and crisis.

NATIVE AMERICAN POLICY

Jefferson and Madison continued to pressure Native American tribes to cede land through treaties and used military force in response to Native resistance.

RELIGION AND THE GOVERNMENT

During and after the War of 1812, Madison issued proclamations of prayer and thanksgiving, but took special care to make them non-sectarian.