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## Assumptions Of Authority: Social Washington's Evolution From Republican Court To Self-Rule, 1801-1831

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**ASSUMPTIONS OF AUTHORITY:  
SOCIAL WASHINGTON'S EVOLUTION FROM  
REPUBLICAN COURT TO SELF-RULE, 1801-1831**

by

**MERRY ELLEN SCOFIELD**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

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2014

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Advisor

Date

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**CHAPTER ONE:****INTRODUCTION**

*It is well first to be properly introduced.*

—MAUDE C. COOK<sup>1</sup>

In early 1829, Margaret O'Neale Timberlake Eaton, the less-than-reputable bride of expected cabinet appointee, John Eaton, left her visiting card at the Washington home of Floride Calhoun, wife of the vice president. Mrs. Calhoun pointedly ignored the card and refused to make the customary return visit, thus establishing that she would not be accepting Peggy Eaton into her social circle. The other cabinet wives, and the elite women of Washington, followed suite. Harsh words were never exchanged. The lack of calling cards on Mrs. Eaton's front table did all of the talking. Peggy Eaton was not welcome in Washington society. President Jackson intervened in Eaton's defense, first insisting on her virtue, and then demanding her acceptance on his presidential say-so. When cabinet members refused to dictate with whom their wives socialized, he purged the lot of them.

Such was Washington City during the Jackson period. Because its population was almost solely tied, in one form or another, to the national government, social life and political life were understandably intertwined. Within that framework, the men controlled the business of government and the women controlled society. To the ladies went the responsibility of safeguarding the honor and prestige of their elite social circles. They were gatekeepers who used a set of unwritten criteria in order to determine who would,

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<sup>1</sup> Maud C. Cooke, *Social Etiquette or Manners and Customs of Polite Society* (Boston: George M. Smith, 1896), 72.

and would not, be admitted. Peggy Eaton, with her colorful past, had not met the morality clause.

The events of what became known as the "Eaton Affair" showed the resolve of Washington women to protect their social authority. For Catherine Allgor and Kirsten Wood, the episode also proved to be their downfall.<sup>2</sup> "The . . . de facto outcome of the [Eaton] affair [was] that women did not have the power to dictate" who belonged in their society because their society was an arm of political Washington.<sup>3</sup> From General Jackson on, Allgor and Wood contended, acceptance into the capital's elite social circles would be solely determined by political status. "Consciously or unconsciously, Andrew Jackson had brought democracy to Washington City."<sup>4</sup> As for the women, they retreated, shaken and defeated, into their homes.

This study contends that in the wake of the Eaton affair, the women of Washington neither retreated to their parlors nor lost their social authority. To the contrary, President Jackson was the one who, after a series of political tantrums, surrendered to the ladies of his administration. Far from signaling the end of social influence by Washington women and the society they controlled, the Eaton affair was, conversely, the successful climax of a thirty-year journey in which capital society evolved from a republican court into an independent body determined and able to act of its own accord, even when pitted against Old Hickory.

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000); Kirsten E. Wood, "'One Woman so Dangerous to Public Morals': Gender and Power in the Eaton Affair," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (1997): 237-75.

<sup>3</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 238.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 237.



The journey begins with a review of Democratic-Republican disgust over what it perceived as the monarchical tendencies of the George Washington and John Adams administrations. Chapter two then examines Thomas Jefferson's determination to strip all signs of aristocracy from his own administration. Assisting him in that mission was the national government's move to the Potomac only months before the Jefferson inauguration in 1801. The chapter compares the new woodland capital to the previous urban seats of government in New York City and Philadelphia. It examines the inadequate housing, the lack of cultural diversions, and the small circle of mostly imported elites who worked to build an urbane society in a decidedly provincial location. What developed was an intimate genteel society willing, from need and political inclination, to function as a satellite around the president. Jefferson, it will be argued, served the city not only as its political authority but also as its social authority.

That Thomas Jefferson assumed social authority over Washington City became evident in the 1803-1804 events surrounding the arrival of new British foreign minister, Anthony Merry, and his wife, Elizabeth. Initial questions of diplomatic protocol directed at the minister climaxed in presidential rudeness toward Elizabeth Merry at an executive dinner. The incident unleashed diplomatic and social tumult that revealed Jefferson's attitudes toward Great Britain, toward court etiquette, and toward outspoken, assertively confident women like Elizabeth Merry. In the flurry that followed the dinner, Jefferson issued a public statement on proper republican court etiquette (while simultaneously insisting that such a "court of the US" had died with the Federalist period).<sup>5</sup> Chapter three

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<sup>5</sup> "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

examines the Merry affair and its aftermath. It pays particular attention to Jefferson's "Canons of Etiquette," which confirmed both the existence of a republican court and President Jefferson's assumption of social authority over the District.<sup>6</sup>

Chapter four explores Dolley Madison's successful White House reign. Although women played a part in the Jefferson administration, it was clear by 1809 that the workhorses of capital society were the city's politically elite women, and none more so than Queen Dolley. She was the nucleus of social Washington, an ever-present personality who incorporated traditional aspects of elite etiquette with republican hospitality and reciprocity. Her innate amicability and her tireless sense of duty profited her husband's administration and nurtured a successful social partnership between the city's genteel population and the presidential couple.

Chapter five explains the consequences of James and Elizabeth Monroe's unwillingness to follow Dolley Madison's hospitable lead. The Monroes let it be known as early as Inauguration Day, 1817, that theirs would be a more exclusive and private White House. For the diplomatic corps and Washington elite, both of whom had enjoyed a warm, informal relationship with the Madisons, the decrease in presidential accessibility was disquieting. A number of social battles ensued, during which society began to realize that it was no longer socially reliant on the presidential family as it had been under Jefferson and the Madisons. Politicians, particularly senators and cabinet members, now carried their own social power. Many of the residents offered frequent and

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<sup>6</sup> Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive, December 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (July 3, 2013).

lavish dinners and evening parties. Drawing rooms, balls, and assemblies were in abundance. Elite Washington came to recognize that although the members of official society changed faces every two, four, six, or eight years, as a unit they were a more stable body than the one or two term residents in the White House. Thus, to rely on the social whims of any presidential couple was chaotic at best. As chapter five argues, the Monroe period brought with it the evolution of a Washingtonian society that appreciated its own capable, independent nature. It continued to recognize the chief executive as the top of its social hierarchy, but no longer accepted the president or his first lady as its social authority.

For the most part, chapter six bypasses John Quincy and Louisa Catherine Adams, who performed their presidential social obligations in a generous Monrovia manner. By the Adams administration, Washington elite were conducting their own social affairs, with the White House couple playing only a pleasant, peripheral role. And so it might have continued if not for the election of Andrew Jackson. Unwilling to accept any rank less than general-in-charge-of-everything, President Jackson led a failed attempt to redirect Washington's social authority back onto executive grounds.

Chapter six first reviews the circumstances surrounding the Eaton affair, 1829-1831, and then examines scholarly interpretations of its importance. The chapter concludes with an argument against the idea that the aftermath of the Peggy Eaton affair ultimately chastened capital society. That was not the case. After the initial political fallout, the elite women who ruled Washington's social circles regained their footing — and their authority to determine who would be invited into their homes. The members of

Jackson's second cabinet brought with them only wives of unquestionable respectability, and by 1833, the president, himself, as one historian worded it, was showing "a marked tendency to eat the cake of custom."<sup>7</sup> Capital society, and the women at its helm, had won.

Chapter seven concludes the dissertation. It takes a look at capital society after the Jackson administration, as it evolved from autonomy into a unit of social power that ruled even those in the White House. The chapter then draws some conclusions on nineteenth-century social Washington and offers possibilities for further research.

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Because this study employs terms more readily familiar to nineteenth-century gentility than to twenty-first century readers, a few definitions are in order.

A *levee*, as used in the early republic, was a form of public reception given by a high level political figure. The term originated from the French *lever* (to rise) and began as an elaborate seventeenth-century ceremony surrounding the rising, dressing, and receiving of gentlemen guests by Louis XIV. English monarchs adopted similar ceremonies. By the reign of King George III, the *levée* or *levee*, was an afternoon reception usually held three times a week while Parliament sat, twice a week at other times. Royal levees in England, as well as the weekly presidential levees of George Washington and John Adams, were attended only by men (a distinction not always

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<sup>7</sup> Gibbs Myers, "Pioneers in the Federal Area," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 44/45 (January 1942): 157.

recognized by historians).<sup>8</sup> No invitations were issued, but a gentleman needed either a prior introduction or someone at hand to make the introductions. Although the word is now pronounced 'levē as in “I drove my Chevy to the levee,” in 1832, British author, Fanny Trollope, wrote that Americans pronounced the last syllable of levee "as long as possible, being exactly the reverse of the French and English manner of pronouncing the same word . . . the effect of which is very droll."<sup>9</sup>

A *drawing room* was another type of reception, held in the drawing room or parlor of a private residence, hosted by the lady of the house, and usually given at regular intervals. Attendees had either been introduced to the mistress on a previous occasion, or let their calling card substitute as a formal introduction. Later in the nineteenth century, these occasions were referred to as a lady's *at home* day.<sup>10</sup> Women announced their day at home on the lower left-hand corner of their visiting cards, although in late century Washington, those days were pre-prescribed by society depending on the political position of one's husband or father. For example, cabinet wives received on Wednesdays and senatorial wives received on Thursday. As late as 1913, social

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph Ellis in *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004) wrote of President Washington kissing Nathanael Greene's widow on the cheek at one of his levees, an occurrence only possible at one of Martha Washington's weekly drawing rooms (193). Catherine Allgor in *Parlor Politics* used the term *levee* incorrectly, writing that Jefferson abolished presidential levees in order to disempower women (23). Jefferson did abolish levees, but since levees were, during this period, gentlemen affairs, women would not have been affected.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Milton Trollope and Pamela Neville-Sington, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832; New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 174; Don McLean, “American Pie,” *American Pie*, United Artists, 1971.

<sup>10</sup> In discussing *at home* days, some etiquette manuals use quotes (“at home” days), some use capitals (At Home days), and some use italics. I followed the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed., 7. 85.

arbiters were encouraging even those who worked or who were without servants to offer such a day. The demands were small, one authority insisted. Once a week, “include free hours from about three-thirty P.M., a prettily arranged sitting-room, a few flowers, a simple graceful gown, and a tea-table not too lavishly spread.”<sup>11</sup> In Washington, nineteenth-century presidential wives always held scheduled drawing rooms, as did cabinet wives and wives of other prominent political officials. Local society matrons across the nation did the same.

A drawing room given by the wife or daughter of a high official might be referred to as a *levee*, but a gentlemen's *levee* would never be referred to as a drawing room. In 1897, an English dictionary still distinguished a *levee* from a *drawing room* by the exclusion of women at the former.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, although historians have sometimes used *salon* and *drawing room* interchangeably (presumably because both salons and drawing rooms were hosted by elite women in a private setting), they have different meanings.<sup>13</sup> Historically, a *salon* referred to a gathering of intellectual guests who were guided through an evening of cultural, political, or philosophical conversation by a skilled hostess. A drawing room could accidentally evolve into such an evening, but in general,

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<sup>11</sup> Helen Lefferts Roberts, *Putnam's Handbook of Etiquette: A Cyclopaedia of Social Usage, Giving Manners and Customs of the Twentieth Century* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 342, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Hunter and Charles Morris, *Universal Dictionary of the English Language: A New and Original Work Presenting ... Every Word in the English Language ... and an Exhaustive Encyclopaedia of All the Arts and Sciences, Vol. III* (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1897), 2897.

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 125-42.

the term indicated an informal reception at which one expected no more than light refreshments and even lighter conversation.

The term *society* in this study always refers to what in other works might be styled *polite society*, the *gentility*, or the *better sort*.<sup>14</sup> In the early republic, society was open to "large landowners, wealthy merchants, and lawyers . . . prominent ministers, educators, and publicists," all of whom needed to demonstrate good breeding, although perhaps not good birth.<sup>15</sup> In 1830, Noah Webster defined *good-breeding* as "polite manners, formed by a good education," and inversely, *education* as the "formation of manners."<sup>16</sup>

For landowners and merchants, wealth was essential to admittance into genteel society. Not only had financial success remained the "only symbol of aristocracy" still acceptable in the former British colonies but more practically, the ability to exhibit refinement and to entertain guests took money.<sup>17</sup> Servants were assumed. So was

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of nineteenth century high society in terms of "what it is not," see Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> Victor M. Lidz, "Founding Fathers and Party Leaders: America's Transition to the Democratic Social Condition," in Harold J. Bershad, *Social Class and Democratic Leadership: Essays in Honor of E. Digby Baltzell* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1989), 244.

<sup>16</sup> Noah Webster and John Walker, *American Dictionary of the English Language: Exhibiting the Origin, Orthography, Pronunciation, and Definitions of Words* (New York: S. Converse, 1830), 373, 483, 382, 285.

<sup>17</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville and Henry Reeves, *Democracy in America: Volume II* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 649. See also Richard Lyman Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992).

honorable behavior, although the standards were more stringent for women than for men.<sup>18</sup>

The men of elite society were further defined by their civic virtue. To them went the responsibility of political leadership.<sup>19</sup> Because these men were expected to take on civic responsibilities, much of genteel society was political. That is why in late eighteenth-century Knickerbocker society, the affluent, well-bred, and politically prominent Jay family mingled with the affluent, well-bred, and politically prominent Van Cortlandts, Van Hornes, Schuylers, and De Peysters.<sup>20</sup> The same could be said of the Boston Brahmins and the first families of Philadelphia, all with members whose wealth was founded in business, but whose good name was founded in the honorable performance of civic duties.

The society of early Washington City demanded the same standards of breeding as did gentility elsewhere. However, the lack of women, servants, adequate housing, and opportunities for public entertainment made for an intimate group in which there was less

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<sup>18</sup> Additionally, early nineteenth-century society was interconnected through commonalities of race, religion, community, and intermarriage. E. Digby Baltzell referred to these societal links as "familistic-communal," and argued that the links were absorbed into a new "extra-communal and associationally defined" upper-class after the North became thoroughly industrialized in the 1880s, E. Digby Baltzell and Howard G. Schneiderman, *The Protestant Establishment Revisited* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 103.

<sup>20</sup> John Jay's wife, Sarah Van Brugh Livingston Jay, left an invitation list for 1787 and 1788, transcribed in Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *Republican Court: Or, American Society in the Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1854), 98-99. See also various surnames in Joseph Alfred Scoville, *The Old Merchants of New York City, Vol. II* (New York: Thomas R. Knox & Company, 1885). All of the men listed were distinguished statesmen whose wealth was founded in the trade business.



expectation for the outward exhibition of refinement and luxury than there was in other genteel societies around the young nation. More uniquely, Washington society was political, composed almost exclusively of families whose gentlemen had excelled in politics to the degree that they now operated at a national level.<sup>21</sup>

This study uses the term *republican court* to advance its theory of an eventually autonomous social Washington. It defines *republican court* as the presumption of social authority by a president over the capital city, and argues that the embryonic nature of Washington City's elite political society made it ripe for becoming a republican court structure in a manner inconceivable in the earlier capitals of New York and Philadelphia. *Republican court* is used interchangeably in this study with "court of the US," a phrase explained more fully (and by Thomas Jefferson, himself) in chapter three.<sup>22</sup>

One of the best works on the political culture of early Washington City, fifty years old and holding, is James Sterling Young's *Washington Community, 1800-1828*. In his study, Young argued that the ill-fitting and incomplete "jigsaw puzzle" topology of

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<sup>21</sup> There was only one intermingling elite society in the early years of the District. By mid-century, growth and time caused a separation of that society. Social arbitrator Randolph Keim identified the three categories as "*The Official Class . . . The Quasi-Official Class* [consisting of the foreign ligations, etc.] . . . *The Un-Official Class*." The permanent residents in Washington's unofficial society were originally known as the Antiques, but by 1900, Cave Dwellers became the more popular term. De Benneville Randolph Keim, *Hand-Book of Official and Social Etiquette and Public Ceremonials at Washington: A Manual of Rules . . .* (Washington, DC: De B Randolph Keim, 1886), 11; Katherine Allamong Jacob, *Capital Elites: High Society in Washington, D.C., after the Civil War* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 224.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Jefferson, February 1804, Response to Etiquette of the Court of U.S., Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013233>> (March 22, 2013).

the District not only separated Capitol Hill from the “ruling community on the other side of the Tiber” but also isolated the capital city from the nation as a whole.<sup>23</sup> He stressed that the physical segregation of national political leaders from their constituents offered presidents, in particular, a unique opportunity for employing informal methods of building power, although he also argued that only Jefferson used such methods effectively. Young explored the impact of congressional lodging, which was generally in boardinghouses, primarily male, and often with residents from the same political party, geographic region, or both. The dynamics of these residential fraternities, Young argued statistically, influenced voting patterns and encouraged party bonding.

A central theme of Young's scholarship is that politics revolved not only around what transpired in the congressional chambers or the president's office, not only around what was written in formal documents or carefully honed letters, but also in the informal behavior of those engrossed in the daily business of running a national government. The "governing group of Washington," he wrote, "like virtually all other enduring groups, has an inner life of its own—a special culture which carries with it prescriptions and cues for behavior that may be far more explicit than those originating outside the group, and no less consequential for the conduct of government."<sup>24</sup> In the end, Young argued, the geographic dynamics of the new capital, and the Jeffersonian bias against centralized power, caused a physical and political fragmentation in the national government. Only Andrew Jackson, as he "blazed new paths to Washington with the mighty sword of

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<sup>23</sup> James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 3, 82, 248.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, ix.

democracy," could repair the damage.<sup>25</sup> Young, though, stopped short of explaining his confidence in the Jackson era, and this study will question the effectiveness of Jackson's mighty sword on capital society. Nonetheless, despite a debatable conclusion, *Washington Community, 1800-1828*, is essential reading. The author constructed keen observations on boardinghouse culture and on Jeffersonian employment of entertainment as a source of power. He argued successfully on the political effects of the Washington City location, on its topology, its isolation, and its intimate nature. Most importantly, James Sterling Young proved, for all time, that Washington City was a company town, conceived and created for a singular political purpose.<sup>26</sup>

While James Young offered historians a fresh perspective on early Washingtonian politics, three other historians have offered an analysis of its elite society, and have done so in terms of gender and power. Catherine Allgor, in *Parlor Politics*, focused on four women elites in early Washington City. Kirsten Wood, in "One Woman so Dangerous to Public Morals," concentrated on the Jackson period. Susan Radomsky in her dissertation, *The Social Life of Politics*, studied the emergence of a national political elite.<sup>27</sup> Collectively, these historians go a step beyond Young. He described an emergent Washington City in which the early national politicians formed an intertwined social and political community (or pockets of communities) where none had existed before. Allgor,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 249.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, xi-xii.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Radomsky, *The Social Life of Politics: Washington's Official Society and the Emergence of a National Political Elite, 1800-1876* (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005).

Wood, and Radomsky ask that scholars remember the essential role of Washington's elite women in forming that unique community.

*Parlor Politics* investigates the informal methods by “which the ladies of Washington help[ed] build a city and a government.”<sup>28</sup> Its author focused almost entirely on four women with access to the president—Dolley Madison, Louisa Catherine Adams, Margaret Bayard Smith, and Margaret (Peggy) Eaton. She attempted, sometimes more successfully than others, to prove that these women acted with conscious political intent. In her lengthy discussion on the development of Dolley Madison’s Wednesday evening drawing rooms, Allgor investigated how Madison straddled public concerns about creeping monarchism with the social expectations of Washington City. That discussion, and the chapter on Louisa Catherine Adams, provide insights into the ways that Washington City women maneuvered through what Louisa Adams considered etiquette minutiae, in order to politically assist their husbands. Through social interaction, these women obtained an indirect, albeit significant, political power that, according to Allgor, ended with the Eaton Affair.<sup>29</sup> As examples of political success, the historian cited the networking done by these women to gain employment for friends and family, the use of the Madison drawing room for nurturing political relationships and soothing partisan feathers, and the determination women exhibited against President Jackson when he attempted to usurp that power.

Although *Parlor Politics* encourages historians to rethink the role of women in early national politics, its author was sometimes too willing to mold history to fit her

<sup>28</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, subtitle.

<sup>29</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 100.

claims instead of ensuring that her claims fit history. She credited Dolley Madison, her contacts, and her drawing room, for the collapse of a congressional vote to remove the seat of government, but did so without convincing evidence.<sup>30</sup> Allgor's chapter on President Jefferson seems more determined to provide a contrast to the upcoming glory days of Dolley Madison than it does to provide readers with an honest depiction of Jefferson's relationship with the women of Washington.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, in her chapter on the Eaton affair, Allgor declared a win for Andrew Jackson and a lasting retreat by the elite women who had been previously empowered. It gave her study its dramatic conclusion. It also underestimated the power of Washington society to hold its own.

Kirsten Wood explored the Eaton affair in her article, "One Woman so Dangerous to Public Morals." Unlike Allgor, Wood argued that society's power rested, not in the role of individual Washingtonian women but in the social authority of Washington society as a unit. With the onset of the Eaton affair, the women of that society "set the terms for the debate that followed both within the executive branch and in the public press."<sup>32</sup> It was "heady stuff," Wood argued, "for women to ally with each other in the name of virtue and female purity and thereby to challenge powerful men."<sup>33</sup> She added, however, that by attempting to extend their power directly into the political arena, they were exposed and

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<sup>30</sup> For contrary evidence, see Merry Ellen Scofield, "Yea or Nay to Removing the Seat of Government: Dolley Madison and the Realities of 1814 Politics," *The Historian* 74, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 449-66.

<sup>31</sup> For a differing viewpoint, see Merry Ellen Scofield, "The Fatigues of His Table: Politics of Presidential Dining During the Jefferson Administration," *Journal of the Early Republic* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 450-51, 462-63 including footnotes.

<sup>32</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, "'One Woman so Dangerous to Public Morals': Gender and Power in the Eaton Affair," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (1997): 241, 256.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 256.

easily shut down by men such as Jackson, whose greater power was neither implied nor circumstantial. In this, Wood, like Allgor, marked the Eaton affair as the point of declination for society women seeking a base of power in the "company town."<sup>34</sup>

In *The Social Life of Politics*, Susan Radomsky agreed with Allgor and Wood that Washington City's social and political power intertwined. She argued that the capital was able to build a stable official society among a city of transients because it respected this social-political dynamic. She further argued, as others had before her, that early Washington politicians were as influenced by personal relationships as they were by debates in the congressional chambers, that they drew their political energy from these relationships, and that society provided the arena needed for forming personal bonds.

Radomsky weaved through several decades of social Washington as she argued for the success of official society in "melding the political leadership of the country into a unified entity."<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, she gave the Eaton affair its due. The social chaos over Peggy Eaton, she wrote, highlighted the struggle that faced any "governing elites," what British historian Leonore Davidoff called "the social absorption of new groups" coming into power.<sup>36</sup> Radomsky recognized that the stubborn conservatism that kept Peggy Eaton out of Washington society also helped society maintain its stability, despite a continually changing membership. For Radomsky, unlike for Allgor and Wood, that society "remained a potent and even indispensable element of politics" for decades after the Jackson administration. She showed little patience, however, with the women who

<sup>34</sup> Young, *Washington Community*, xi-xii.

<sup>35</sup> Radomsky, *The Social Life of Politics*, 181.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 158. The "social absorption" quote is from Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1973), 69.

attacked Peggy Eaton. In "a system where able and respectable men and women were always rising," she wrote, "those who rendered themselves too obnoxious to democracy were likely to find themselves out of office or out of favor."<sup>37</sup>

Women were integral to nineteenth-century Washingtonian society, particularly the well-bred, well-married women who followed their husbands to the capital. Alexis de Tocqueville noted the exceptionalism of such women in *Democracy in America*. It was they, he argued, who maintained the domestic order necessary to the growing prosperity of America. He appreciated that Americans had wisely applied the principle of political economy to the sexes, "carefully dividing the duties of man from those of woman, in order that the great work of society may be the better carried on."<sup>38</sup> He also argued that, although American women operated from within an inescapable "circle of domestic interest and duties," from that circle, they ruled of the nation's virtues and morals.<sup>39</sup>

The idea that women were both relegated to and held power within a domestic sphere is not unique to Tocqueville. It dates back to Aristotle who wrote that the duties of husband and wife "are divided, with different [roles] for the man and the woman; hence each supplies the other's needs by contributing a special function for the common good."<sup>40</sup> Tocqueville brought new light to an old idea, helped by his "habitual charm, his

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<sup>37</sup> Radomsky, *The Social Life of Politics*, 158. A companion book to the Radomsky dissertation might be Kathryn Allamong Jacob's *Capital Elites: High Society in Washington, D.C., After the Civil War* (1995), which studies Washingtonian society as it moved toward the twentieth century.

<sup>38</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Volume II*, 698.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 688.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1162a20, in Aristotle and Terence Irwin, *Nicomachean Ethics (Second Edition)* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), 134.

fearlessness in making broad generalizations, [and] his mastery of language."<sup>41</sup> His interpretation of separate spheres would provide a touchstone for the women's historians who began to emerge in the late 1950s.<sup>42</sup>

For some women's historians, the term has been useful only as a point of rejection. Jocelyn Boryczka maintained that the Frenchman's position on separate spheres confined women "to a political identity as moral guardians and the people to a thin conception of citizenship antithetical to democracy's demands."<sup>43</sup> She noted that the women Tocqueville appeared to admire the most—American frontier wives—did not fit within the gender boundaries that he so carefully drew.<sup>44</sup>

Thirty years before Boryczka, Joan Kelly argued that the idea of two separate spheres masked a more complex social reality. "It did not describe the society in which it arose so much as reflect it ideologically . . . [and] served to legitimate bourgeois patriarchal practices of that society."<sup>45</sup> During the same time, Gerda Lerner contended that the term functioned as an ideological tool for extolling woman's place in the home, "while it tried to justify women's exclusion from the public domain, from equal education

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<sup>41</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 9.

<sup>42</sup> Awareness of Tocqueville's social commentary on women was helped by the renewed scholarly interest in *Democracy in America* after World War II. Robert Nisbet, "Tocqueville Revisited," *The New Criterion* 1 (September 1982): 76.

<sup>43</sup> Jocelyn M. Boryczka, "The Separate Spheres Paradox," Jill Locke and Eileen Hunt Botting, *Feminist Interpretations of Alexis de Tocqueville* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 284.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 288.

<sup>45</sup> Joan Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory: A Postscript to the 'Women and Power' Conference," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 222.



and from participation in the political process."<sup>46</sup> Linda Kerber wrote in 1788 that the term was flawed because it was capable of a wide number of interpretations and often employed sloppily. It allowed historians, argued Kerber, to "avoid thinking about race" and about categories of women outside the "white women, mostly of the middle class" who fit Tocqueville's mold.<sup>47</sup> Still, for a new breed of historians searching for ways to explain women's lives, "no concept seemed more promising than Tocqueville's."<sup>48</sup>

One of the first of this new breed to accept the concept of separate spheres and explore its implications, was Betty Friedan. In 1963, Friedan attacked the post-World War II doctrine of domesticity, contending that women were prisoners of what she called the feminine mystique—women's commitment to the "fulfillment of their own femininity."<sup>49</sup> She blamed the male-dominated world of women's magazines and popular advertising for helping convince the post-war woman that her proper station was as the ideal wife and mother. Because of the success of that propaganda, these women had imprisoned themselves in a "comfortable concentration camp" where they lived "a vicarious life through mass daydreams or through [their] husband[s] and children."<sup>50</sup>

Barbara Welter expanded the Friedan argument to include nineteenth-century America. In "The Cult of True Womanhood," she argued that, as American men replaced revolutionary ideals with a "thirst for profit and expansion," they left their wives "hostage

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<sup>46</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 20.

<sup>47</sup> Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place," 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 91.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 426.

in the home."<sup>51</sup> The True Woman's role, confirmed by her church and by the literature she read, was to exemplify "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity."<sup>52</sup> As wife and mother, she was "not only the highest adornment of civilization, but [was] supposed to keep busy at morally uplifting tasks," the most important of which was to raise the next generation "of Christian statesmen."<sup>53</sup>

Six years after Welter, Linda Kerber purposed the metaphor of "Republican Motherhood" in a book focusing on revolutionary period women.<sup>54</sup> The American Revolution, she contended, brought with it political and intellectual consequences for the women of the early republic. Among these consequences were certain specialized domestic responsibilities, which Kerber wrapped around the term, "Republican Mother."<sup>55</sup> Her Republican Mothers were educated, "deferential citizen[s]" of the new republic who took pride in their place at home.<sup>56</sup> From that domain, they "shape[d] the characters of their sons and husbands in the direction of benevolence, self-restraint, and responsible independence."<sup>57</sup> Although hesitant to take on public responsibilities, these women claimed "for themselves the responsibility of committing the next generation to republicanism and civic virtue . . . succeeding so well that by the antebellum years [civic

<sup>51</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (July 1, 1966): 151.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 164 (not only), 171 (Christian).

<sup>54</sup> Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

<sup>55</sup> Linda K. Kerber, "Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 187-205.

<sup>56</sup> Linda Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 59.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

virtue] would be thought to be distinctively female and its older association with men largely forgotten.”<sup>58</sup>

Jan Lewis maintained that the women of the early republic were less Republican Mothers than Republican Wives, “affectionate, virtuous, chaste, and capable of enormous moral authority over her husband.”<sup>59</sup> Marriage, as envisioned by American writers, was the republic in miniature, “a fusion of – passion and intellect, head and heart.”<sup>60</sup> Women lured men into respectability and virtuous behavior during courtship by accepting nothing less from their admirers. As wives, the intent was to preserve their husbands in the same “exalted state” to which their “influence had raised” them.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, these women learned through repeated failures that their success as Republican Wives was dependent on the cooperation of their husbands; they had “no power over those who were not or did not want to be virtuous.”<sup>62</sup> Their children, though, were more malleable “and seemed to offer a more promising opportunity for the exercise of influence.” By the 1820s and 1830s, argued Lewis, the Republican Wife, in her hunt for more status and power, had transitioned herself into the Republican Mother (what Lewis called the “Victorian mother”).<sup>63</sup>

No one exemplified the transition from Republican Wife to Republican Mother more so than Elizabeth Wirt, the wife of William Wirt, attorney general under James

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>59</sup> Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (October 1987): 720.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 708.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 701.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 720.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 721.

Monroe and John Quincy Adams. Elizabeth Washington Gamble was raised in an environment of “elegant [Virginian] hospitality” and educated at a female seminary whose dual purpose was to "introduce women to a classical curriculum and to remind them that their calling was marriage and family."<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Gamble learned her lessons well, marrying lawyer William Wirt and providing him with children and a comfortable home. In her study of the couple, Anya Jabour's focus is on the dissolution of the Wirt marriage from a companionate union to one of breadwinner and consumer. It is also, coincidentally, a study of Elizabeth Wirt's transition from Republican Wife, with its "focus on affectionate love," companionship, and "shared responsibility for the cultivation of domestic virtue," to a Republican Mother who "claimed a central position as the family caretaker" and "made motherhood her primary goal."<sup>65</sup>

Historian Paula Baker considered the suffrage of white males in the 1820s and 1830s as the turning point for the relegation of white, middle and upper-class women into a separate sphere. “Parties and electoral politics united all white men, regardless of class or other differences,” and political entertainments became distinctively male.<sup>66</sup> Simultaneously, literature and etiquette manuals encouraged the definition of women in terms that "insistently" disqualified her from public life—“physical weakness,

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<sup>64</sup> Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 11-12.

<sup>65</sup> Timothy Kenslea, *The Sedgwicks in Love: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage in the Early Republic* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2006), 171 (focus); Jabour, 137 (relinquished), 123 (made motherhood).

<sup>66</sup> Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1, 1984): 628.

sentimentality, purity, meekness" and piety.<sup>67</sup> "The idea of separate spheres had a venerable past," wrote Baker, "but it emerged in the early nineteenth century with a vengeance."<sup>68</sup>

Baker argued that Jacksonian democracy "separated male and female politics."<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Varon disagreed. Her research into the Virginian Whig campaigns of the 1840s and 1850s disclosed that women participated in a number of the partisan rituals and pageantry that accompanied nineteenth-century elections. The Whigs promoted female involvement because it advanced their platform of statesmanship, virtue, and "the traditions of the Founding Fathers."<sup>70</sup> The party also promoted religion and reform, two areas of interest to women. Democrats at first mocked the female involvement in the Whig organization, but then warmed to the idea of marginally including them in the process. The Democrats, though, never included women to the degree of the Whigs or its successor, the Republicans. The latter's promotion of Jessie Frémont in her husband's campaign encouraged strong female participation. As Varon's study reveals, mid-nineteenth century women did not always stick to their non-partisan domestic roles. They used the values and morals that surrounded their domestic roles to add their enthusiastic voices to party politics.

According to Nancy Cott, the nineteenth century's tendency to define women by their domesticity was the result of a changed economy. Women, who in colonial times

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 629.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Elizabeth R. Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (1995): 494-521.

had often worked in close economic partnership with their husbands, were now primarily consumers and staff managers.<sup>71</sup> Spouses increasingly conducted business elsewhere. The home, both literally and figuratively, became the center of a woman's world, one in which "children stayed before they began to work and where her husband rested after the strain of labor."<sup>72</sup> (This transition was also true of Elizabeth Wirt, whose husband initially kept his law office in their home, before moving his practice to a separate office.)

Cott, like Tocqueville and the others, also found that those who operated from within the "narrow circle of domestic interest and duties" wielded power from that sphere on issues of morality and virtue.<sup>73</sup> "The doctrine of woman's sphere . . . articulated a social power based on their special female qualities rather than on general human rights. For women who previously held no particular avenue of power of their own – no unique defense of their integrity and dignity – this represented an advance."<sup>74</sup>

The ladies of capital society exemplified the type of woman studied by Cott. From their Washington City parlors, they "articulated social power" based on their moral authority and on the indirect power they held as spouses and daughters of prominent political figures.<sup>75</sup> They were the archetypical women of Tocqueville's domestic sphere—

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<sup>71</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 49.

<sup>73</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Volume II*, 688.

<sup>74</sup> Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 200.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

white, generally well-educated, gentility who respected the traditional gender division of duties, and supported their husbands "with calm and unquenchable energy."<sup>76</sup>

Nineteenth-century political wives exhibited strong similarities among themselves. They recognized that their actions reflected onto their husbands. They attended to their personal appearance and the style of their wardrobe, and supervised well-kept homes. Although financial worry was not uncommon, these women maintained at least outward appearances of economic comfort, and while residing in the capital, accessed the funds or the credit needed to dress fashionably, entertain as expected, and mingle in national society.

If the first responsibility of a republican wife was to choose her mate carefully, the women of Washington society chose well, and were proud of their good judgment. Each openly admired her husband and took his accolades as her own. Although not all of these women had concurred with her husband's decision to enter public office, all suffered the consequences of that decision. They each struggling against the loneliness, anxieties, and added responsibilities of political widowhood as their husbands pursued careers away from home. Despite any hardships, though, these women believed that their husband, brother, or father possessed singular attributes that made him invaluable to the future success of the nation.

On another scale, the women of nineteenth-century Washingtonian society came uncomfortable close to matching the type scorned by historian Ann Douglas. Her Wollstonecraftian perception of women included their demand of flattery in place of

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<sup>76</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: Volume II*, 689.

justice and equality, their acceptance of "special status" as a substitute for power, and their willingness to train subsequent generations to accept the same submissions.<sup>77</sup> According to Douglas, the only power these women gained in the nineteenth century was as writers, and at that they were "intellectual failure[s]."<sup>78</sup> Having never been properly schooled in math and the natural sciences, women writers had no reasoning skills (an argument with which historian Mary Kelley would disagree), and thus, turned to sentimentality as their literary device.<sup>79</sup> Their published works, argued Douglas, held little merit and were long ago dismissed, but the sentimental style in which women wrote encouraged a cottage industry of anti-intellectual fluff that has penetrated American culture ever since.

The women who dominated early Washington society mastered much of what Douglas deplored. Looked at in one light, it could be argued that they lived in an elite society of pronounced manners in which "finery symbolized the flattery which was their due," a world in which they advertised their husband's success as compensation "for their own lost productivity."<sup>80</sup> These women maintained a special stature in Washington, but no direct power, and they carefully taught incoming wives to follow the established rules

<sup>77</sup> Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 61, 75-76.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 58. In discussing antebellum American women, Mary Kelley contended that the "claims made by participants in the discourse of female intellect, the perceived need for an educated citizenry, and the ideology of republican motherhood provided the context for the emergence of female academies and seminaries in the early republic," creating spaces "in which women's abilities were developed and displayed." In turn, many women maintained the domestic interests of their mothers while developing the reasoning skills of their fathers. Mary Kelley, "'Vindicating the Equality of Female Intellect': Women and Authority in the Early Republic," *Prospects* 17 (1992): 15-16, 18-19.

<sup>80</sup> Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 61.



of their intricate society. This group even produced a small collection of writers of no lasting prominence who wrote forgettable novels in the flowering sentimentalist style that Douglas lamented, for example, Margaret Bayard Smith's two volume *A Winter in Washington*.<sup>81</sup>

Such a portrayal of Washington women, accurate to a point, does not tell the whole story. Margaret Smith's fictional style was sentimental and unmemorable, but she pushed the boundaries of the domestic sphere by publishing her work. Other women, in their letters and journals, reveal an intelligent and nuanced interest in national politics, sometimes hidden behind comments of a more social nature. Women were constantly made aware that they were in a unique social environment. Louisa Catherine Adams lamented of a festive evening spoiled by the determination of a "Western Member" to talk politics.<sup>82</sup> "I was forced to repeat I had nothing to do with affairs of State," she wrote.<sup>83</sup> Nonetheless, that the "Western Member" thought Adams might be interested in a political conversation (or that chatting with Louisa Adams might affect the political decisions of her secretarial husband) says as much about social Washington as her grumbling.<sup>84</sup> Catherine Allgor and Kirsten Wood, as discussed before, have argued that Washington's women worked within their domestic boundaries to garner political

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<sup>81</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *A Winter in Washington: Or, Memoirs of the Seymour Family* (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824). Post-Civil War examples include the writings of congressional wife Mary Simmerson Cunningham Logan and congressional daughter Madeline Vinton Dahlgren.

<sup>82</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, February 21, 1821, Louisa Catherine Adams and Judith S. Graham, *Diary and Autobiographical Writings of Louisa Catherine Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 2: 567.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

influence. Historians Fredrika Teute, Jan Lewis, and Cynthia Earman, have joined the same conversation.<sup>85</sup> However, one has to be careful not to generalize. For every Washington City woman who appears to have utilized her position in society to gain power and influence amidst national politics, there was another who fit more readily into the mold Ann Douglas cast for them, willing to substitute status and flattery for more lasting power.<sup>86</sup>

The political wives of Washington were the most significant members of the elite group who developed and then nurtured a capital society. They came to the Potomac assured of a certain social stature through their husband's political position, and confident that they represented the best of American womanhood. When confronted with the raw cultural environment of Washington City, they worked diligently to establish a stable

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<sup>85</sup> Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics*; Allgor "Federal patronage in the Early Republic: The Role of Women in Washington, D. C.," in Kenneth R. Bowling and Donald R. Kennon, *Establishing Congress: The Removal to Washington D. C., and the Election of 1800* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press for United States Capitol Historical Society, 2005); Fredrika Teute, "Roman Matron on the Banks of the Tiber; Margaret Bayard Smith and the Politicization of Spheres in the Nation's Capital," and Jan Lewis, "Politics and the Ambivalence of the Private Sphere: Women in Early Washington, D. C.," in Donald R. Kennon, *Republic for the Ages: The United States Capitol and the Early Republic* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1999); Cynthia D. Earman, "Remembering the Ladies," *Washington History* 12, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2000): 102-17; Kirsten Wood, "One Woman So Dangerous," 237-75,

<sup>86</sup> Of course there were also those women, like Dorcas Dearborn, who participated in society because she was a cabinet wife, but who was "forever regretting her Milch Cows, and her chickens" back in Massachusetts. Louisa Catherine Adams, "The Adventures of a Nobody," Microfilms of the Adams Papers given by the Adams Manuscript Trust to the Massachusetts Historical Society, Part III, 269, Louisa Catherine Adams Miscellany (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1956), 161.

genteel society that would ensure them of the respect and moral authority they had enjoyed back home.

These women, along with their political husbands and fathers, created Washingtonian society. The physical, geographic, and cultural restraints of a backwoods capital would influence the development of that society, but it would not restrict its progress. Beginning as a republican court under the auspices of Thomas Jefferson, the elite members of this group would eventually form for themselves a strong, self-determining social Washington capable of making and enforcing its own rules and standing strong against even the likes of Andrew Jackson. It is the objective of this dissertation to tell the story of that evolution.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### JEFFERSON AND THE WOODLAND CAPITAL

*Then let us to the woods repair,  
And build a federal city there . . .*  
—ANONYMOUS<sup>87</sup>

In late 1800, the seat of government relocated to the newly created Washington City. Although there was a small community of genteel families already living in the Potomac region, the political transplants who moved with the government faced a cultural wilderness unlike anything they had experienced in the previous national capitals of Philadelphia and New York. What developed over the next few decades was an official society whose form and function was the product of two major components: the provincial location of the new Federal City and the ideology of the Republican Party. This chapter explores both of those factors. To do so, however, it is necessary to begin in 1790, before the move to Washington City and before the Republicans gained control.

Thomas Jefferson arrived in New York City, March 21, 1790, reluctant, but ready, to assume his duties as the nation's first secretary of state. By the time of his arrival, the Washington administration was just shy of a year old, and the pragmatic first

<sup>87</sup> Unknown author, "The Rural Retreat," 1789, in "History of the Establishment of a Permanent Seat of Government for the United States," *Executive Documents Printed by Order of the House of Representatives during the Session of the Forty-First Congress 1869-70*, vol. 13 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1870), 178. Rebound and titled, *Congressional Serial Set*, and found on Google Books, <[http://books.google.com/books?id=MHJBAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA1-PA178&lpg=RA1-PA178&dq=%22then+let+us+to+the+woods+repair%22&source=bl&ots=gu-u52Em6c&sig=m\\_edqVfFoupQKqU3N6dCjpFSwnU&hl=en&sa=X&ei=959iUuGwMqbbyQH6voGYCw&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAQ#v=snippet&q=woods&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=MHJBAAAAYAAJ&pg=RA1-PA178&lpg=RA1-PA178&dq=%22then+let+us+to+the+woods+repair%22&source=bl&ots=gu-u52Em6c&sig=m_edqVfFoupQKqU3N6dCjpFSwnU&hl=en&sa=X&ei=959iUuGwMqbbyQH6voGYCw&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAQ#v=snippet&q=woods&f=false)> (February 6, 2014).

president had already dealt with many of the nettlesome concerns that surrounded the creation of his new office. One such problem was the question of executive protocol.

It had taken General Washington only weeks after his inauguration to realize the need for establishing order to his day. As he explained it to a correspondent, “by the time I had done breakfast, and thence till dinner, and afterwards till bed time I could not get relieved from the ceremony of one visit before I had to attend to another; in a word, I had no leisure to read or to answer the dispatches that were pouring in upon me from all quarters.”<sup>88</sup> Washington expressed his concerns in a series of written questions entitled “Queries on a Line of Conduct to be Pursued by the President, which he then circulated to various advisors for their consideration.”<sup>89</sup>

To James Madison, Washington explained that “to draw such a line for the conduct of the President as will please every body, I know is impossible.”<sup>90</sup> However, official procedures needed to be established that would permit the president ample time for official duties without completely withdrawing him from company or diminishing respect for the executive office. As an astute politician, Washington was also aware that he needed to develop protocols that ensured principles of republicanism while maintaining the dignity of his office. It was important to Washington that the presidency

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<sup>88</sup> George Washington to David Stuart, July 26, 1789, George Washington, John Clement Fitzpatrick, and David Maydole Matteson, *Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), 30: 361.

<sup>89</sup> “Queries on a Line of Conduct to be Pursued by the President,” May 10, 1789, Fitzpatrick and Matteson, *Writings of George Washington*, 30: 319-22.

<sup>90</sup> George Washington to James Madison, May 12, 1789, Fitzpatrick and Matteson, *Writings of George Washington*, 30: 322.

be seen "as a symbol of national power and unity."<sup>91</sup> To that end, he "went to great lengths to define the proper social and political protocol in order to command the proper respect and deference for the office."<sup>92</sup>

Both Vice President John Adams and Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton submitted written recommendations of protocol, and before the time of Thomas Jefferson's arrival, Washington had implemented his Line of Conduct. It established a routine that he would follow throughout his administration.<sup>93</sup> Each Tuesday, between the hours of three and four, the president held a gentlemen's levee.<sup>94</sup> On Thursdays, he hosted dinners "to as many as my table will hold."<sup>95</sup> Friday evenings, Martha Washington offered a public drawing room for mixed society.<sup>96</sup> Washington also presided over annual holiday entertainments, attended public balls, and drew crowds as his white carriage, resplendent with medallion ornaments and a retinue of servants, made its way yearly to the official opening of Congress. Although Martha Washington returned calls, her

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<sup>91</sup> Robert M. Saunders, *Power, the Presidency, and the Preamble: Interpretive Essays on Selected Presidents of the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 1.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Washington Irving, *Life of George Washington* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1861), 5: 7-12.

<sup>94</sup> George Washington to David Stuart, June 15, 1789, Fitzpatrick and Matteson, *Writings of George Washington*, 31: 54.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 31: 55.

<sup>96</sup> Of Martha Washington's "publick Evening," Abigail Adams wrote that the President's levee was Tuesday ". . . and Mrs. Washingtons drawing [sic] of a fryday such." Abigail Adams to her sister, Mary Cranch, July 27, 1790, Abigail Adams, Mary Smith Cranch, and Stewart Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams 1788-1801* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 55.

husband did not, making informal visits to friends only. Each morning, the president received visitors with matters of business.<sup>97</sup>

Jefferson was immediately uncomfortable with the degree to which Washington's chosen forms of protocol mimicked the British royal court. King George III held weekly gentlemen's levees, his on Wednesdays and Fridays.<sup>98</sup> Queen Charlotte welcomed members of the royal court and selected guests to her drawing room on Thursdays and Sundays.<sup>99</sup> "In his public appearances [Washington] rode in an elaborate coach drawn by four and sometimes six horses," wrote Gordon Wood.<sup>100</sup> In public addresses, "he referred to himself in the third person." He sat for "dozens of state portraits . . . Indeed," concluded Wood, "much of the iconography of the new nation . . . was copied from monarchical symbolism."<sup>101</sup> Jefferson and his supporters were determined that such policies would lead the nation into a system of "absolute, or at best, mixed, monarchy."<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, Jefferson's duties as the nation's first secretary of state, and his respect for the president, temporarily kept him silent.

<sup>97</sup> "Queries on a Line of Conduct," May 10, 1789, Fitzpatrick and Matteson, *Writings of George Washington*, 30: 319-20.

<sup>98</sup> John Brooke, *King George III* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), 294-99. Adams family letters and diary entries discussing royal levees and drawing can be found in Margaret A. Hogan and C. James Taylor, *The Adams Papers: Adams Family Correspondence: January 1786-February 1787* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>99</sup> John Brooke, *King George III*, 294-99.

<sup>100</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 52.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 52-53.

<sup>102</sup> From the Virginia Resolutions of 1798 as quoted in Douglass Greybill Adair and Mark E. Yellin, *Intellectual Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy: Republicanism, the Class Struggle, and the Virtuous Farmer* (1943 dissertation; Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 4. Adair argued that Jefferson and Madison considered monarchism a serious threat to the new republic (3-13).

Within two years of the Washington administration, however, the personal and political animosities between Jefferson and fellow cabinet member Alexander Hamilton were a matter of public record. As Jefferson became more vocal in his attacks against Hamilton's vision of a dominant federal government, he also became more vocal in his opinion of executive protocol. Two Republican newspapers, the *Philadelphia Aurora*, owned by Benjamin Franklin Bache, grandson of the founding father, and the *National Gazette*, published by poet Philip Freneau and under the express influence of Jefferson, began sharp attacks on what they perceived as the regal decorum associated with the Washington administration. The newspapers denounced the president for "his drawing rooms, levees, declining of invitations to dinners and tea parties, his birthday odes, visits, compliments, etc."<sup>103</sup>

In 1797, a letter from Thomas Jefferson to Italian radical Philip Mazzei surfaced in the American press. It directly linked Jefferson, now vice president under John Adams, with the personal assaults on General Washington. "In place of that noble love of liberty and republican government which carried us triumphantly through the war," Jefferson had written Mazzei, "an Anglican monarchical aristocratical party has sprung up, whose avowed object is to draw over us the substance, as they have already done the forms, of the British government."<sup>104</sup> To James Madison, Jefferson complained that the published copy of his letter used the singular *form* as if Jefferson meant to condemn the American

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<sup>103</sup>John Adams to Abigail Adams, January 2, 1794, John Adams, and Charles Francis Adams. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1856), 1: 461.

<sup>104</sup>Thomas Jefferson to Phillip Mazzei, April 24, 1796, Thomas Jefferson and Merrill D. Peterson, *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 470.



government, and not *forms* as in “the birth-days, levees, processions to parliament, inauguration pomposities, &c.” to which he was, in truth, referring.<sup>105</sup> Jefferson decided against a public explanation, brooding to Madison that to do so might cause further differences between himself and General Washington. He need not have worried. That relationship, battered by years of party disputes and slanderous remarks, was now over.<sup>106</sup>

That same year, John Adams’s appearance at his own inauguration, complete with “cockaded hat” and “splendid sword,” left clear indications to his opponents that this second president was to be no less “monarchical” than his predecessor.<sup>107</sup> What had been barely tolerated by the developing Democratic-Republican Party during the Washington administration now proved insufferable under Adams. They nicknamed him “Duke of Braintree” and “His Rotundity.”<sup>108</sup> After the move to Washington City in 1800, they

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, August 3, 1797, Thomas Jefferson and Paul Leicester Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes*. Federal Edition (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904), 8: 332-33.

<sup>106</sup> On the Washington-Jefferson break, see Don Higginbotham, *George Washington Reconsidered* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 7; Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1960), 118-21.

<sup>107</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Phillip Mazzei, April 24, 1796, Peterson, *Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 470 (monarchical); Page Smith, *John Adams* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 2: 917 (hat/sword). Another Adams biographer, Miriam Gross, found Adams's inauguration far less aristocratic than that of Washington. He arrived in a “the simple carriage” and wore “a plain grey broadcloth suit.” Miriam Gross, *John Adams: Patriot, Diplomat, and Statesman* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2005), 84. Of the inauguration, Merrill Peterson wrote that Adams was dressed “in drab gray, a sword dangling at his side.” The historian considered the attire no more elaborate than that of his vice president, Jefferson, dressed in a “long blue frockcoat.” Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 562.

<sup>108</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82.

called him “king in his palace.”<sup>109</sup> Adams had shown a love of titles as vice president, in particular when he suggested that the Senate refer to George Washington as "His Majesty, the President."<sup>110</sup> Adams's "infatuation with titles," wrote Gordon Wood, "made him appear ridiculous . . . to some of his contemporaries," who turned the tables on him with their mocking nicknames.<sup>111</sup>

For her part, Abigail Adams worried about the high cost of presidential entertaining. She lamented to her sister, “today will be the 5th great dinner I have had, about 36 Gentlemen to day, as many more next week, and I shall have got through the whole Congress, with their apendages. Then comes the 4 July which is a still more tedious day.”<sup>112</sup> Not a wealthy Southern landowner, but a frugal New England housewife, Abigail Adams complained of the personal expense involved. "You will not wonder," she wrote, "that I dread it, or think President Washington to blame for introducing the custom.”<sup>113</sup>

No matter the expense, and despite growing criticism, the Adamses kept up the protocol initiated by the Washingtons. The move to the unfinished "Presidents House" in November 1800 did not deter them, nor did the inconvenience of having to obtain daily

<sup>109</sup> William Seale, *The President's House: A History* (Washington, DC: White House Historical Association, 1986), 1: 86.

<sup>110</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Rush, John Adams, Benjamin Rush, Julia Stockton Rush, and Alexander Biddle, *Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle. Series A* (Philadelphia: Press of J.B. Lippincott Company, 1892), 46.

<sup>111</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 82.

<sup>112</sup> Abigail Adams to sister, Mary Smith Cranch, June 23, 1797, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 98-99.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

groceries from Georgetown, "only one mile from me but a quagmire after rain."<sup>114</sup> In early December, the Adamses learned almost simultaneously that John Adams would not be the next president and that their troubled son, Charles, was dead from complications of alcoholism. Still, the Adamses carried on, performing what they considered their official duties, including a formal New Year's reception for invited guests, the continuation of President Adams's levees, and the receiving and returning of calls by his wife.<sup>115</sup> "I have no disposition to seclude myself from society," Abigail Adams wrote on January 15, 1801, despite "unkind or ungrateful returns from some."<sup>116</sup> She wished only to act her part well and retire with dignity.

On March 4, 1801, with his wife already back home in Massachusetts, John Adams abandoned his attempts to duplicate Washingtonian protocol. He not attend the installation of his successor, as President Washington had done four years earlier. Instead, in the early hours of the inaugural morning, the Federalist quietly departed Washington City, "angry and bitter at his rejection by the people her had served so

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<sup>114</sup> Abigail Adams to sister, Mary Smith Cranch, November 21, 1800, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 257.

<sup>115</sup> Image of an invitation to dine with President and Abigail Adams, January 1, 1801, <[http://www.whitehousehistory.org/whha\\_pictures/presidentshouse\\_adams-05.html](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/whha_pictures/presidentshouse_adams-05.html)> (March 9, 2013); December 9, 1800, Anna Maria Brodeau Thornton and Worthington C. Ford, "Diary of Mrs. William Thornton, 1800-1863," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 10, (1907): 219; Abigail Adams to daughter, Abigail Adams Smith, November 21, 1800, Abigail Adams and Charles Francis Adams, *Letters of Mrs. Adams: The Wife of John Adams with an Introductory Memoir by Her Grandson, Charles Francis Adams* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1840), 432-35; Abigail Adams to sister, Mary Cranch, January 15, 1801, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 263.

<sup>116</sup> Abigail Adams to sister, Mary Smith Cranch, January 15, 1801, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 263.

well."<sup>117</sup> At noon that same day, a simply clad Thomas Jefferson, “champion of human rights, the reformer of abuses,” stood on the small stage of a crowded Senate chamber, accepted the oath of office, and promised a “wise and frugal government.”<sup>118</sup> The Republicans were in, and ceremony, as the Federalists had fashioned it, was out.

During the next eight years, as Republicans tried to undo the perceived damage of their “aristocratical” predecessors, a remarkably calculated style of governmental informality reigned, not only with the elimination of levees but also in the decided minimizing of protocol surrounding all administrative activities.<sup>119</sup> Ceremonies such as state birthdays were abolished, and the executive mansion doors thrown open to local citizens and curious travelers. The president’s dress took on a style more like that of a farmer than of a head of state. And in place of receptions and formal affairs, Jefferson held his frequent, relatively small, dinner parties for worthy participants of America’s new government.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Page Smith, *John Adams*, 2: 1065.

<sup>118</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith and Gaillard Hunt, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906), 7; First Inaugural Address 1801, Peterson, *Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 293. Abigail Adams left Washington City in late February 1801, waiting only out to find out who the House would elect president, Abigail Adams to her sister Mary Cranch, January 7, 1801, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 264-65.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Phillip Mazzei, April 24, 1796, Peterson, *Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 470.

<sup>120</sup> For various interpretations of what Burstein and Isenberg called Jefferson's "commitment to democratic self-deprivation," see Henry Adams and Gordon Wood who both argued, like Isenberg and Bernstein, that Jefferson's "self-deprivation" was calculated. Wood, though, was more ready to appreciate that the “symbolic transformation of manners . . . reflected the growing number of citizens "who were decidedly not at home in polite society. Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 2010), 381; Henry Adams, *History of the*

The stripping of formal presidential protocol and ceremony was greatly facilitated by the government's move to the Potomac in 1800. As much as the Jeffersonians wanted to blame Federalists for instigating aristocratic manners into the new republic, the forms adopted by the Washington and Adams administrations were less King George III than they were the established practice of New York and Philadelphia gentry. Levees, drawing rooms, balls, and parades had long been fixtures of colonial cities, where the landed and mercantile elite of British America had taken what they knew of London society and made it their own.<sup>121</sup>

Washington City was different. Unlike in New York or Philadelphia, it had no entrenched society, either within its borders or nearby. Baltimore, a city of some 26,000, was only forty miles away; but it was a journey over treacherous roads and backcountry that, according to Gouverneur Morris, continued "up to the very doors" of his Washington inn.<sup>122</sup> Closer to the new capital was neighboring Georgetown. Although Abigail Adams described the town as "the very dirtiest Hole I ever saw," it featured neat rows of houses, a few shops, and the only market available.<sup>123</sup> It also encompassed

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*United States of America, During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 1: 187; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 288.

<sup>121</sup> Arthur Meier Schlesinger Sr., *Learning How to Behave: A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 9-14.

<sup>122</sup> Gouverneur Morris, November 1800, quoted in Gouverneur Morris and Anne Cary Morris, *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris: Minister of the United States to France; Member of the Constitutional Convention, Etc.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 2: 394.

<sup>123</sup> Abigail Adams to sister Mary Cranch, November 21, 1800, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 257. William Seale wrote that there was a market within walking distance from the executive mansion during Jefferson's first two years in office, and after that, a new one established several blocks to the west of the house. However, Jefferson's overseer, Edmund Bacon, on a visit in 1809, wrote that the steward would take

several large estates and a small, but solid, social class among its 3,000 inhabitants. Some were shipping merchants like Uriah Forrest and his business partner, Benjamin Stoddert. Stoddert built his Georgian-styled Halcyon House in 1783, in the manner of homes he had admired in Philadelphia. Uriah Forrest built his brick home at 3350 M Street approximately five years later.<sup>124</sup> Others established roots in Georgetown only after General Washington and Congress finalized the exact site of the new capital. By 1800, almost all of Georgetown was entangled, geographically, politically, and economically with the new capital. Any society that they had established prior to the national government's arrival became quickly indistinguishable from that in Washington City.

Like Georgetown, the Residence Act immediately affected Alexandria across the Potomac. By 1800, the town had almost doubled in size to approximately five thousand persons.<sup>125</sup> It had been included with the District boundaries at the request of President Washington. Congress agreed, but stipulated that all public buildings be erected "on the

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Jefferson's carriage driver and go "to Georgetown to market." Seale, *President's House*, 1: 102; Hamilton Wilcox Pierson and Edmund Bacon, *Jefferson at Monticello: The Private Life of Thomas Jefferson from Entirely New Materials* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1862), 114.

<sup>124</sup> "National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form," United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, July 2, 1973, page 3, <<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/73002084.pdf>> (March 14, 2013); Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Courtlandt Van Dyke Hubbard, *Historic Houses of Georgetown & Washington City* (Richmond, VA: Dietz Press, 1958), 22, 17.

<sup>125</sup> According to the United States census, the population of Alexandria City was 2,746 in 1790 and 4,971 in 1800. Georgetown population in 1800 was 2,993. There is no 1790 census for Georgetown proper, but its population at that time has been calculated at 2,135. United States Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, *District of Columbia Appropriations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1908, 192; "Who Settled Georgetown?," Glover Park History, <<http://gloverparkhistory.com/population/settlement/who-settled-georgetown/>> (March 22, 2013).

Maryland side of the river Potomac.<sup>126</sup> That stipulation meant that Alexandria would never be an integral part of the national government. Its distance from the Capitol Building, eight miles downriver across a broad expanse of the Potomac, also made it impractical as a residency for congressmen and other officials, who could ill-afford either the time or the expanse of shuttling back and forth between Alexandria and Washington City.<sup>127</sup> Alexandria had a budding merchant and planter class, many of whom interacted with Washingtonian society, but as a group, its gentry maintained a neighborly, but separate, community.

Washington also differed from the former capitals of New York and Philadelphia because it was, in many opinions, an outpost. Despite the growth stimulated by the Residence Act, and the pockets of genteel families, on the eve of Jefferson's inauguration, the entire area numbered only fourteen thousand persons residing, free and enslaved, in one hundred-plus square miles of muddy roads and half-completed buildings.<sup>128</sup> "You may look in almost any direction," wrote Oliver Wolcott, "over an

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<sup>126</sup> George Cochrane Hazelton, *The National Capitol: Its Architecture, Art and History* (New York: J. F. Taylor & Company, 1914), 4; Kenneth R. Bowling, *Creation of Washington D.C.: The Idea and Location of the American Capital* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1991), 126.

<sup>127</sup> In 1801, to travel from Alexandria to the Capitol Building, it was nine miles up and across the Potomac at Georgetown and then three miles back down into Washington City, or one could take the packet, which took an hour with a fair wind. The Long Bridge (14th Street Bridge) was built in 1809. Sarah Ridg, February 9, 1809, "Washington in 1809—A Pen Picture," Dairy of Sarah Ridg (Schuyler), January 3-November 2, 1809, Sarah Ridg Schuyler Diary, 1809, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>128</sup> In 1800, Washington City had 3, 210 residents, "Georgetown town," 2,993, "Alexandria town," 4,971, and the outlying areas of the District, an added 2,919 to total 14, 093 residents. Over a quarter of that number were enslaved, and a large number were laborers and craftsmen constructing the new government facilities. "Table 3. Population of the 33 Urban Places: 1800," United States Bureau of the Census,



extent of ground nearly as large as . . . New York, without seeing a fence or any object except brick kilns and temporary huts for labourers."<sup>129</sup> According to Wolcott, the people of Washington City were poor, and from what he could judge, "live like fishes, by eating each other."<sup>130</sup> Georgetown was "compact [and] tolerably well built," but "three miles distant" over a bad road.<sup>131</sup> Alexandria was the most "beautiful," with well-paved streets, but so far downriver from the public buildings that he, like every other chronicler of this period, did not consider that city an integral part of the district.<sup>132</sup>

By contrast, in 1800, 60,000 New Yorkers filled five boroughs and 305 square miles, while 41,000 Philadelphians wedged themselves into an approximately two square mile area, with another 20,000 to 30,000 on its fringe.<sup>133</sup> What those large populations

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<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab03.tt>> (March 14, 2013); "Table 1: Population of the District of Columbia," Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 21.

<sup>129</sup> Oliver Wolcott to Mrs. Wolcott, July 4, 1800, Oliver Wolcott Jr. and George Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams: Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury* (New York: Printed for the subscribers, William Van Norden, 1846), 2: 377-78.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 2: 377.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 2: 378, 2: 377.

<sup>132</sup> Oliver Wolcott to Mrs. Wolcott, July 17, 1800, Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, 2: 380.

<sup>133</sup> Census Bureau, "Table 3"; Thomas Wilson and James Mease, *Picture of Philadelphia, for 1824: Containing the "Picture of Philadelphia, for 1811, by James Mease, M. D." with All Its Improvements Since That Period* (Philadelphia: Thomas Town, 1823), 14, 36-37. In 1854, the original City of Philadelphia consolidated with outlying districts in hopes of improving issues of public safety and jurisdiction that pledged both Philadelphia and its thirty-nine municipal appendages. See Elizabeth M. Geffen, "Industrial Development and Social Crisis, 1841-1854," in Russell Frank Weigley, Nicholas B. Wainwright, and Edwin Wolf, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 359-62. For information on the newly revised square mileage of New York City, see Sam Roberts, "It's Still a Big City, Just Not Quite So Big," *New York Times*, May 22, 2008, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/22/nyregion/22shrink.html>> (March 15, 2013).



brought to both Philadelphia and New York, besides the obvious negatives, was the culture, sophistication, and wealth that stimulated society. These cities lacked none of the parks, malls, "churches, theatres, nor colleges" that one traveler found absent in the newly forming capital.<sup>134</sup> Neither did either city want for "such trifles" as "houses, cellars, kitchens, scholarly men [and] amiable women," commodities that Gouverneur Morris noted missing on the Potomac.<sup>135</sup>

The lack of culture was amplified by Washington City's raw landscape. The roads were unbearable: "deep ruts, rocks, and stumps of trees, every minute impede your progress, and threaten your limbs with dislocation."<sup>136</sup> The terrain could be swampy, although not as bad as some historians have depicted. Kenneth Bowling argued that only a few of the dozens of personal accounts mentioned swamps, and that of those who did, they were probably referring to periodic flooding in the "two small, low lying areas between the Tiber Creek and Pennsylvania Avenue."<sup>137</sup> Bowling could not imagine George Washington, who personally selected the area, choosing a swamp.

Whereas *muddy* might be a more honest description, there is foundation for the belief that the area could be swampy. Albert Gallatin referred to a large swamp dividing

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<sup>134</sup> Charles William Janson, *The Stranger in America 1793-1806* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, 1935), 211.

<sup>135</sup> Gouverneur Morris to the Princesse de la Tour et Taxis, December 14, 1800, Gouverneur Morris and Anne Cary Morris, *The Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris: Minister of the United States to France; Member of the Constitutional Convention, Etc.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 2: 394, English translation, 2: 395.

<sup>136</sup> Janson, *The Stranger in America*, 209.

<sup>137</sup> Bowling, *Creation of Washington D.C.*, 237-38.

part of the city.<sup>138</sup> John Cotton Smith spoke of “a deep morass” and areas of “marshy soil.”<sup>139</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith wrote of Jefferson often dismounting during his daily rides, to “wade through swamps.”<sup>140</sup> But an elderly Margaret Bayard Smith, looking back on her first years in Washington, remembered the terrain with fondness. “Between the foot of the hill and the broad Potomac extended a wide plain, through which the Tiber wound its way . . . Beautiful banks of the Tiber! delightful rambles! happy hours!”<sup>141</sup>

The new seat of government, although marshy in spots, generally sat on elevated ground, "mostly cleared and command[ing] a pleasing prospect of the Potomac River."<sup>142</sup> It was, though, a work in progress and it would remain so for decades. Late into the nineteenth century, observers continued to mock the Federal City's half-finished monuments, its "sorrowful little desert of cheap boarding houses," and the farm life that

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<sup>138</sup> Albert Gallatin to wife, Hannah Nicholson Gallatin, January 15, 1801, in Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Company, 1880), 252.

<sup>139</sup> John Cotton Smith and William W. Andrews, *The Correspondence and Miscellanies of the Hon. John Cotton Smith, LLD.: Formerly Governor of Connecticut with an Eulogy Pronounced Before the Connecticut Historical Society at New Haven, May 27th 1846* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847), 204-05.

<sup>140</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 393.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>142</sup> Manasseh Cutler to daughter, Betsy, December 21, 1801 (pleasing prospect), Manasseh Cutler, William Parker Cutler, and Julia Perkins Cutler, *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, L. L. D.* (Cincinnati: Clark & Company, 1888), 2: 50. In 1816, D. B. Warden wrote that the plan of the city was "universally admired," although with the summer heat and winter winds of the region, "narrow streets, affording shade and shelter" would have been more practical. David Bailie Warden, *A Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia: The Seat of the General Government of the United States* (Paris: Printed and Sold by Smith, 1816), 33-34.

accessorized streets better suited as canals.<sup>143</sup> As for the opinion of those arriving on the Potomac in 1800, Abigail Adams spoke for many when she wrote, "We have, indeed, come into *a new country*."<sup>144</sup>

Members of the second session of the Sixth Congress, the first to conduct business in the new seat of government, began filtering into the capital in early November 1800. One hundred and thirty-eight representatives required housing for the four-month session. Most found accommodations in boardinghouses, often sleeping two to a bed. Few brought their wives. The journey was difficult, and accommodations for a family were all but impossible to find. Albert Gallatin, lodging at Conrad and McMunn's boardinghouse, wrote that at the table, "we are from twenty-four to thirty, and, was it not for the presence of Mrs. Bailey and Mrs. Brown, would look like a refectory of monks."<sup>145</sup> The housing situation was problematic even forty years later when Representative Abraham Lincoln brought his wife and two small boys to Washington for a congressional session. The scarcity of affordable accommodations forced the family to take up quarters in a single room at Mrs. Sprigg's boardinghouse. In a male community unaccustomed to sharing close quarters with women or children, the unruly children were little missed at dinner when Mary Lincoln, miserable from a lack of friends and female

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<sup>143</sup> Samuel Langhorne Clemens and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* (New York: George Routledge and Sons, 1883), 171-72.

<sup>144</sup> Abigail Adams to daughter, Abigail Adams Smith, November 21, 1800, Charles Francis Adams, *Letters of Mrs. Adams*, 434.

<sup>145</sup> Albert Gallatin to wife, Hannah Nicholson Gallatin, January 15, 1801, Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, 253. Vice President Jefferson also lodged at "Messrs. Conrad and McMunn's apartments," noted in the *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, November 28, 1800.

company, decided to spend the rest of the congressional season visiting her father in Kentucky.<sup>146</sup>

What had long since formed in these boardinghouses, much to Mrs. Lincoln's dissatisfaction, were fraternal *messes*—distinct societies of congressmen bonded by close living quarters, the same dining table, and a masculine atmosphere that allowed for informal manners and open discussion.<sup>147</sup> How the messes formed changed over time. As Washington grew in size, each mess usually consisted of congressmen from the same geographic area. During the capital's earliest years, however, with fewer congressmen and fewer boardinghouses, the divisions tended to be by political party.<sup>148</sup> For example, during the second session of the Seventh Congress 1802-1803, a Miss Finigan boarded congressmen from New England and the middle states, but all were Federalists, while both Mr. Washington and Miss Burch roomed nothing but Republicans from various parts of the country.<sup>149</sup> Although gentlemen were known to switch houses in mid-session, the lodgings were of such a permanent nature that until the end of the Jefferson administration, the Congressional Directory listed members, not by state, but by mess.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 119-21.

<sup>147</sup> James Sterling Young, *Washington Community*, 100-01. See also Elijah Hunt Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, January 15, 1822, Elijah Hunt Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 19, (1881–1882): 32.

<sup>148</sup> Young, *Washington Community*, 99. By 1807, seventy-two percent of the area's boardinghouses accommodated messes from single geographic areas.

<sup>149</sup> Conclusions were drawn using United States Congress, James Sterling Young, and Perry M. Goldman, *The United States Congressional Directories, 1789-1840* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 41-42, and the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress: 1774-Present*, <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>> (March 22, 2013).

<sup>150</sup> Young, *Washington Community*, 100; Young, *United States Congressional Directories 1789-1840*. Original boardinghouse listings of the 1801 and 1805 sessions can also be

"Life within the boardinghouses combined the qualities of the fraternity house with those of the political club," wrote historian James Sterling Young.<sup>151</sup> Men ate together, smoked their pipes in the parlor together, and used each other as sounding boards in a relaxed atmosphere of "unvarying masculinity."<sup>152</sup> Their constant exposure to one another influenced votes in Congress, argued Young, where messes often voted in blocs.<sup>153</sup> The qualities inherent to these male-dominated lodgings could also be unpleasant. Senator Quincy of Massachusetts found boardinghouse life to be one of noise and intrusion. In 1806, Senator Plumer noted that living amid a mess of "rigid federalists" prevented him from inviting any "gentleman to call on me whose politics are different, lest these violent inmates should treat him with rudeness & insult."<sup>154</sup>

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found through "A list of the names of the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, according to States." *Early American Imprints* 2nd series; no. 1507, and *Early American Imprints* 2nd series; no. 9564, respectively. The lodging houses, themselves, were not locked into a certain party. In 1802-1803, the Frost boardinghouse lodged all Federalists; in 1807-1808, it roomed all Republicans, save one. (Calculated using *United States Congressional Directories* and *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*.)

<sup>151</sup> Young, *Washington Community*, 100.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 101. The quote, "unvarying masculinity," is from Daniel Webster, who used it in reference to all of Washington City. Daniel Webster to Mr. James H. Bingham, June 4, 1813, Daniel Webster, Fletcher Webster, and Edwin David Sanborn, *The Private Correspondence of Daniel Webster* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1857), 1: 234.

<sup>153</sup> Young, *Washington Community*, 103.

<sup>154</sup> Josiah Quincy, October 26, 1808, quoted in Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 142; William Plumer, March 18, 1806, William Plumer and Everett S. Brown, *William Plumer's Memorandum of Proceedings in the United States Senate 1803-1807* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 458. For the following session, Plumer moved from Captain Coyle's boardinghouse to that of Mr. Frost, whose clientele had been changing from Federalist in 1802 to Republican in 1808, much like Federalist Plumer. Plumer became New Hampshire's Republican governor in 1812. William Plumer, December 7, 1806, *Plumer's Memorandum*, 523, 622.

The fraternal atmosphere of early Washington did not stop at the front steps of its boardinghouses. Even the executive mansion took on the tone of a men's club after Thomas Jefferson moved in. He had no wife, and his two grown daughters generally stayed back in Virginia to raise their families. With some prodding, the two women had made an extended visit in late 1802. The younger daughter, Mary Jefferson Eppes, died in 1804, but Jefferson's elder daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, along with her many children, returned for a visit during the winter of 1805-1806.<sup>155</sup> Jefferson also enjoyed two short stays by the Madisons in 1801. Other than that, Jefferson, his secretary, and in some years his congressional sons-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph and John Wayles Eppes, lived like "mice in a church," amidst the unfinished splendor of the President's House.<sup>156</sup>

Precipitating this masculine atmosphere was the shortage of congressional wives. Distance, insufficient housing, expense, and the backcountry locale of the new Federal City kept most women from joining their husbands for the congressional season. Jefferson made a point of inviting all residing wives to dinner, Federalist or Republican,

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas Jefferson to daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, November 25, 1805, Mary Jefferson Eppes to Thomas Jefferson, November 5, 1802, Thomas Jefferson, Edwin Morris Betts, and James Adam Bear, *The Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1966), 283, 283n, 239; death of daughter, Mary (Maria) Jefferson Eppes, *ibid*, 259n.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Jefferson to daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, May 28, 1801, Betts and Bear, *Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, 202. The Madisons stayed with Jefferson for part of May 1801, before settling into their F Street home, and again for a few days in October 1801, after their house was freshly plastered, *ibid*, 202, 210. The executive mansion was called the President's House from the beginning. See, for example, Alexander White to Thomas Jefferson, August 8, 1801, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib010396>> (February 8, 2014).

but his presidential dinner records, kept from November 1804 through his retirement, never note more than two dozen such women, and usually far less.<sup>157</sup> During the 1804-1805 season, only twelve congressional wives are listed. Then, in the fall of 1807, Jefferson wrote daughter Martha Randolph, "We have little company of strangers in town this winter. The only ladies are the wives of Messrs. Newton, Thruston, W. Alton, Marion, Mumford, Blount, Adams, Cutts, and Mrs. Mc.Creary expected."<sup>158</sup> Those who did come to the capital normally departed immediately after the legislative session ended. "Our city is now almost deserted," wrote Dolley Madison after the close of Congress in 1804, "and will be more so in a week or two."<sup>159</sup>

The Madisons lived on F Street, not far from the executive mansion. Dolley Madison, unlike many other political wives, was never comfortable living apart from her husband. Her "brief stay in Philadelphia in 1805 for an ulcerated knee and Madison's select trips traveling without his wife" were the only times the couple were separated.<sup>160</sup> Thus, her relative permanence in the city, along with her outgoing personality and her

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<sup>157</sup> Photocopies of Jefferson's presidential dinner records are available through the microfilm edition of the Coolidge Collection of Thomas Jefferson Manuscripts, 1705-1828, at the Massachusetts Historical Society, reel 4. The White House Historical Association published digitized photographs of the dinner records in Charles T. Cullen, "Jefferson's White House Dinner Guests," *White House History*, no. 17 (Winter 2006): 30-37.

<sup>158</sup> Thomas Jefferson to daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, November 23, 1807, Betts and Bear, *Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, 315.

<sup>159</sup> Dolley Payne Madison to sister, Anna Payne Cutts, Dolley Madison and Lucia Beverly Cutts, *Memoirs and Letters of Dolly Madison, Wife of James Madison, President of the United States* (1886; Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971), 45. The letter is not dated, but the editor placed it between a letter written on April 9, 1804 and one written May 22, 1804.

<sup>160</sup> "James & Dolley Madison," James Madison's Montpelier, The Montpelier Foundation, <<http://www.montpelier.org/james-and-dolley-madison>> (June 28, 2014).

position as wife to the leading cabinet member, made Dolley Madison a prominent fixture in Washingtonian society from its beginnings. Those who comprised her social circle made up the District's first official society.

Many of the women in Washington's first official society had husbands who owed their political appointments to Jefferson. Three families had diplomatic titles. A few more came from the ranks of Congress, and the rest were part of the local elite economically and politically tied to the Republican Party. Washington society also included prominent Federalist families, like the Benjamin Stodderts and the John Tayloes. Being an "incurable and hopeless" high Federalist might keep a local citizen off the president's guest list, but the intimate nature of the village capital, along with the limited number of socially acceptable families, precluded any type of social inflexibility off the executive mansion grounds.<sup>161</sup> At times, public entertainments could be partisan, most commonly at party-sponsored dinners, but in a community in which "all of the city, ladies and gentlemen" meant 150 couples, one had to sacrifice partisan autonomy for "the amusements of social life."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Pierce Butler, August 26, 1801, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib010467>> (February 7, 2014).

<sup>162</sup> Albert Gallatin to wife, Hannah Nicholson Gallatin, July 7, 1802, Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin*, 253, speaking of a Fourth of July dinner at the Navy Yard; Augustus John Foster and Richard Beale Davis, *Jeffersonian America* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1954), 8. Gallatin complained in his letter that he did not care for occasions such as the July dinner, in which men of different politics mingled. Gallatin may have gotten his number from the newspaper, which reported the same estimate of 150 couples. "Washington City, July 7," *Democratic Republican, and Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), July 7, 1802.



This early Washingtonian gentility, so small in number, had to find their entertainments where they might. Concerts, art exhibits, museums, and theater events that served as gathering spots in metropolitan areas were largely unavailable in the new capital. In 1804, Jefferson wrote his daughter that "the place is remarkably dull . . . [even] the theatre fails . . . for want of actors."<sup>163</sup> Neither could Washingtonian society entertain itself with dinner at a fine hotel, or by strolling through a grand park, or even by an afternoon of leisurely shopping.

The availability of churches was also at a premium. In 1799, Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert, a native to the Potomac region, was living in Philadelphia with her husband, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert. She missed Georgetown, she wrote her sister, but not its lack of churches or markets.<sup>164</sup> By 1800, Georgetown supported at least four churches congregating in rudimentary facilities.<sup>165</sup> For those living in the newly established Washington City, the choices were fewer. The only church originally available to the incoming population was a converted tobacco house "fitted up as a church in the plainest and rudest manner."<sup>166</sup> Residents soon traded the tobacco house for the House chamber.

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<sup>163</sup> Thomas Jefferson to daughter, Martha Jefferson Randolph, December 3, 1804, Betts and Bear, *Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, 265.

<sup>164</sup> Rebecca Lowndes Stoddert to "My Dear Sister," February 3, 1799, Rebecca Stoddert Papers, 1766-1800, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>165</sup> Early churches of Georgetown found in William Benning Webb, John Wooldridge, and John Crew, *Centennial History of the City of Washington, D.C.: With Full Outline of the Natural Advantages, Accounts of the Indian Tribes, Selection of the Site, . . . Etc. to the Present Time* (Dayton, OH: United Brethren Publishing House, 1892), 534, 548, 560, 582.

<sup>166</sup> "Reminiscences" written in 1837, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 13.

The stately chamber provided more than a comfortable venue for a religious service, it supplied a location for Washington gentility to intermingle in grand style. Margaret Bayard Smith wrote that "these Sunday assemblies . . . were very little like a religious assembly."<sup>167</sup> They were more occasions for exhibiting the "beauty and fashion of the city."<sup>168</sup> Alan Taylor wrote that colonial Virginian gentry "displayed themselves in expensive clothes and refined manners before common audiences at church, taverns, cotillions, courthouses, and elections."<sup>169</sup> Their peacocking helped create an aura of gentility. Early Washington elite looked to create their own aura of gentility. With limited facilities from which to choose, they turned to Sunday services in the Capitol as occasions for display. The "sabbath-day-resort became so fashionable," wrote Margaret Bayard Smith, "that the floor of the house offered insufficient space . . . crowded [as it was] with ladies in their gayest costume and their attendant beaux . . . who led them to their seats with the same gallantry as is exhibited in a ball room."<sup>170</sup>

Congress supplied another entertainment for community elite. They filled its galleries with the enthusiasm of theatergoers, especially during times of heated legislative debates. And then there was the excitement of the horse races. In a city with so few other public options, horseracing could, as John Quincy Adams noted in 1803, shut down Congress. "No business of consequence was done in the Senate," he grouched on a

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 152.

<sup>170</sup> "Reminiscences" written in 1837, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 14.

November Monday, "and they adjourned early, until Thursday."<sup>171</sup> Officially, the recess was due to workmen needing to "repair the [chamber] ceiling," but Adams suspected another motive—the advent of the city's "annual horse races."<sup>172</sup> Representative Manasseh Cutler wrote that the races were attended by a great number of women in elegant dress, who arrived in impressive carriages, with "attendants and servants numerous."<sup>173</sup> If he had not known them as *Democrats*, he wrote, "I should have thought them the *Noblesse*."<sup>174</sup>

For gentlemen in the city, a number of public dinners offered opportunities to congregate socially. These occasions often honored the arrival of a dignitary or military hero, or were part of a formal celebration. On February 22, 1804, for example, "the federal part of both Houses" dined at Stelle's Hotel in celebration of Washington's birthday, while during the same week, the "Demo's had a dinner" applauding the

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<sup>171</sup> John Quincy Adams, November 7, 1803, John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia: J. B Lippincott & Company, 1874), 1: 272.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> November 12, 1803, Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 142, in a letter to Cutler's son added as a postscript by the editors.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* Even Jefferson joined in the fun of the races, listing "Paid at the races 2. D" on November 30, 1802 and "Paid at the races .25 c." on December 1, 1802. Thomas Jefferson, James A. Bear Jr., and Lucia C. Stanton, *Jefferson's Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826*, vol. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 2: 1087.

Louisiana purchase.<sup>175</sup> Other dinners, like that honoring Barbary War hero, General William Eaton, were generally bipartisan.<sup>176</sup>

President Jefferson provided some social diversion for the community, although of a different sort than what had been offered by the Washingtons and Adamses. Republican ideology ended the weekly gentlemen levees of the Federalist period. The weekly drawing rooms of Martha Washington and Abigail Adams were not replaced by the widowed Jefferson, even when his daughters were in residence,<sup>177</sup> On the other hand, the presidential grounds were available for strolling, and the doors of the mansion were open to visitors. The third president also maintained an exhausting schedule of private dinners, and he held each year, two public entertainments, one on New Year's Day, and the other on the Fourth of July.<sup>178</sup>

President Jefferson's New Year's reception was a continuation of what began under the first president. On January 1, 1790, Washington had held a levee for "Foreign public characters and all the respectable [male] Citizens," followed later in the day by "a great number of Gentlemen & Ladies" at Martha Washington's drawing room.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Cutler diary entry, February 22, 1804 (federal part), Manasseh Cutler to Mr. Poole, February 21, 1804 (Demo's), Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 154, 2: 163. Italics are Cutler's.

<sup>176</sup> A bipartisan committee that included staunch Federalist, John Tayloe, and staunch Republican, Samuel H. Smith, organized the Eaton dinner, *National Intelligencer & Washington Advertiser*, December 2, 1805.

<sup>177</sup> "Levees are done away," Jefferson assured Nathaniel Macon in in 1801. Thomas Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon, May 14, 1801, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib010052>> (February 7, 2014).

<sup>178</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 397.

<sup>179</sup> January 1, 1790, George Washington, Donald Jackson, and Dorothy Twohig, *The Diaries of George Washington, Volume VI, January 1790-December 1799*

Jefferson's receptions were public events, open to both men and women. No formal invitations were issued. The crowd included distinguished visitors to the city, foreign ministers and their suites, congressmen, administration officials, their wives and families, and the acknowledged local gentry. With few exceptions, everyone else knew to stay away.<sup>180</sup>

Federalist Manasseh Cutler wrote unenthusiastically about Jefferson's 1802 New Year's reception. "We went at eleven, were tolerably received, and treated to cake and wine. We had likewise, the honor of viewing the mammoth cheese. It had, a little before on this morning, been presented with all the parade of Democratic etiquette."<sup>181</sup> Republican Samuel Mitchill found the same reception more enjoyable. Unlike at home in New York, he explained to his wife, New Year's Day in Washington City did not include house-to-house visits. The place to be was at the president's mansion. "Arriving late," he wrote, "I met a whole troop of ladies and their attendant gallants . . . On passing the great hall and entering the withdrawing-room, I found still a large party there. The President was standing near the middle of the room, to salute and converse with visitors. The male

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(Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 1. By the twentieth century, the president's New Year's reception had become so inclusive that on January 1, 1932, President Herbert Hoover bravely shook more than six thousand hands. The following New Year he fled to Florida, promptly ending the 135-year presidential custom. Seale, *President's House*, 2: 901.

<sup>180</sup> Samuel Latham Mitchill to wife, Catharine Akerly Mitchill, January 4, 1802, Samuel Latham Mitchill, "Dr. Mitchill's Letters from Washington: 1801-1813," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 58, no. 347 (April 1879): 743.

<sup>181</sup> Manasseh Cutler to Dr. Torrey, January 4, 1802, Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 66. Cutler reported after the 1803 New Year's reception that the mammoth cheese was still in what Jefferson called the 'Mammoth Room.' Sixty pounds of it had been cut out of the center due to "puffing up and symptoms of decay." Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 116.

part of them walked about or made groups for conversation, while the ladies received the bows and adorations of the gentlemen,"<sup>182</sup> After graciously escorting "several of the fair creatures in succession to their carriages," Republican Mitchill stayed to chat quietly with Jefferson about political issues.<sup>183</sup>

The other Jefferson ritual was his annual Fourth of July celebration, held in midsummer for the more permanent residents of the district (the rest having abandoned the city after Congress adjourned in the spring). On the Fourth of July 1801, Samuel H. Smith, owner and editor of the *National Intelligencer*, wrote of a crowd that included five Cherokee chiefs, sideboards of foods, military bands playing patriotic airs, and Mr. Jefferson acting the perfect host.<sup>184</sup> In 1802, a Baltimore newspaper reported that the president "received the ladies of the city and George Town, and was waited upon generally by the citizens" at a celebration of "animated gaiety."<sup>185</sup>

Always a favorite day for Jefferson, the Fourth of July reception took on a special meaning in 1803 when news of the Louisiana treaty arrived at the capital only the night before. Smith described the festivities to his wife away in New York. "A discharge of 18 guns saluted the dawn, the military assembled exhibiting a martial appearance, at 11 o'clock an oration . . . at 12 company began to assemble at the President's; it was more

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<sup>182</sup> Samuel Latham Mitchill to wife, Catharine Akerly Mitchill, January 4, 1802, Samuel Latham Mitchill, "Dr. Mitchill's Letters from Washington: 1801-1813," 743.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Samuel Harrison Smith to his sister, Mary Ann Smith, July 5, 1801, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 30.

<sup>185</sup> "Washington City, July 7," *Democratic Republican and Commercial Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), July 7, 1802.

numerous that I have before marked it, enlivened too be the presence of between 40 and 50 ladies clothed in their best attire, cakes, punch, wine &c in profusion.”<sup>186</sup>

The local gentry relied on public festivities like the presidential receptions, the horse races, and the theatrics of church in the Capitol Building because few of them had the facilities to entertain privately. Congressmen, with or without their wives, were often confined to receiving guests in the drawing room of a boardinghouse. Even the better homes in the area got bad reviews from Europeans. English architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe described the city’s largest houses, with few exceptions, as “3 Stories high with 2 Rooms a passage and staircase on each floor, exactly on the plan of the h[ouse]s of the 3d Rate in London.”<sup>187</sup> The British minister and his wife felt compelled to purchase two neighboring houses in order to accommodate their staff and entertain appropriately. The legation's secretary, Augustus Foster, wrote that congressmen, living in cramped boardinghouses, relied on the invitations of “public functionaries and foreign envoys” for what “little amusement and relief . . . they could obtain after public business.”<sup>188</sup> With only two other foreign ministers residing in the capital, Washingtonians leaned most heavily on those “public functionaries” who had the appropriate accommodations for entertaining.<sup>189</sup> As Secretary Foster put it: “[Jefferson's] house and those of the Ministers

<sup>186</sup>Samuel Harrison Smith to his wife, Margaret Bayard Smith, July 5, 1803, in Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 38-39.

<sup>187</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to John Philip Morier, October 27, 1810, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, John C. Van Horne, Jeffrey A. Cohen, Darwin H. Stapleton, and Lee W. Formwalt, *The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Vol. 2: 1805-1810* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 922.

<sup>188</sup> Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, 9.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

being in fact almost necessary to [congressmen] unless they chose to live like bears, brutalized and stupefied . . . from hearing nothing but politics from morning to night."<sup>190</sup>

Perhaps because proper at-home entertaining was so limited, the making of calls, or carding, took on immense proportions in the capital. Carding never forced one to receive in cramped quarters, or to receive at all, but still provided the means for maintaining relationships and building social networks. The custom was European in origin. Established in America during the colonial period, it was dependent on gentry who did not answer their own front doors. Instead, a servant received potential visitors, took possession of their cards, and advised them as to the availability of the residents. Visitors were not offended, and often relieved, to hear that the family was not receiving. Socially, the leaving of a card was as good as a chat. A series of polite rejections enabled women in many cities to make quick work of visiting days, or as Timothy Dwight penned it, to "stop at thirty doors, in half a day, drop the gilt card, and proudly roll away."<sup>191</sup>

Unfortunately, Washington City's disagreeable roads and its "magnificent distances" made "thirty doors, in half a day" unrealistic.<sup>192</sup> Abigail Adams found the returning of calls exhausting. "My visitors [sic] . . . come three and four miles," she wrote her daughter. "The return of one of them is the work of one day; most of the ladies reside

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill: a Poem in Seven Parts* (New York: printed by Childs and Swaine, 1794), 48.

<sup>192</sup> "Magnificent distances," credited to José Francisco Correia da Serra, Portuguese foreign minister from 1816-1820. Abbé Correa refused to reside in Washington during his tenure, preferring the civility of Philadelphia. José Francisco Correia da Serra and Richard Beale Davis (*The Abbé Corrêa in America, 1812-1820: The Contributions of the Diplomat and Natural Philosopher to the Foundations of Our National Life* (Providence, RI: Gávea-Brown, 1993), 104-05; (thirty doors), Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 48.



in Georgetown or in scattered parts of the city at two and three miles distance. Mrs. Otis, my nearest neighbor, is at lodgings almost half a mile from me; Mrs. Senator Otis, two miles."<sup>193</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, who experienced Washington society off and on for over forty years, wrote that social life in the capital "had all the routine of a metropolitan season," except that one participated "at the risk of life."<sup>194</sup> The streets were ungraded, "the bridges consist[ed] of mere loose planks; and huge stumps of Trees . . . intercept[ed] every path."<sup>195</sup>

Men found local travel just as difficult. James Bayard complained that an invitation to dinner "costs you a ride of 6 or 8 miles and with the state of the road obliging you to return before night, you have just time to swallow your meat."<sup>196</sup> Gouverneur Morris wrote to a friend about the absurdities of accepting a simple invitation: "The weather clouds up; in the evening, coming away, my horses refuse to draw, and as I cannot get a hack I am obliged to stay all night. So much for dining out in a town where a man finds himself four miles from home, and a road not merely deep, but

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<sup>193</sup> Abigail Adams to daughter, Abigail Adams Smith, November 27, 1800, Abigail Adams and Charles Francis Adams, *Letters of Mrs. Adams: The Wife of John Adams with an Introductory Memoir by Her Grandson, Charles Francis Adams, Fourth Edition, Revised and Enlarged . . .* (Boston: Wilkins, Carter, and Company, 1848), 3: 385.

<sup>194</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, "The Adventures of a Nobody," manuscript, 158.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. See also Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel, Volume I* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), 237.

<sup>196</sup> James A. Bayard to Andrew Bayard, January 8, 1801, James A. Bayard and Elizabeth Donnan, "Papers of James A. Bayard, 1796-1815," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1913* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 2: 119.

dangerous, to drive in the dark."<sup>197</sup> The "society of this capital," he summarized, "would be pleasant if the communications were less difficult."<sup>198</sup>

While Washington's elite struggled to forge a proper genteel society in a city deficient in culture, housing, and good roads, on the executive grounds, the new president was at peace. "We shall have an agreeable society here," Jefferson promised James Madison, "and not too much of it."<sup>199</sup> Jefferson was comfortable with the countrified environment of this unspoiled Southern community. Where others saw trees and forests, Jefferson saw the foundation of a Republican Athens.<sup>200</sup> As the *National Intelligencer* reported euphorically only six months into the Jefferson presidency, here was a place, unlike others, where "a spirit of political tolerance reigns, and men, however different their opinions of public measures, unite with cordiality in the various intercourses of business and pleasure."<sup>201</sup> In such a city, his "Democratic-Majesty," as Federalists were wont to call him, might be lulled into thinking he had carte blanche to do as he pleased. That attitude, perhaps, is part of the reason for the social and political upheaval that followed.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> From an 1800 letter partially quoted in Morris, *Diary and Letters of Gouverneur Morris*, 395.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, March 12, 1801, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009784>> (March 21, 2013).

<sup>200</sup> For a vivid interpretation of Jefferson's vision for Washington, see Cynthia R. Field, *Paris on the Potomac: The French Influence on the Architecture and Art of Washington, D.C.* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008).

<sup>201</sup> "From the *National Intelligencer*, Sept. 7," *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, September 9, 1801.

<sup>202</sup> In 1804, Federalists Samuel Taggart and Manasseh Cutler referred to Thomas Jefferson as his "Democratic Majesty." Samuel Taggart to John Taylor, January 13, 1804,

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### DICTATING A REPUBLICAN SOCIETY—THE MERRY AFFAIR

*It is whispered that the British Ambassador  
is not at all charmed with [His] Democratic Majesty*  
—SAMUEL TAGGART<sup>203</sup>

Although many among Washington's political elite were holdovers from the headier days of Philadelphia and New York, by 1803, they had grown accustomed to both the provinciality of the Potomac region and the determined simplicity of the Jefferson administration. The city, for the most part, accepted Jefferson's private manner, his casual dress, his preference for frequent, informal dinners over ceremonious state affairs, and the sight of their president alone on horseback, instead of riding escorted in an official carriage. Those who bristled, mainly Federalists, "still [made] as much noise as if they were the whole nation," but they held no threat to the administration's method of conducting business.<sup>204</sup> Even members of the foreign legations, although more than willing to mock Republican forms of protocol (or lack there of), seemed to appreciate that with the informality came certain advantages. In Washington City, unlike in other capitals, foreign ministers dropped in on the chief executive at will, dined at his table

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Samuel Taggart and George Henry Haynes "Letters of Samuel Taggart, Representative in Congress, 1803-1814: Part I, 1803-1807," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Series 33 (April 11, 1923-October 17, 1923): 125; Manasseh Cutler diary entries on January 10, 1804, February 23, 1804, November 7, 1804, Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 155, 2: 158, 2: 171.

<sup>203</sup> Samuel Taggart to John Taylor, January 13, 1804, "Letters of Samuel Taggart," 125.

<sup>204</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Count de Volney, February 8, 1805, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib014337>> (February 8, 2014).

frequently and without ceremony, and enjoyed a friendly acquaintance with both the head of state and his cabinet.<sup>205</sup>

The diplomatic corps was a small group of charge d'affaires and envoys. The Danish sent Peder Pedersen, an unassuming man about whom little has been written. He represented Denmark from his residence in Philadelphia and showed up occasionally at a Jefferson dinner. Spain sent Don Carlos Martinez Yrujo, officially the Marquis de Casa Yrujo, who married Sally McKean, the daughter of Republican governor Thomas McKean. "He was a courtly, gallant figure," wrote Claude Bowers, "[who] had, on more than one occasion, given dignity to diplomacy by smoothing difference and reconciling his own country to our own."<sup>206</sup> Until the Louisiana Purchase and Florida land-claim issues, he was considered almost a family member at the executive mansion. From France, there was Louis André Pichon. Like Yrujo, he had served as a diplomat in Philadelphia during the Federalist period. He had personally experienced the diminished diplomatic protocol that distinguished Jefferson from his predecessors and had accepted it with good humor.<sup>207</sup> The British chargé *ad interim*, Edward Thornton, also had a long history in the new republic, having served as British vice-consul in Maryland since 1793.

<sup>205</sup> The president welcomed all visitors, without appointment. For the variety of dinners, formal and casual, to which the ministers attended, see Scofield, "Fatigues of His Table," 457. For images of the original dinner records, see Cullen, "Jefferson's White House Dinner Guests," 30-37.

<sup>206</sup> Claude G. Bowers, *Jefferson in Power* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1936), 316. Yrujo's father-in-law was a friend of Jefferson from Philadelphia (316). Yrujo's wife, Sally, was an "old and great" friend of Dolley Madison and her sisters. Dolley Madison, Holly C. Shulman, and David B. Mattern, *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 46.

<sup>207</sup> In 1804, Louis Marie Turreau replaced Pichon. Turreau was flamboyant and entertaining. Saved from a French prison by the gatekeeper's daughter he then married, his abusive treatment toward his wife was known throughout the city.

He, along with Pedersen, Yrujo, and Pichon had amended their expectations of protocol to fit their American posts, enjoying, for the consideration, an inflated position of social power among the minute Washington gentry and unprecedented access to the chief executive. For his part, Jefferson continued to conduct official hospitality in a manner that suited his Republican purposes and his personal style, in a city that offered up little resistance. The popularity of his dinners, the crowds at his New Year's and Fourth of July receptions, and his friendly relations with Washington society all suggested the irrefutability of his actions—a perception that rapidly changed with the arrival of new British Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary Anthony Merry.

Anthony Merry was the son of a London wine merchant, a career diplomat who had served in Madrid, Copenhagen, and Paris, and a man so dour that fellow Brits dubbed him *Toujours Gai*.<sup>208</sup> On November 26, 1803, he arrived at the American capital with his bride, innumerable crates, and certain expectations of diplomatic protocol. His wife, the intelligent, sharp-tongued Elizabeth Death Leathes Merry, immediately wrote her friend, Thomas Moore, with details of their Washington post. Proper living quarters had been

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<sup>208</sup> Augustus Foster to Lady Elizabeth Foster, December 30, 1804, Georgiana Cavendish Devonshire, Vere Foster, and Elizabeth Cavendish Devonshire, *The Two Duchesses, Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire, Elizabeth Duchess of Devonshire: Family Correspondence of and Relating to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, Earl of Bristol . . . and Others 1777-1859* (London: Blackie & Son, Limited, 1898), 196. *Toujours gai*, meaning always happy, or perhaps "the life of the party," was the motto on Merry's personal seal. Others found the association between man and term ironic. Malcolm Lester, *Anthony Merry Redivivus: A Reprisal of the British Minister to the United States, 1803-1806* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 9-10.

impossible to find, she opined. The people were ignorant and self-conceited, and the city, itself, “worse than the worst parts of Spain.”<sup>209</sup>

On instructions from James Madison, and with the secretary of state at his side, Merry presented his credentials to President Jefferson on November 29, 1803. Either not in the capital long enough to have gotten the particulars of Jefferson’s republican ways, or not believing they applied to his own presentation, Merry, bedecked in full ceremonial dress, was "introduced to a man as President of the United States, not merely in undress, but actually standing in slippers down to the heels."<sup>210</sup> The two previous presidents had greeted foreign ministers in full dress and the only other foreign minister to present his credentials to Jefferson, Peder Pedersen earlier that year, had been forewarned by his superiors that the president kept no formal etiquette.<sup>211</sup> Although Merry confessed to his

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<sup>209</sup> Elizabeth Merry to Thomas Moore, “Sunday, 1804,” Thomas Moore and John Russell *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore, Edited by the Right Honourable Lord John Russell, M. P.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1856), 8: 50-52. See also the same letter quoted in full by Allen Culling Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Washington, DC: Press of W. F. Roberts Company, 1914), 57-59.

<sup>210</sup> From notes taken by Josiah Quincy, January 1806, after hearing the story from Anthony Merry, and quoted in Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts*, 92-93.

<sup>211</sup> Peder Petersen, Washington, to the Royal Danish Foreign Office, October 2, 1803, from the research of Richard N. Côté, *Strength and Honor: The Life of Dolley Madison* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Corinthian Books, 2004), 395. Pedersen presented his papers in the fall of 1803. James Madison to Peder Pedersen, September 10, 1803, James Madison, David B. Mattern, J. C. A. Stagg, Ellen J. Barber, Anne Mandeville Colony, and Bradley J. Daigle, *Papers of James Madison, 16 May–31 October 1803*, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 400.

superior a pleasant conversation at that first meeting, the minister was insulted and under the impression that Jefferson had planned the embarrassment.<sup>212</sup>

Merry was then informed that it would be his responsibility to honor the cabinet members with a first call. Under the Federalists, foreign ministers had only made a first call on the secretary of state and had received the honor of a first call from all others. When Merry's mention of past procedures met with rebuff, he made the visits. The British minister was also to be denied a chair to the right of the vice president during sessions of the Senate. The elimination of this diplomatic privilege, insisted the administration, was not a personal slight but the result of some unexplained indiscretion by Spanish Minister Yrujo.<sup>213</sup> Amid these insults came an invitation to dine with the president.

The Merrys believed that the December 2, 1803 dinner was being given in their honor.<sup>214</sup> They had, after all, traveled months to reach the city; they represented one of the great empires of the world, and Merry was a high-ranking British official who might assume deference from an upstart nation and former colony. Certainly the guest list followed the lines of an affair of state, including among others, the Madisons, the Gallatins, Spanish Minister Don Carlos and Madame Yrujo, and French chargé d'affaires Louis André Pichon with his wife, Elizabeth.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Anthony Merry to Lord Hawkesbury, December 6, 1803, as quoted by Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 380.

<sup>213</sup> Lester, *Anthony Merry Redivivus*, 33.

<sup>214</sup> Anthony Merry to Lord Hawkesbury, December 6, 1803, as quoted by Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 370.

<sup>215</sup> Louis-Andre Pichon to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, February 5, 1804, as quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 369.

On the evening of the dinner, the guests arrived at the executive mansion, gathering in the presidential drawing room for introductions and light conversation before the start of dinner. The Merrys were somewhat disconcerted by the presence of the Pichons, given that Great Britain and France were at war, but they maintained their composure. The couple intended to exemplify by their own conduct the urbane sophistication they found sorely missing in the wilderness capital—a place where people bounced around in "coachies," and called "a dirty arm" of their river, the Tiber.<sup>216</sup>

A Jefferson dinner party invokes certain images. Ladies in silk gowns stand demurely beside gentlemen in cut-away coats and breeches, abundant food lines a mahogany table, and the air of future opulence filters through the plaster dust of the unfinished President's House. We see oil lamps pooling light in the darkening halls, imported wine in the glasses, and guests enjoying the company of a man who, as Henry Adams wrote, thoroughly understood the art of entertaining.<sup>217</sup>

All of that might have been true of this December evening, but none of it mattered in the weeks and months that followed. What would matter was a single act of discourtesy. As dinner was announced, the president turned to cabinet wife Dolley Madison, offered his arm, and walked her into the dining room. He left in his wake a flabbergasted Elizabeth Merry, who clearly had expected the president to escort her. Instead, Jefferson handed in the protesting Madison and sat her in the seat of honor, to his

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<sup>216</sup> Elizabeth Merry to Thomas Moore, "Sunday, 1804," Moore and Russell, *Memoirs, Journal, and Correspondence of Thomas Moore*, 8: 50, 52.

<sup>217</sup> Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Second Administration of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 2: 470. References to oil lamps and mahogany dining tables from William Seale, *President's House*, 1: 100-04.



right. Simultaneously, Sally Yrujo was placed to his left, while the rattled Elizabeth Merry, who had been escorted to the table by Secretary Madison, was seated unceremoniously below the Spanish minister. Elizabeth Merry's husband then scrambled for the place next to her, but lost it to a nameless congressman. Shocked, Anthony Merry snatched the first available chair, only to find that French minister Pichon had taken the seat directly across from him.<sup>218</sup>

Many of those at the dinner did not excuse the evening's events. For her part, Elizabeth Merry had assumed herself due the honor of a presidential escort because of her husband's position.<sup>219</sup> Other observers thought Jefferson's move went against Washington etiquette, which customarily gave distinguished newcomers precedence. Under that standard, and even if titles and diplomatic rank were studiously ignored, Elizabeth Merry warranted the president's arm, "by virtue of [her] being a stranger" to the city.<sup>220</sup> On the evening of the dinner, Madame Yrujo had predicted, "This will be cause of war," and both her husband and Anthony Merry wrote their home offices with unfavorable accounts of the occasion.<sup>221</sup> The situation was made worse four nights later when the foreign

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<sup>218</sup> The seating fiasco was reported by Merry in Anthony Merry to Lord Hawkesbury, December 6, 1803, as quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 369-70. Merry insisted that Jefferson looked on, neither "using any means to prevent" the debacle, nor "taking any care that [the British minister] might be otherwise placed."

<sup>219</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 8, 1804, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013083>> (February 8, 2014).

<sup>220</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, diary entry, November 12, 1812, Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer": A Biographical Sketch with Passing Notices of His Associates and Friends* (Boston: J. R. Osgood and Company, 1871), 84.

<sup>221</sup> Madame Yrujo's prediction related to Benjamin Tayloe by Dolley Madison years after the event. Benjamin Olge Tayloe and Winslow Marston Watson, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Olge Tayloe* (Washington, DC: Privately printed for family and friends, 1872),

ministers and their ladies dined at the Madison home. In a move that even French minister Pichon found studied, Madison ignored all of the ministerial wives in favor of escorting Secretary Albert Gallatin's wife, Hannah, to the table. "There is no doubt," Pichon wrote his superiors, "that Mr. Madison in this instance wished to establish in his house the same formality as at the President's, in order to make Mr. Merry feel more keenly the scandal he had made; but this incident increased it."<sup>222</sup> Madison put it differently. Writing James Monroe in England, he explained that, given what had taken place at the president's dinner, he was obligated to followed suite in his own home, since "the example could not with propriety be violated."<sup>223</sup>

The Federalist newspapers immediately attributed Jefferson's behavior to "pride, whim, weakness and malignant revenge."<sup>224</sup> The president had "indulge[d] his rancorous hatred against a nation . . . and at the same time gratif[ied] the feelings of many friends, who are constantly agitated by similar feelings."<sup>225</sup> The *United States Gazette* had been informed, mistakenly, that at the dinner "the secretary ladyships were led in, and seated according to their rank" above the British minister's wife.<sup>226</sup> It would seem, the paper wrote in response, that Jefferson believed "that the *secretaries and their wives*, (and a

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137. Lengthy quotes from the Merry and Yrujo reports can be found in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 369-71.

<sup>222</sup> Louis-Andre Pichon to Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, February 5, 1804, as quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 371.

<sup>223</sup> James Madison to James Monroe, January 19, 1804, James Madison and Robert Brugger, *The Papers of James Madison: 1 November 1803–31 March 1804* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 361.

<sup>224</sup> "Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman at Washington, Dated 2d January, 1804," *Washington Federalist*, January 30, 1804.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

pretty set of them there are) were the greatest people in the world, and all others must do homage to them."<sup>227</sup>

Jefferson defended himself in a letter to his minister in England, James Monroe. No insult had been intended. It was simply that "as [Mrs. Madison] was to do the honors of the table I handed her to dinner myself."<sup>228</sup> He blamed the entire incident not on Anthony Merry, whom he considered "a reasonable and good man"; but on Merry's wife, a woman of the "opposite character in every point," who had "disturbed our harmony greatly."<sup>229</sup> Jefferson did not mention to Monroe that he was in the process of creating an official code of etiquette that would conveniently clear him of all charges of misconduct toward the British couple, as well as clarify republicanism to the foreign legations.

The main points of Jefferson's canons of etiquette as laid out in an initial draft are as follows. One, that "residents shall pay the first visit to strangers." That included the "families of foreign ministers." Only one exception applied. "Foreign ministers . . . [will] pay the first visit to the ministers of the nation, which is returned." Two, no precedence would be given to inherited title or diplomatic rank, including the seating "at public ceremonies." Three, in Washington society, "all are perfectly equal, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office." This was Jefferson's doctrine of *pêle mêle*, meaning *at random*. As an extension, the canons requested that "[to] maintain the principle of equality, or of *pêle mêle* . . . the members of the Executive will practice at

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 8, 1804, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013083>> (February 8, 2014).

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

their own houses, and recommend an adherence [by others] . . . of gentlemen in mass giving precedence to the ladies in mass, in passing from one apartment where they are assembled into another."<sup>230</sup>

Each of the main points in Jefferson's draft could be linked to the incidents that had unfolded in the two months after the Merrys' arrival to the capital. Point one restated the president's insistence that Merry make first calls on his secretaries. By restricting the rule to the ministers, and not their families, Jefferson defended the actions of leading cabinet wife, Dolley Madison, who had quickly made a first call on Elizabeth Merry before all the confusion set in. Point two insisted that the new republic did not recognize titles or precedence, which explained away many of the perceived discourtesies to the Merrys. In point three, by dictating a society that passed *en masse* from room to room, ladies at random followed by men at random, Jefferson cleared himself of any indiscretions toward Elizabeth Merry—and, as the Federalists would be quick to mention, conjured up a vision of social chaos. By requesting that cabinet members follow his lead, Jefferson relieved Madison of any inappropriateness toward Elizabeth Merry in his own home four days after the president's dinner.

In a second draft of the rules, titled "Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive," Jefferson spoke more eloquently about the "principle of equality," and explicitly mentioned "dinners in public and private." He went so far in this second

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<sup>230</sup> Rules of Etiquette, [Nov.?, 1803], Thomas Jefferson and Paul Leicester Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), 8: 276-77. See also Rules of Etiquette, [November ?, 1803], Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009931>> (February 8, 2014).

version as to discuss the system of protocol to be used when a president visited a state capital. Both versions of the canons insisted on the same overall practice of pêle-mêle, as did a third version, which appeared in the Philadelphia *Aurora* on February 13, 1804.<sup>231</sup>

The *Aurora* version of the canons was Jefferson's only public statement on a broad administrative policy, and as close as he ever got to an edict. Washington and Adams both had accepted that presidential status entitled them to issue proclamations. Washington decreed a day of thanksgiving in 1789 and 1795. Adams announced days of fasting and prayer in 1798 and 1799. A nation formerly accustomed to the public orders of King George III was ambivalent in its acceptance of such decrees by the first two presidents, and tended, as could be expected, to divide along party lines. President Adams's days of fasting caused an uproar among Republicans. The *Porcupine's Gazette* pronounced the 1798 edict as "one of those apparently humble, hypocritical and delusive methods Tyrants have universally [employed] . . . for oppressing the people."<sup>232</sup> In 1812, the retired John Adams blamed the 1799 "national fast" for his defeat against Jefferson in 1800.<sup>233</sup> His enemies had branded it a step toward the establishment of a national church.

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<sup>231</sup> Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive, December 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (February 8, 2014); "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804. Jefferson's "Canons of Etiquette" is quite polished, but still an incomplete draft. At one point, Jefferson wrote only "12. The Presidents family in public or private" without further expansion.

<sup>232</sup> *Porcupine's Gazette*, April 26, 1798 as quoted in Richard N. Rosenfeld and William Duane, *American Aurora: A Democratic-Republican Returns: The Suppressed History of Our Nation's Beginnings and the Heroic Newspaper That Tried to Report It* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 92.

<sup>233</sup> John Adams to Benjamin Rush, June 12, 1812, John Adams, *Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle*, 392.

"Nothing," wrote Adams, "is more dreaded than the National Government meddling with Religion."<sup>234</sup>

Now, Jefferson was using the same "humble, hypocritical" method to proclaim a national etiquette. Reaction to his canons fared no better in the Federalist press than Adams's decree on fasting had fared with the Republicans.<sup>235</sup> The *Washington Federalist* dubbed the guidelines, "Etiquette of the Court of the U. States."<sup>236</sup> The paper mockingly recommended "that hereafter at all official dinners, ladies shall be led to the dining room according to *seniority, the oldest first*; Maiden Ladies, above seven and twenty to have the privilege . . . of going in when they please."<sup>237</sup>

In response to the criticism, Jefferson wrote a third, and last, version of the canons, which he turned over to William Duane of the *Aurora*.<sup>238</sup> The paper published the draft on February 13, 1804, without acknowledging the president's involvement. Prefacing the canons was a direct retort to the *Washington Federalist's* accusations of a court society. "There has been had been *no* 'Court of the U. S.' since the *4th March* 1801," Jefferson wrote.<sup>239</sup> "That day buried levees, birth-days, royal parades, processions with white wands and the arrogation of precedence in society."<sup>240</sup> He then followed with

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 393.

<sup>235</sup> *Porcupine's Gazette*, April 26, 1798, in Rosenfeld and Duane, *American Aurora*, 92.

<sup>236</sup> Communications: Etiquette of the Court of the U. States," *The Washington Federalist*, February 1, 1804.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. See also Joel Larus, "Growing Pains of the New Republic: III, Pell-Mell Along the Potomac," *William and Mary Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (July 1960): 356.

<sup>238</sup> Thomas Jefferson, February 1804, Response to Etiquette of the Court of U. S., Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013233>> (February 8, 2014).

<sup>239</sup> "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

fifty-one lines of anti-court protocol, this time tweaked to emphasize the similarity of certain of its rules to "English principle" and to remind "diplomatic gentlemen . . . [of] the right of every nation to establish or alter *its own rules of intercourse*."<sup>241</sup>

All of this played out in a city enthusiastically taking sides. Architect Benjamin Latrobe wrote from Washington on February 6, 1804: "We are here as busy in paying visits, and receiving them, in playing loo, and in quarreling about etiquette as you please. By *we* I do not mean myself or even my family, but the great world in general. *We* have this advantage, that without a Theatre, *we* are acting a dozen farces at once, some of them tragi-comedies, others pure burlesque."<sup>242</sup> Two weeks later Latrobe wrote to another friend, "I have ventured into the evenings . . . and have witnessed some of the absurdities which the new etiquette has introduced. [Mrs. Merry] has now withdrawn from all evening Society excepting of one or two families, but the Marchioness D'Yrujo who does go into society has now taken up the claim to *universal* precedence, and some times meets with a little mortification and disappointment."<sup>243</sup>

Latrobe blamed Jefferson for the initial flare-up, writing that the president's treatment of Elizabeth Merry was not "correct or politic."<sup>244</sup> Jefferson blamed the Merrys

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to George Davis, February 6, 1804, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, John C. Van Horne, and Lee W. Formwalt, *The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Vol. 1: 1784-1804* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 232.

<sup>243</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to Joshua Gilpin, February 20, 1804, Van Horne and Formwalt, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Vol. 1*, 434.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

and the Yrujos, who had "enveloped" the city with their "questions of etiquette."<sup>245</sup> He "rejoice[d]" that his daughters were not in town.<sup>246</sup> "The brunt of the battle," Jefferson wrote them, "now falls on the Secretary's ladies, who are dragged in the dirt of every federal paper. You would have been the victims had you been here, and butchered the more bloodily as they would hope it would be more felt by myself."<sup>247</sup>

Gossip flared up again in the weeks following the December 2, 1803, dinner when Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother, Jerome, arrived at the capital with his beautiful American bride. While Jefferson may have ignored Mrs. Merry, the lovely Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte had not suffered the same treatment. As his dinner guest, and despite the newly imposed etiquette codes, Jefferson graciously extended his arm to the young Madame Bonaparte and escorted her to the table.<sup>248</sup> The Republican women of Washington cruelly compared the two respective women. Elizabeth Bonaparte was slim

<sup>245</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, January 23, 1804, Betts and Bear, *Family Letters of Thomas Jefferson*, 255.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. Elizabeth Merry proved herself a woman who could hold a grudge. When Martha, whose husband served in Congress, arrived for a visit two winters after the Merry dinner, the British minister's wife sent her a biting note. It enquired if Mrs. Randolph were in town as the president's daughter or as a congressman's wife. According to her father's own rules, in the first case, Elizabeth Merry would make the first call, in the second, Martha Randolph. Martha wrote back that she "claimed no distinction whatever, but wished only for the same consideration extended to other strangers." Elizabeth Merry made the first call. Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 404-05. According to Jefferson's rules, strangers received first precedence.

<sup>248</sup> Andre-Louis Pichon to Talleyrand, February 5, 1804, as quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 374.



of form and scant of dress; Elizabeth Merry was buxom and gaudy, draped in “a mélange of satin and crepe and spangles.”<sup>249</sup>

Because Anthony Merry had reported his displeasure to London, both Jefferson and Madison wrote James Monroe with explanations and instructions on how to minimize the event overseas. In Washington City, a number of Republican families attempted to defuse the commotion. Secretary of the navy, Robert Smith, invited the couple to dinner, making it clear beforehand that he planned to escort Elizabeth Merry into dinner. Pichon wrote his superiors that the couple declined, but another guest at the party wrote of Mrs. Merry's being there, dressed to attract "great attention."<sup>250</sup> Cabinet wives then endeavored to include Elizabeth Merry in their society. Six months after the December dinner, however, Dolley Madison was writing her sister that "Mrs. Merry is still the same . . . she hardly associates with any one."<sup>251</sup> In the meantime, the president elected to bypass Elizabeth Merry completely, asking his secretary of state to inquire if the British minister would be receptive to dining at the mansion without his wife. After receiving some indication that he might, Jefferson sent out the invitation.

Under Washington and Adams, it was "The President of the United States" who requested the pleasure of one's company to dine, but in this new administration, the

<sup>249</sup> Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*, 732.

<sup>250</sup> Louis-Andre Pichon to Talleyrand, February 5, 1804, quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 375; Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kilpatrick, January 23, 1804, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 45.

<sup>251</sup> Dolley Madison to Anna Payne Cutts, May 25, 1804, The Dolley Madison Project: Exhibit, Holly C. Shulman, The Dolley Madison Digital Edition, <<http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/madison/exhibit/washington/letters/052504.html>> (November 4, 2013).

invitation came from "Th: Jefferson."<sup>252</sup> It was a change in protocol that not all congressmen found appropriate, and an act of republicanism that played against him when dealing with Anthony Merry.<sup>253</sup> In response to Jefferson's invitation to dine on February 13, 1804, the British minister wrote Secretary Madison a sardonic decline. It seemed, Merry explained, that he had "engaged some company to dine with him on that day."<sup>254</sup> Of course, he would have sent apologies to his own guests and attended the Jefferson dinner if the invitation had come from "the chief magistrate of the U.S."<sup>255</sup> However, Jefferson's invitation appeared to be a private one, in that "*Th: Jefferson* ask[ed] the favor."<sup>256</sup> In order to accept a private invitation he would, unfortunately, need clearance from his superiors. Both Jefferson and Madison saw the hand of the minister's wife behind the offensive letter. Madison declared that the manners of Mrs. Merry

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<sup>252</sup> For samples of presidential dinner invitations from the Washington, Adams, and Jefferson presidencies, see George Washington to James Madison Jr., December 16, 1796, Card of Invitation, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799, Series 4, General Correspondence.1697-1799, Library of Congress, <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>> (April 15, 2013); "The First Invitation to Dinner at the White House," image, <[http://www.whitehousehistory.org/whha\\_classroom/images/classroom\\_4-002.jpg](http://www.whitehousehistory.org/whha_classroom/images/classroom_4-002.jpg)> (May 10, 2014); Jefferson invitation, Seale, *President's House*, 1: ill. 16.

<sup>253</sup> Federalist Senator William Plumer, noted that, although "It is *Th: Jefferson* not the *President* of the United States that invites—" if he were "not the President I presume I should not be invited." William Plumer, December 3, 1804, Plumer, *Memorandum*, 211.

<sup>254</sup> James Madison to James Monroe, February 16, 1804, James Madison and Gaillard Hunt, *The Writings of James Madison, Comprising His Public Papers and His Private Correspondence, Including Numerous Letters and Documents Now for the First Time Printed* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910), 7: 121-22. In the letter, Madison enclosed a copy of both the invitation and the formal decline he received from Anthony Merry. See also, Anthony Merry to James Madison, February 9, 1804, Brugger, *The Papers of James Madison: 1 November 1803–31 March 1804*, 460.

<sup>255</sup> James Madison to James Monroe, February 16, 1804, Hunt, *The Writings of James Madison*, 122.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

“disgust both sexes and all parties,” and Jefferson predicted that, unless she adapted to the local mores, she would be forced to “eat her soup at home.”<sup>257</sup>

In London, James Monroe kept a close eye on Britain's response to the Merry affair. He noted, too, that he and his wife, Elizabeth, were being ignored by some of London's political society. "Lord Hawkesbury had not been kind . . . [and] In the Queen's drawing-room [Charlotte] had passed him without sign of recognition, though he ascribed the apparent slight to her age or a defect of vision."<sup>258</sup> Because the Monroes had "no reason to be satisfied with the station we appear to have held [before the incident]," they accepted with grace the one they "now hold."<sup>259</sup> Monroe's objective, he wrote Madison, was "to excite no discussion."<sup>260</sup>

Eventually the issue found its way into English papers, but the publicity must have disappointed Minister Merry. “Really, it is somewhat mortifying,” argued one British newspaper, “that we should run even the most slight risk of injury to our public interest from a cause so trifling as that whether Mrs. Merry, of whom none of us ever before heard, is or is not permitted to take the *pas* of Mrs. Maddison [sic] or Mrs.

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<sup>257</sup> James Madison to James Monroe, February 16, 1804, Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*, 7:121; Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 8, 1804, The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013083>> (February 8, 2014).

<sup>258</sup> Bowers, *Jefferson in Power*, 42; James Monroe to James Madison, March 3, 1804, James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, March 15, 1804, James Monroe and Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, *The Writings of James Monroe: Including a Collection of His Public and Private Papers and Correspondence Now for the First Time Printed* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900) 4: 150-51, 4: 157-58.

<sup>259</sup> James Monroe to James Madison, March 3, 1804, Hamilton, *The Writings of James Monroe*, 4: 150.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid*, 4: 151.

Gallatin."<sup>261</sup> In the end, the monarchy refused to make etiquette a cause for war. According to Merry biographer, Malcolm Lester, the British minister's request for official instructions regarding the incident went unanswered.<sup>262</sup> Monroe thought otherwise. In April, he wrote Madison that "no one in power" had spoken to him of the "aff" with Mr. Merry."<sup>263</sup> Because of that, he was satisfied that Merry had been sent orders "to conform with whatever rules our gov<sup>t</sup> adopted."<sup>264</sup> Monroe was stunned that a foreign minister had "attempt[ed] to dictate to any government, how it is to behave."<sup>265</sup> Certainly, in London, he wrote Madison, the ministers accepted what little attention was paid them without complaint. Minister Merry, and his supporter, Spanish Minister Yrujo, had taken liberties Monroe could not accept. That disapproval of their boldness would later affect how Monroe handled Washington's *corps diplomatique* during his own presidency.<sup>266</sup>

For their part, neither Elizabeth nor Anthony Merry would be extended another presidential invitation during their remaining two years in Washington. Minister Merry attended the New Year's receptions, but left each time feeling the president had slighted him. Still, the Merrys did not eat their soup alone. Although they had "exiled themselves from the best table in Washington," the couple entertained lavishly to a select circle of

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<sup>261</sup> "Mr. Merry," *Cobbett's Annual Register*, February 11 to February 18, 1804, in *Cobbett's Political Register, Volume 5*, January to June, 1804 (London: Printed by Cox and Baylis, 1804), 250.

<sup>262</sup> Lester, *Anthony Merry Redivivus*, 44.

<sup>263</sup> James Monroe to James Madison, April 26, 1804, Hamilton, *The Writings of James Monroe*, 4: 170.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 4: 170-71.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

Washingtonians, and had their own following.<sup>267</sup> Republican Aaron Burr wrote his daughter of Mrs. Merry's "grace and dignity, ease and sprightliness."<sup>268</sup> Federalist Manasseh Cutler, a frequent guest, found Elizabeth Merry to be not only a fine botanist but also "very accomplished and agreeable."<sup>269</sup>

In May 1806, the British minister received a dispatch from his home office. "In consequence of your long-continued ill State of Health, His Majesty is graciously pleased to grant you Leave of Absence to return to this Country."<sup>270</sup> This was the final disgrace, and at the hands of his own country. Anthony Merry was neither ill nor had he applied for leave. Rather he was the victim of changes in the British government when William Pitt died in early 1806.<sup>271</sup> In the reassignments that followed, Merry's ally in the foreign affairs department, George Hammond, was replaced by Charles James Fox, who found Merry "unacceptable . . . both personally and politically."<sup>272</sup> With the arrival to

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<sup>267</sup> Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President: First Term, 1801-1805* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 392. At one Merry dinner, Federalist Cutler reported "Company 28, 13 members of Congress. Table superb, the plate in the center, and in the last service, the knives, forks, and spoons were gold. Six double-branched, silver candlesticks, with candles lighted." Manasseh Cutler diary entry, February 12, 1805, Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 183.

<sup>268</sup> Aaron Burr to daughter, Theodosia Burr Alston, January 17, 1804, Aaron Burr and Matthew Livingston Davis, *Memoirs of Aaron Burr: With Miscellaneous Selections from His Correspondence* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), 2: 269.

<sup>269</sup> Manasseh Cutler to Mrs. Torrey, February 21, 1805, Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Manasseh Cutler*, 2: 190.

<sup>270</sup> Bernard Mayo, "Instructions to British Ministers, 1791-1812," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* *fid*, or *the Year 1936*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 220.

<sup>271</sup> Lester, *Anthony Merry Redivivus*, 115.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, 115-16.

Washington City of the new British minister, David Montagu Erskine, and his *American* wife, the Merrys departed for Europe.<sup>273</sup>

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Thomas Jefferson was known for his non-confrontational demeanor, his hospitality, and his avoidance of public debate and controversy. In 1808, the president advised his grandson that politeness was a cheap price to pay "for the good will of another."<sup>274</sup> It deprives us, Jefferson wrote, "of nothing worth a moment's consideration," but renders its recipients "pleased with us as well as themselves."<sup>275</sup> That general sense of "genial mien," wrote Jon Meacham, "lay in the Virginia culture of grace and hospitality; another factor was a calculated decision . . . that direct conflict was unproductive and ineffective [politically]."<sup>276</sup> How then, given Jefferson's sage advice, his propensity for calm waters, and his political shrewdness, did the Merry Affair ever occur under his watch?

Anthony Merry's first experience with the president, in which Jefferson appeared "in slippers down to the heels," may not have been meant as a personal affront to the new minister.<sup>277</sup> Jefferson had made a similar fashion statement at the Danish minister's presentation, and, in truth, remarks about his casual dress had been following him for years. While in France as America's minister plenipotentiary, Jefferson had been deemed

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<sup>273</sup> Lord David Erskine was married to Frances Cadwalader, daughter of Pennsylvanian John Cadwalader, a patriot general during the Revolutionary War.

<sup>274</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Jefferson Randolph, November 24, 1808, Peterson, *Portable Thomas Jefferson*, 512.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power*, 308.

<sup>277</sup> Josiah Quincy, January 1806, Edward Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts*, 93.

by one young admirer, the "plainest man" at court.<sup>278</sup> Pennsylvania Senator William Maclay noted, in 1790, that Jefferson's "clothes seem too small for him."<sup>279</sup> Becoming president did not alter Jefferson's style; it may have enhanced it. Many a dinner guest at the executive mansion commented on the degree to which their host was, or was not, attired appropriately. Sir Augustus Foster, the British foreign secretary, wrote of one dinner in which the president "wore a blue coat . . . yarn stockings and slippers down at the heel, his appearance being very much like that of a tall large-boned farmer."<sup>280</sup> And Hannah Gallatin's niece, Frances Few, present at a Jefferson dinner, noted that her "very agreeable" host was distinguished from his guests only by "the shabbiness of his dress."<sup>281</sup>

Margaret Bayard Smith defended Jefferson's wardrobe as "plain, unstudied and sometimes old-fashioned . . . [but] it was always of the finest materials."<sup>282</sup> Contrarily, historian Henry Adams found Jefferson's attire calculated. The president, he insisted, "seemed to regard his peculiar style of dress as a matter of political importance," one that

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<sup>278</sup> Thomas L. Shippen to Dr. William Shippen, January 9, 1788, "Letters of Thomas Shippen to his father, Feb./Mar. 1788," Thomas Jefferson and Julian Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Volume 12, 7 August 1787 to 31 March 1788* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), 504.

<sup>279</sup> William Maclay, May 24, 1790, William Maclay and George W. Harris, *Sketches of Debate in the First Senate of the United States, in 1789-90-91* (Harrisburg, PA: Lane S. Hart, Printer and Binder, 1880), 212.

<sup>280</sup> Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, 10.

<sup>281</sup> Frances Few, October 19, 1808, Frances Few and Noble E. Cunningham, "Notes and Documents: The Diary of Frances Few, 1808-1809," *Journal of Southern History* 29 (August 1963): 350.

<sup>282</sup> "President's House Forty Years Ago," Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 386.

intentionally displayed his republican values.<sup>283</sup> Interestingly enough, Jefferson's manner of dress at Anthony Merry's introduction imitated his own presentation at Versailles fifteen years earlier. There, King Louis XVI formally received the new United States Minister to France in a state of undress, "just pulling on his coat, a servant . . . tying his [unpowdered] hair," and his sword belt yet attached.<sup>284</sup> Whatever the meaning of Jefferson's attire, in regards to the British minister's official introduction to the president, his "utter slovenliness and indifference to appearances" was not unique to that occasion.<sup>285</sup>

If Jefferson's dress was in his usual manner, his behavior surrounding the December 2, 1803, dinner was not. To begin with, he coaxed the French chargé d'affaires, Louis-Andre Pichon, to return early from Baltimore to attend the affair. "The President was so obliging as to urge my return," Pichon wrote his superior, "in order to be present with Mme. Pichon at the dinner. I came back here, although business required a longer stay in Baltimore. Apart from the reason of respect due the President, I had that of witnessing what might happen."<sup>286</sup> Thus, Jefferson, generally hesitated to sit at his table a

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<sup>283</sup> Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 1: 187.

<sup>284</sup> Thomas L. Shippen to his father, Dr. William Shippen, January 9, 1788, Boyd, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Volume 12*, 503.

<sup>285</sup> From notes taken by Josiah Quincy, January 1806, after hearing the story from Anthony Merry, and quoted in Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts*, 92-93.

<sup>286</sup> Louis-Andre Pichon to Talleyrand, February 5, 1804, quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 369.



Federalist with a Republican for fear of discord, had gone to some lengths to see that his dinner included two representatives from warring nations.<sup>287</sup>

As for the president escorting Dolley Madison to his table instead of Elizabeth Merry, historian Claude Bowers argued that Jefferson was retaliating for his own ill treatment at the Court of St. James. Jefferson had found his 1786 introduction to King George III very unpleasant, writing in his autobiography that "it was impossible for anything to be more ungracious, than their notice of Mr. Adams and myself" at the royal levee.<sup>288</sup> If Jefferson supposed himself mistreated by the British court in 1786 that might have been a reason for retaliation. However, he had already dealt pleasantly with the three British foreign ministers before Merry, beginning when he was secretary of state under Washington.<sup>289</sup> There was no reason for him to randomly vent an old grudge on this fourth British minister.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Jefferson's dinner records, 1805-1809, prove he normally invited either Republicans or Federalists to dinner. Jon Meacham made a case for Jefferson's dislike of confrontation, as did R. B. Bernstein and William Freehling. Jon Meacham, *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* (New York: Random House, 2012), 9, 395, 365; R. B. Bernstein, *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 81; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 129.

<sup>288</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography of Thos. Jefferson* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1959), 75.

<sup>289</sup> George Hammond served as the British envoy from 1791-1795. Jefferson was secretary of state, 1790-1793. Phineas Bond served as chargé d'affaires *ad interim* from 1795-1796, but Jefferson was at Monticello during that period. Robert Liston served from 1796-1800, while Jefferson was vice president (1787-1801). Edward Thornton was chargé d'affaires *ad interim* from 1800 until the arrival of Anthony Merry in late 1803. Charles Lanman, *Biographical Annals of the Civil Government of the United States: During Its First Century: From Original and Official Sources* (Washington, DC: James Anglim, 1876), 616.

<sup>290</sup> Charles R. Ritcheson, "The Fragile Memory: Thomas Jefferson at the Court of George III," *Eighteenth Century Life* 6 (1981): 1-16. Ritcheson questioned Jefferson's memories,

Edward Thornton, the former British chargé d'affaires *ad interim*, advanced a different rationale for Jefferson's behavior. Thornton argued that the purchase of Louisiana had abruptly changed the American government's attitude toward the Crown. It created "ill-will" where none had been before and caused the Americans to lean more heavily toward an alliance with France, whose continued benevolence it needed "in order to support their [territorial] demands against Spain."<sup>291</sup> Moreover, wrote Thornton, the cession had "lifted Jefferson, beyond imagination, in his own opinion."<sup>292</sup> The result, according to the diplomat, was Jefferson's arrogant behavior toward the Merrys, his insistence on including France's Pichon at the December 2 dinner, and cause for the stark contrast between his neglect of Mrs. Merry and his gracious attentiveness toward the new Mrs. Jerome Bonaparte.

Although James Madison admitted to "the U. S. having now less need of the friendship of Britain," the secretary of state denied rumors put forth by observers like Thornton that the American government was "yielding to a latent enmity" towards the British."<sup>293</sup> The best proof to the contrary, he wrote James Monroe in England, came with the president's own wishes that Monroe do whatever necessary to convince the British government that "the United States is sincerely and anxiously disposed to cultivate

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arguing that they were that of an old man confusing his dislike of the British with his treatment at their court.

<sup>291</sup> Edward Thornton to George Hammond, January 29, 1804, quoted in Beckles Willson, *Friendly Relations: A Narrative of Britain's Ministers and Ambassadors to America (1791-1930)* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934), 43; also quoted in Henry Adams, *First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 387.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> James Madison to James Monroe, February 16, 1804, Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*, 7: 120.

harmony between the two nations."<sup>294</sup> Jefferson, too, wrote Monroe. "We learn that Thornton thinks we are not as friendly now to Great Britain as before our acquisition of Louisiana. This is totally without foundation. Our friendship to that nation is cordial and sincere."<sup>295</sup> As it was, he added, "with France."<sup>296</sup>

Madison also insisted to Monroe that what others were calling a sudden change in official protocol was, in actuality, business as usual. Had not the "old Congress" at official ceremonies placed foreign secretaries, not by title and importance, but "according to the order in which their Gov. acknowledged by Treaties the Independence" of the new nation?"<sup>297</sup> Had not Jefferson, in "handing first to the table" a cabinet wife instead of Elizabeth Merry, only followed the same "general rule of *pele mele*" that he had applied in other cases?<sup>298</sup> And why, argued Madison, would Spain's Minister Yrujo complain of diplomatic insults to the Merrys when he had "acquiesced for nearly three years in the practice ag[ainst] which he now revolts"?<sup>299</sup>

Jefferson's own letter to James Monroe contended that the handing in of Dolley Madison had followed his standard practice and had not been meant to offend. It had been his habit, he wrote his minister to England, "(having no lady in my family) to ask

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 8, 1804, The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013083>> (April 22, 2013).

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

one of the ladies of the 4. secretaries to come & take care of my company."<sup>300</sup> Because Mrs. Madison "was to do the honors of the table," he escorted her to the table. Madison family lore, though, disputes the normalcy of that evening and insists that Dolley Madison was surprised at the president's behavior. "Mrs. Merry," wrote Dolley Madison's niece, ". . . publicly asserted that she intended to teach the Americans etiquette, and how to behave themselves."<sup>301</sup> Jefferson, upon hearing the insult, promised to put the minister's wife in her place, and used his dinner party to do so. It was for that reason that he took the arm of a surprised Dolley Madison. "Take Mrs. Merry," she had pleaded, "[but] he answered, 'not so' and persevered [in] handing [in] the Lady of the Secretary of State."<sup>302</sup>

In her book on early Washingtonian society and politics, Catherine Allgor argued that Jefferson's behavior toward Elizabeth Merry was deep-seated in his own anxieties. The minister's wife, according to the historian, was "an elite European woman—cultivated, charming, astute and public—and thus everything Jefferson hated."<sup>303</sup> Her European ways and her dominance over her husband, theorized Allgor, disgusted the president. If good republican women devoted themselves to domesticity, Europeans such as Elizabeth Merry, wrote Allgor, "wielded the weapons of aristocratic politicking:

<sup>300</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 8, 1804, Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 10: 66.

<sup>301</sup> From the memoirs of Mary Cutts, niece of Dolley Payne Madison, Mary Estelle Elizabeth Cutts and Catherine Allgor, *The Queen of America: Mary Cutts's Life of Dolley Madison* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 138.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. According to the niece, Dolley Madison related this story at a dinner she attended at the Polk White House. As such, its accuracy needs to be weighted against the distance of time, Mrs. Madison's advanced age, and the former first lady's desire to amuse her table companions.

<sup>303</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 45.

elaborate dress, public presence, [and] personal appeal."<sup>304</sup> Such women were dangerous. They demanded attention, "dominated social events, and in their capacities as social leaders they exerted a powerful and (to Jefferson's mind) destructive effect discussion on the government's decisions."<sup>305</sup> Thus, Jefferson's behavior at the December 2, 1803, dinner was a reaction, argued Allgor, not to Elizabeth Merry personally, but to her type.

Allgor did not reference Jefferson's own writings to prove her point, but there is plenty of evidence that he had strong reservations against women he found overtly "public."<sup>306</sup> There is also strong evidence that Jefferson found French women too politically involved and socially preoccupied. From Paris in 1788, Jefferson wrote Philadelphia's Anne Willing Bingham of Parisian women, "hunting pleasure in the streets, in routs & assemblies, and forgetting that they have left it behind them in their nurseries."<sup>307</sup> American women, by contrast, had "the good sense to value domestic happiness above all other, and the art to cultivate it beyond all others."<sup>308</sup> To George Washington, Jefferson wrote of the undue influence French women held over the French

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>306</sup> Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 45-46. Isenberg provided her readers with a short but nuanced dialogue comparing Harriet Martineau's interpretation of the public and the private to that of Jefferson. For a discussion on Jefferson, gender, and his Paris experiences, see Brian Steele, *Thomas Jefferson and American Nationhood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64-72.

<sup>307</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Anne Willing Bingham, May 11, 1788, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib003492>> (June 27, 2014).

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

government, added that “fortunately for the happiness of the sex itself,” this behavior did not “extend itself in our country beyond the domestic line.”<sup>309</sup>

Jefferson's negative opinions were of Parisians. Of Englishwomen, he appears to have written nothing.<sup>310</sup> Furthermore, how similar late eighteenth-century Frenchwomen were to those, like Elizabeth Merry, across the channel is debatable. Many Brits were as disapproving of these women as was Jefferson. Linda Colley argued that it became common “for [British] writers on proper female conduct, whatever their politics, to invoke the behavior of Frenchwomen as exemplifying what must be avoided in Britain.”<sup>311</sup> British moralists protested that “a minority of Frenchwomen had acquired pretensions of intellectual autonomy.”<sup>312</sup> They had obtained “too much of the wrong kind of power.”<sup>313</sup> These men blamed the *ancien régime*. It allowed women “an unnatural prominence . . . 'they govern all from the court to the cottage.’”<sup>314</sup> There was a fear that Englishwomen might be susceptible to the bad influence of their French counterparts, in the same way that Jefferson worried that Anne Bingham might think that “the pleasures

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<sup>309</sup> Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, December 4, 1788, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib003954>> (June 27, 2014).

<sup>310</sup> Jefferson made one trip to London, March 12 to April 26, 1786. “London,” *Thomas Jefferson Encyclopedia*, Monticello, Home of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson Foundation, <<http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/london>> (June 27, 2014).

<sup>311</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 250-51.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.* Quote by Scottish Presbyterian minister, James Fordyce,

of Paris more than supply its wants; . . . that a Parisian [women] is happier than an American."<sup>315</sup>

When Jefferson chose to escort Dolley Madison to his table instead of the British minister's wife, he may have been reacting to Elizabeth Merry's type, "an elite European woman—cultivated, charming, astute and public."<sup>316</sup> Just as plausibly, he may not have cared for the woman's arrogance, her inflated sense of importance, and her belittlement of the capital, which sat, Jefferson could have pointed out to her, on land the former colonies had won in their victory against the British Empire. Should Elizabeth Merry have dared speak of Washington City, even in private conversation, with the same mocking tones that she used in her letters, word of her disdain for Jefferson's city would have reached the president before the dinner. Moreover, for all her intelligence, Elizabeth Merry not only dominated a room to the point that "her good husband pass[ed] quite unnoticed" but she also was fond of theatrics.<sup>317</sup> British-born Louisa Catherine Adams found her "a very showy and vulgar woman" whose conversation and manner was "frequently insulting."<sup>318</sup> The amicable Dolley Madison, who maintained a cordial relationship with the Merrys throughout their tenure in Washington, chuckled at Elizabeth Merry's airs. "[You] know," wrote Mrs. Madison in 1805, "when she chuses

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<sup>315</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Anne Willing Bingham, May 11, 1788, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib003492>> (June 27, 2014).

<sup>316</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 45

<sup>317</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, January 23, 1804, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 46.

<sup>318</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, "The Adventures of a Nobody," manuscript, 190.

she can get angry with persons as well as circumstances," in "high good humour" one moment, and in the next, marching off "with great dignity, & more passion."<sup>319</sup>

Whatever the motives for Thomas Jefferson's discourtesy toward Elizabeth Merry—her type, her personality, Jefferson's political attitude toward Britain, or a combination of several reasons—the consequence of that one slight was months of needless backpedaling and explanations. Although his cabinet and political allies publicly supported the president's actions, they also were put in the awkward position of explaining away the poor manners of a Southern gentleman. Benjamin Henry Latrobe put it well when he wrote that "nothing was indeed intended" by the president's treatment of Elizabeth Merry, but that neither was anything "considered as it ought to have been."<sup>320</sup>

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Thomas Jefferson responded to the Merry affair with a proclamation on republican etiquette. Some of the etiquette was already accepted practice within capital society, such as strangers receiving the first visit. Other canons, like the disregarding of rank, received varied acceptance among the city's elite. The one canon not previously followed, and never seriously considered, was the mandate for *pêle môle* protocol. The city was aware that even the president was not following his own rule, as observed at the Jerome and Elizabeth Bonaparte dinner. It also understood the lunacy of a *pêle môle* society in which ladies and gentlemen moved *en masse* through their various entertainments. For historians, though, *pêle môle* protocol has continued to pique

<sup>319</sup> Dolley Payne Madison to Anna Payne Cutts, June 4, 1805, Shulman and Mattern, *Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 61.

<sup>320</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to Joshua Gilpin, February 20, 1804, Van Horne and Formwalt, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, Vol. 1, 434.



attention. Viewed ideologically as a principle of equality, it has helped scholars define Jefferson's vision of a democratic society. Merrill Peterson saw the president's *pêle môle* etiquette as an attempt to match the "outward demeanor of the government to the inner spirit of the people . . . a gesture, modest but dramatic, on behalf of American nationality."<sup>321</sup> Joyce Appleby wrote that, alongside his other "reforms of etiquette, [pell mell] provided the contrast with the Federalists that [Jefferson] wished to sharpen," and "embodied the republican simplicity that he had extolled in his presidential campaign."<sup>322</sup>

When historians have viewed *pêle môle*, not ideologically, but as a presidential directive, they have sometimes painted a more ludicrous scene. R. B. Bernstein wrote that *pêle môle* "resembled a game of musical chairs; those not deft enough to grab the seats they desired either had to sit at the end of the table or had to stand, uncomfortably juggling plates and cups."<sup>323</sup> Robert M. Saunders argued that, with the introduction of *pêle môle*, guests "upon a signal simply rushed to the dinner table to get the best seat possible rather than a prescribed place that recognized their status."<sup>324</sup> Moreover, Harlow Unger maintained, "the president replaced the protocol of assigned seating with informal, sit-whenever, serve-yourself, plantation-style dinners."<sup>325</sup>

From their creation, the canons, including the protocol of *pêle môle*, were more ideological and political than practical. "Jefferson's gentlemanly tastes," wrote Gordon

<sup>321</sup> Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*, 734.

<sup>322</sup> Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Thomas Jefferson: The American Presidents Series: The 3rd President, 1801-1809* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003), 47.

<sup>323</sup> R. B. Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson: The Revolution of Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 171.

<sup>324</sup> Robert M. Saunders, *Power, the Presidency, and the Preamble*, 27.

<sup>325</sup> Harlow G. Unger, *The Last Founding Father: James Monroe and the Nation's Call to Greatness* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009), 173.

Wood, "scarcely allowed for any actual leveling in social gatherings."<sup>326</sup> The protocol had been written to tutor Ministers Merry and Yrujo on the tenets of a republican society, and to defend the administration. Despite Federalist mocking of the canons, their popularity as fodder for gossip, and their diplomatic implications, Jefferson's rules of etiquette faded away once they had served their immediate purpose. No one presented the presidential canons to incoming dignitaries or tacked them on village doors. Newcomers to the capital continued to learn Washingtonian etiquette as they had before the canons, from conversations in the drawing room.<sup>327</sup>

Conflictingly, Jefferson attempted to dictate an official protocol while simultaneously arguing that the country had no official society. The administration adamantly denied the existence of a "Court of the U. S.," yet Jefferson's canons gave the appearance of court rules.<sup>328</sup> Jefferson dictated circumstances in which cabinet families would pay first visits, as well as the random seating of official families at all public ceremonies. He also mandated that cabinet families follow the principle of *pêle mêle* in their homes.<sup>329</sup> By the time Jefferson wrote the newspaper version of the canons, he had expanded his social authority into Congress, declaring that "no distinction" would be "admitted between Senators and Representatives" and he set the conditions of

<sup>326</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 288.

<sup>327</sup> Madeleine Dahlgren, in her 1873 courtesy book, wrote of its need: "Not a winter passes but the same questions are asked over and over again by scores of persons entering for the first time into public life." Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, *Etiquette of Social Life in Washington* (Lancaster, PA: Inquirer Printing and Publishing Company, 1873), 18.

<sup>328</sup> "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

<sup>329</sup> Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive, December 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (February 8, 2014).

congressional visits to foreign ministers.<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, his "Democratic Majesty" positioned himself at the apex of society, exempt from much of what he ordered.<sup>331</sup> As president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson never fought for a seat at his own table or worried about return calls.<sup>332</sup>

The contradiction goes further. Not content to explain the ideology of republican society in terms of his own administration, Jefferson expanded his social authority into the streets of Washington City. Not only were governmental officials to model a proper republican society but all of the city was to do so also, "whether in or out of office, foreign or domestic . . . among ladies as among gentlemen . . . at dinners, assemblies or on any other occasions."<sup>333</sup> Thus, Jefferson, who seldom left the executive grounds except for his solitary horse rides, and who participated in local society only on his own terms and from inside the mansion, made the capital his court. By doing so, he rendered official what already had been evident. In the larger metropolises of New York and Philadelphia, the national government had played a role in the social vitality of each city. However, its participation in those societies enriched, but did not reconfigure, what already had been laid down by generations of elite families. In provincial Washington, the national government *was* the vitality of the city, and the head of that government, both politically and socially, was the president. The city existed, not because of a strong economic

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<sup>330</sup> "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

<sup>331</sup> "Democratic Majesty," Samuel Taggart to John Taylor, January 13, 1804, "Letters of Samuel Taggart," 125.

<sup>332</sup> President Washington set a precedent of "returning *no* visits" other in a private capacity. George Washington to David Stuart, July 26, 1789, Fitzpatrick and Matteson, *Writings of George Washington*, 30: 360.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

foundation, but because Congress had voted to move the nation's capital to "an unpeopled region" along the Potomac.<sup>334</sup> Official society had moved with the capital. Now devoid of the distractions and diversions of a metropolis culture, that society survived in its simplest form, as the social appendage of the national government, at whose center sat the chief executive. Jefferson's utopian vision of a *pêle mêle* society did not take hold in the capital, but his assumption of social authority was nonetheless accepted. In the capital city, the president, or, as would happen next, the president's lady, was king.

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<sup>334</sup> A. G. Riddle, "Wade, the Senator 1851-1853," *Magazine of Western History* 5, no. 3 (July 1886): 299.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### REPUBLICAN MANNERS AND THE REIGN OF QUEEN DOLLEY

*What need you manners more captivating, more winning,  
more polished, than those of that amiable woman . . .  
'She moves a goddess and she looks a queen.'*

—MARGARET BAYARD SMITH<sup>335</sup>

President Jefferson retired from office at noon, March 4, 1809. He returned to Monticello confident that the political initiatives of his administration would proceed with earnest under the care of his former secretary of state and close friend, James Madison. The two men had founded the Republican Party together and had come into power together in 1801. Madison's move to the executive mansion in 1809 did nothing to upset either the "unassuming & unavenging spirit which has marked the Republican Ascendency" or the two men's forty-year political partnership.<sup>336</sup> Nonetheless, when Madison accepted the presidential baton, he took on more than the responsibilities of advancing Jeffersonian political policies. With the presidency came the responsibility of heading what Jefferson had futilely denied to be Washington's "court of the US," a role less comfortable for Madison than it had been for his friend.<sup>337</sup>

Certainly, Madison dressed the part of a Republican president and with even greater simplicity than Jefferson. His attire was black, from coat to silk stockings, and he

<sup>335</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *A Winter in Washington: Or, Memoirs of the Seymour Family* (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824), 1: 43, 44.

<sup>336</sup> James Madison to William Eustis, May 22, 1823, Hunt, *The Writings of James Madison*, 9: 136. On the lasting political partnership between Madison and Jefferson, see Lance Banning, *Jefferson and Madison: Three Conversations from the Founding* (Lanham, MD: Madison House Publishers, 1995), also Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson*.

<sup>337</sup> Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

"never had but one suit at a time," wrote one observer.<sup>338</sup> Like Jefferson, Madison had little use for ceremony or ostentatious display. Unlike his predecessor, James Madison had no social flair. As president, Jefferson conducted entertainments to his own liking, but the entertainments he conducted were done with a "degree of ease that every one seem[ed] to feel and to enjoy."<sup>339</sup> His Federalist moniker of "Democratic Majesty" had evolved as much from the confident authority he displayed as head of social Washington as it had from any other expressions of Jeffersonian power.<sup>340</sup> By contrast, Madison tended towards stiffness and reserve in social situations. He was a quiet man whose charm among friends did not extend to his public persona. Left alone, Madison's White House would have been as accessible as it had been during the Jefferson tenure and the president as Republican, but public entertainments would have suffered. Although a good conversationalist at a small diner party, Madison had no knack for grand hosting.

Fortunately, James Madison brought to his administration a person of unwavering social charm and the perfect foil to his reserved, private manner—his wife, Dolley. Moreover, he was wise enough to stay out of her way as she aptly combined the court manners Jefferson had loathed with the spirit of republican hospitality that he had preached. Her acceptance of traditional protocol and precedence would comfort the gentility, Federalist or Republican, foreigner or citizen. At the same time, her ease and unpretentious manner allowed her, as Margaret Smith wrote, to stand *among* as she stood

<sup>338</sup> Paul Jennings, *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison* (1865; Orange, VA: Montpelier Foundation, 2010), 3. "He had some poor relatives that he had to help, and wished to set them an example of economy in the matter of dress."

<sup>339</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to wife, Mary Elizabeth Hazlehurst Latrobe, November 24, 1802, Van Horne and Formwalt, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Vol. 1*, 232.

<sup>340</sup> Taggart, "Letters of Samuel Taggart," 125.

above.<sup>341</sup> The result was eight years of bipartisan social inclusiveness, a Camelotian time of congeniality between court and palace that would never be replicated.

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Thomas Jefferson's inaugurations in 1801 and 1805 were simple affairs, as befitted the man, his political party, and a geographic location in mid-construction. To the first installation, Jefferson had worn "the dress . . . of a plain citizen, without any distinctive badge of office." There had been no reception, other than a gathering he held at his lodgings for a select number of "distinguished citizens."<sup>342</sup> Neither of his daughters attended. A larger gathering had followed the second installation, but it was business as usual by the next night, as the president dined Tripoli War hero, Edward Preble, at a table of twelve to which he had invited, among others, his now former vice president, Aaron Burr.<sup>343</sup>

On March 4, 1809, that all changed. The city was still in mid-construction, and the incoming president still wore the suit of an ordinary citizen, but that ended the resemblance between the Madison and the Jefferson inaugurals.<sup>344</sup> The inauguration was, instead, a day of speeches and celebration, announced at dawn with the sounding of two

<sup>341</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *A Winter in Washington*, 1: 44.

<sup>342</sup> [Inauguration], *National Intelligencer and Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1801.

<sup>343</sup> "After the delivery of the [inaugural] speech, the President was waited upon by a large assemblage," reported in "Washington City," *National Intelligencer and Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1805; Thomas Jefferson, dinner records, March 5, 1805, Thomas Jefferson Papers Microform, a microfilm edition of the Thomas Jefferson Coolidge collection of manuscripts at the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1977), reel 4. Burr was invited to the dinner, but did not attend. (Jefferson entered Burr's name into his guest record, and then crossed it off, which was his method of indicating a declined invitation.)

<sup>344</sup> "Mr. Madison was dressed in a full [wool] suit of cloth of American manufacture," [Inauguration], *National Intelligencer and Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1801.

federal salutes and the presence of uniformed "corps cavalry and infantry."<sup>345</sup> For days, the city had been filling with "a multiplicity of new faces" eager to witness the inauguration.<sup>346</sup> By noon, a crowd of over ten thousand overflowed into the streets around the Capitol Building while James Madison took the oath of office in Representative Hall. Two open houses followed the installation, one at the Madison residence on F Street and the other at the executive mansion, both drawing "a large concourse of ladies and gentlemen."<sup>347</sup>

Then, at 8 o'clock that evening, Washington City witnessed its first inaugural ball.<sup>348</sup> Organized by a non-partisan group of prominent citizens and held at Long's Hotel, it was graced by a company of approximately four-hundred attendees, dressed in their best finery and presenting, among the ladies, a "handsome display of female fashion and beauty."<sup>349</sup> The festivities began with the arrival of Thomas Jefferson. He entered the hall to the accompaniment of "Jefferson's March," speaking "to all whom he knew, and quite the plain, unassuming citizen."<sup>350</sup> Presently, the band struck up the newly composed

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<sup>345</sup> "The Inauguration," *Monitor* (Washington, DC), March 9, 1809.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>347</sup> [Inauguration], *National Intelligencer and Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1809.

<sup>348</sup> [Madison inauguration and accompanying ball], *Princeton Alumni Weekly* 13, no. 22 (March 5, 1913): 414.

<sup>349</sup> "The Inauguration," *Monitor* (Washington, DC), March 9, 1809. The ball managers included Thomas Jefferson's secretary, Isaac A. Coles, both the Navy and Marine Corps Commandants, and several leading citizens of the community, in particular, Federalist John Tayloe, the wealthiest man in the region and a firm anti-Jeffersonian. "Inauguration Ball," *Monitor* (Washington, DC), March 2, 1809.

<sup>350</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Susan Bayard Smith, March 1809 [no day], Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 61. Jefferson, who, it was reported, had not attended a dancing assembly for nearly twenty years, left within two hours of arriving, "The Inauguration," *Monitor* (Washington, DC), March 9, 1809.



"Madison's March."<sup>351</sup> The president and his lady made their entrance, she leading the promenade on the arm of one of the assembly managers; her husband a step behind at the side of his sister-in-law. "She looked a queen," Margaret Bayard Smith wrote of Dolley Madison that night, dressed as she was in buff-colored velvet "with a long train . . . beautiful pearl necklace, earrings and bracelets," and a plumed turban trimmed in Parisian white satin.<sup>352</sup> She did not dance but watched from the side until dinner was announced.

If the day had not yet demonstrated enough departure from Jeffersonian protocol, the dinner announcement at the inaugural ball clearly did. At its sounding, and in a gesture pre-arranged by the managers, the capital's highest ranked foreign envoy, French Minister General Louis Marie Turreau, approached Mrs. Madison, took her arm, and guided her to the dining table. He sat himself to her right, while British Minister David Montagu Erskine, the second highest ranked foreign envoy, sat to her left.<sup>353</sup> Diplomatic status was back.

So was precedence. Despite President Jefferson's insistence that *pêle môle* should rule at public functions as it did in private homes, the inaugural ball managers had carefully planned the table seating to respect the various stations of those present. The same care had been given at the installation ceremony, where seats were assigned

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<sup>351</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Susan Bayard Smith, March 1809 [no day], Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 61.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid*. Erskine guided to the table, Dolley Madison's sister, Anna Payne Cutts.

according to rank and station.<sup>354</sup> Two months after the inauguration, the Madisons resurrected the weekly presidential receptions of the Federalist period, this time in the form of a Wednesday evening drawing room, in which Dolley Madison, like Martha Washington and Abigail Adams before her, officiated.<sup>355</sup>

These changes appeared on the surface to be much like what had come before Jefferson, a return back to what he and Madison had bitterly denounced as the monarchical tendencies of the Federalist Party. By 1809, however, the Republican Party was more willing to make allowances for presidential ceremony than it had been in 1801. Jefferson went into office amid his party's cry to end executive monarchism and establish minimal government. Eight years later, the Republicans were firmly in political control. Fears of presidential ceremony as a pre-cursor to the establishment of "an absolute, or, at best a mixed monarchy" had faded.<sup>356</sup> Thus, James Madison, founding member of the Democratic-Republicans, and his fashionable wife, entered the executive mansion under less social scrutiny from a worried political party.

That meant that while Jefferson had condemned the presidential carriage purchased by former president Adams, President Madison and his wife traveled about

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<sup>354</sup> For a detailed description of the installation seating arrangement, see "The Inauguration," *The Monitor* (Washington, DC), March 9, 1809.

<sup>355</sup> For one of many careful examinations of the Madison weekly receptions, see Gaillard Hunt, "Mrs. Madison's First Drawing Room," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 121, no. 721 (June 1910): 141-48.

<sup>356</sup> James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, *Resolutions of Virginia and Kentucky* (Richmond, VA: R.I. Smith, 1835), 180. See also Thomas Jefferson to John Dickinson, March 6, 1801, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence. 1651-1827, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009745>> (July 23, 2013).

town in an appropriately stately chariot and without political repercussion.<sup>357</sup> It meant, as well, that the Republican-dominated Congress appropriated funds, without debate, that allowed Dolley Madison to transform the President's House into a proper people's palace, accentuated with red velvet drapes and Grecian-inspired furnishings.<sup>358</sup> Under her reign, there would be no Mammoth (cheese) Room in the executive mansion, no bear cubs on the lawn, and no makeshift secretary's bedroom in the East Room.<sup>359</sup>

The formalities that the Madison administration restored were accepted by a political party with nothing more to prove and by members of Washington society who, like every gentry society of the nineteenth century, respected the dignity of ceremony and rank.<sup>360</sup> But if Jefferson's call for *pêle mêle* and his insistence on the absence of executive protocol evaporated with his presidency, his vision of inclusive, open, and equalitarian

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<sup>357</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to Dolley Madison, March 22, 1809, Van Horne, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Vol. 2*, 707-08.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid*, 477. See also "Furnishings for the President's House and the Madisons: Editorial Note," Van Horne, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Vol. 2*, 705-06.

<sup>359</sup> Elder John Leland and his flock celebrated first Jefferson's inauguration by producing of the world's biggest cheese. On the appointed day, the whole countryside of Cheshire, MA turned out with pails and tubs of curd made from the milk of Republican cows. "The cheese was put to press with prayer, and hymn-singing, and great solemnity." The finished product was loaded on a sleigh and driven to Washington. Manasseh Cutler reported after the 1803 New Year's reception that the mammoth cheese was still in what Jefferson called the Mammoth Room. Sixty-pounds of it had been cut out of the center due to "puffing up and symptoms of decay." Editor's footnote and Manasseh Cutler to daughter, undated, Cutler, *Life, Journals, and Correspondence*, 2: 54n, 2: 116. Zebulon Pike brought President Jefferson back a bear cub from his western expedition, which was displayed on the north lawn. Seale, *President's House*, 1: 97. Jefferson's succession of secretaries slept in a partitioned corner of what is now the East Room. Seale, *President's House*, 1: 94.

<sup>360</sup> On ceremony and rank as essentials to good society, see De Benneville Randolph Keim, *Hand-book of Official and Social Etiquette and Public Ceremonials at Washington*, 11-12.

"social circles" did not.<sup>361</sup> As president, Thomas Jefferson had modeled this concept from the White House grounds. There he exemplified republican manners while he ran the national government. He invited to his table, continual rounds of guests from both parties; he opened up the executive mansion to visitors, and he welcomed in the community to help him celebrate both the New Year and the Fourth of July.

Jefferson, though, seldom expanded this communal spirit into the city, leaving the grounds only for his solitary morning horseback rides, or to attend a rare public function, or to journey twice a year to Monticello. The intermingling of the executive branch with the local elites was left to his cabinet and no one handled it more graciously than secretarial wife, Dolley Madison. She circled the city with visits, attended public assemblies, entertained in her home, and, in general, represented the administration across Washington City and Georgetown. Her position as wife of the leading cabinet member, during a presidency with no first lady, ensured her admission into homes and at events. Her "frank and cordial manners" ensured her welcome.<sup>362</sup> By the time that her husband became president, Dolley Madison was the established leader of local society and her home, the "the resort of most company."<sup>363</sup>

With her husband's inauguration, Dolley Payne Todd Madison moved her crowded drawing room from F Street to the executive mansion. Although, as the president's lady, she presided over the expected dinners and the annual New Year's levee,

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<sup>361</sup> "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

<sup>362</sup> [Margaret Bayard Smith], "Mrs. Madison," James Herring and James Barton Longacre, *The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans* (New York: Hermon Bancroft, 1836), 3: 374.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.* Exempting, according to Smith, the President's House.

it was her Wednesday evening receptions that would make her famous.<sup>364</sup> Each week, in a room "so throng[ed] that it amounted to a literal squeeze," Dolley Madison hosted a national house party for all who cared to come.<sup>365</sup> While Thomas Jefferson's White House had been open and accessible, during his administration, most of the city's socializing had occurred off presidential grounds. Dolley Madison now made the executive mansion the epicenter of social Washington with her weekly drawing room; and she honored the nation's democratic ideals with its inclusiveness.

In many ways, Dolley Madison's weekly public receptions were similar to those of Martha Washington and Abigail Adams. As with the Federalist presidents, Madison attended but as a guest. No invitations were issued and light refreshments were served. Martha Washington gave "Tea, Coffe [sic], Cake, Lemonade & Ice Creams in the summer."<sup>366</sup> Madison served punch, wine, "tea and coffee," ice cream, "and a little confectionery."<sup>367</sup> The crowds ran slightly larger in the Madison years than in earlier

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<sup>364</sup> The Jefferson Fourth of July celebration appears to be unique to his administration. The Madisons were sometimes in Washington on the 4th, sometimes not. This researcher found no reports of a White House celebration during the Madison administration. In 1816, Dolley Madison wrote of hosting a large July 4 dinner at Montpelier, Dolley Payne Todd Madison to Anna Payne Cutts, July 5 [1816], in Holly C. Shulman, *The Dolley Madison Digital Edition* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004-2014), <<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/dmde/DPM0535>> (February 9, 2014).

<sup>365</sup> William Darlington, February 9, 1816, *Papers of William Darlington 1788, [ca. 1800]-1863*, New-York Historical Society, New York. *Squeeze* was nineteenth-century slang for a crowded house party.

<sup>366</sup> Abigail Adams to her sister, Mary Cranch, July 27, 1790, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams 1788-1801*, 55.

<sup>367</sup> Mary Boardman Crowninshield to her mother, Mary Hodges Boardman, December 7, 1815, Mary Boardman Crowninshield, Francis Boardman Crowninshield, and Bruce Rogers, *Letters of Mary Boardman Crowninshield, 1815-1816* (Cambridge, MA: Riverside Press, 1905), 25-26.

administrations, numbering "on a good evening . . . not less than 200 of both sexes."<sup>368</sup> Abigail Adams only reached "200 Gentlemen & Ladies" on rare occasions, like her final Philadelphia drawing room in 1800.<sup>369</sup> The genteel respectability of the Madison events was also more in question. General Washington had worried about the quality of his wife's guests, often noting when the crowd was "respectable."<sup>370</sup> But the formality of Martha Washington's drawing rooms and the remnants of colonial deference generally kept the less desirables at bay. Not so in 1809. Benjamin Henry Latrobe complained that the Madisons' first drawing room "was very numerously attended and by none but respectable people. The second la, la. The last by a perfect rabble in beards and boots. There is no knowing what to do . . . we are *jammed*, between our republican principles, and our aristocratic wishes."<sup>371</sup> Dolley Madison welcomed to her drawing room the foreign legations, prominent local and national officials, distinguished visitors to the city, military officers of every grade, merchants, clerks, parsons, office seekers, "buckram gentry, speculators and *nothingarians*—all with their wives, and some with their gawking *offspring*."<sup>372</sup> Whereas Jefferson had embraced the concept of a broad and inclusive

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<sup>368</sup> Ebenezer Sage to his niece, January 24, 1810, Ebenezer Sage Correspondence, 1810, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>369</sup> Abigail Adams to sister, Mary Cranch, May 3, 1800, Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 250.

<sup>370</sup> George Washington, February 19, 1790, Jackson and Twohig, *Diaries of George Washington, Volume VI*, 37.

<sup>371</sup> Benjamin Henry Latrobe to George Harrison, June 20, 1809, Van Horne, *Benjamin Henry Latrobe, Vol. 2*, 731. Italics in transcription. Also see, Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, April 26, 1818, Rosalie Stier Calvert and Margaret Law Callcott, *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert 1795-1821* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 334.

<sup>372</sup> "Views at Court," *Salem Gazette* (MA), June 20, 1817, discussing the Madison drawing rooms. Dolley Madison encouraged the inclusion of children. Of the presidential

capital society twice a year, at a New Year's Day levee and his Fourth of July festivities, Dolley Madison embraced it once a week.

In the way that Queen Dolley's squeezes promoted an inclusive Washington community, her continued intermingling with Washington elite promoted a harmonious republican court.<sup>373</sup> Inside the presidential residence, she received multiple morning visits, held her crowded drawing room, and gave large dinner parties. Off the grounds, she unceasingly returned visits, went to balls, private dinners, the horseraces, and dance assemblies. In 1811, Madison gave her sister a cheery recounting of the "Weeding" she had attended, of "sleighting to Ale[xandria]" with over a dozen friends, and of upcoming plans to run errands about town.<sup>374</sup> She expressed her disappointment that "sore ears & deafness" kept her from the "Fosters party" and a ball given by the French minister.<sup>375</sup> A year later, the Madisons' young houseguest, Phoebe Morris, wrote her family of that week's schedule: A "very large dining company today . . . tomorrow morning is to be devoted to returning some of our visits; in the evening there is a party some where," on Wednesday, the drawing room, and on Thursday, after a presidential dinner, "we go to

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New Year's levee in 1810, Eliza Quincy, wife of Federalist Josiah Quincy III, wrote, "I only regretted I had not complied with Mrs. Madison's earnest request, that I would bring the children with me." Eliza Quincy to Miss Mary Storer, January 10, 1810, Eliza Susan Quincy, *Memoir of the Life of Eliza S. M. Quincy* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1861), 130.

<sup>373</sup> For one example of a Madison contemporary using the term, "Queen Dolly," see William T. Barry to Catherine Armistead Mason Barry, February 24, 1815, William T. Barry, "Letters of William T. Barry, 1806-1810, 1829-1831," *William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine* 13, no. 4 (April 1905): 237.

<sup>374</sup> Dolly Payne Todd Madison to Anna Payne Cutts, December 22, [1811], in Shulman, *The Dolley Madison Digital Edition*, <<http://rotunda.ipress.virginia.edu/dmde/DPM0301>> (July 24, 2013).

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.* Augustus Foster became British foreign minister in early 1811; "F" is the French minister, Louis Barbe Charles Sérurier.

the assembly. On Friday we dine at Genl. Van Nesse's & on Saturday at Doctor Worthingtons."<sup>376</sup>

Dolley Madison was a familiar sight in Washington, her husband less so. James Madison attended the Wednesday drawing rooms and on rare occasions joined his wife at a dinner or ball.<sup>377</sup> In private, the president could be a lively, "often playful" conversationalist, but in a more public social arena he appeared "very formal . . . and precise," or put another way, like "a withered little apple-John."<sup>378</sup> Although James Madison could usually be found in his office concentrating on his constitutional responsibilities, his wife's congenial presence out in society and her generous hospitality at home created the impression of a socially responsive administration.

Dolley Madison's social activities had political implications. Smithsonian historian Edith Mayo noted that "Mrs. Madison's understanding that entertainment was a venue for political lobbying, her creation of the President's House as a stage from which to convey an image of power, cultivate political loyalties, and project dignity and authority, and her shaping of the hostess's role as a powerful position for women, set precedents for . . . the political influence of women."<sup>379</sup> Madison's friendly relationships

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<sup>376</sup> Phoebe Morris, letter, January 6, 1812, Dolley Madison Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington DC.

<sup>377</sup> The French minister held a party in 1816, at which "Mr. Madison (a thing very unusual) was there." Elijah Hunt Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, December 25, 1816, Elijah Hunt Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 20.

<sup>378</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, "The Adventures of a Nobody," manuscript, 159 (often playful); Washington Irving to Henry Brevoort, January 13, 1811, Washington Irving and Pierre Munroe Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864), 1: 263 (very formal/withered).

<sup>379</sup> Edith P. Mayo, "Party Politics: The Political Impact of the First Ladies' Social Role," *The Social Science Journal* 37, no. 4 (4th Quarter 2000), 580.



with the politically powerful, in and out of the executive mansion, meant that she could be useful in procuring positions for friends and family. Her weekly public receptions provided an environment for tempering political tensions. Her lack of pretention, her inclusiveness, and her nonpolitical persona made her the model of a good Republican wife and flattered her husband's administration. All of that made her, to a degree still debated by the scholarly community, a politician.<sup>380</sup> However, the key to Dolley Madison's success in nurturing the ideas of a republican national society was not based on her political instincts, but on her sociability. It defined her in the same way that politics defined her husband and his presidential predecessor.

In the mid-twentieth century, German sociologist Georg Simmel argued that the classically sociable personality possessed "the personal traits of amiability, breeding, cordiality, and attractiveness."<sup>381</sup> He or she thrived in conversation, which was kept light and flirty in order that all parties might enjoy the "pleasure of interacting."<sup>382</sup> Indeed, one had to be able to "bracket out" the external during an exchange in order to achieve the "degree of equality" between participants that characterizes a sociable conversation.<sup>383</sup> That ability did not suggest a lack of opinions or intelligence. Instead, it came from the

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<sup>380</sup> On the degree to which Dolley Madison might be labeled a politician, see Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 48-101; Catherine Allgor, "Dolley Madison Creates the White House," in William Seale, *The White House: Actors and Observers* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002); Catherine Allgor, *A Perfect Union: Dolley Madison and the Creation of the American Nation* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 225-26, 228, 260; Mattern and Shulman, *Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 97-102; Scofield, "Yea or Nay to Removing the Seat of Government," 449-66.

<sup>381</sup> Georg Simmel and Everett C. Hughes, "The Sociology of Sociability," *American Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 3 (November 1949): 255.

<sup>382</sup> Nick Crossley, *Towards Relational Sociology* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 114.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

understanding that certain conversations could lighten a mood and lift the weights of responsibility. Sociability, in itself, created a more harmonious world.<sup>384</sup>

Such a personality was Dolley Madison. Her sociable nature was her one inalienable trait. Everything else was negotiable. Although considered attractive by many, one observer declared Madison "fat and forty, but not fair."<sup>385</sup> Although many regarded the president's lady as dignified and even regal, there were those who considered her "sans distinction either in manner or appearance."<sup>386</sup> "She load[ed] herself with finery & dresses without any taste," wrote a young New Yorker, " – and amidst all her finery you may discover that in neatness she is very deficient."<sup>387</sup> Moreover, while some found Dolley Madison a delightful conversationalist, with the ability to chat broadly on "books, men and manners, literature, [and other] . . . branches of knowledge," Britain's Augustus Foster, who spent years in the company of Dolley Madison, found her to be of an "uncultivated mind and fond of gossiping."<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid, 257. See also Charles Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks: Theories, Concepts, and Findings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 162-64.

<sup>385</sup> Francis James Jackson to mother, Mrs. Jackson, October 7, 1809, Lady Catherine Charlotte Jackson, Jackson, Sir George, and Lady Catherine Charlotte Jackson, *The Bath Archives, a Further Selection from the Diaries and Letters of Sir G. Jackson, from 1809 to 1816, Volume 1* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1873), 20.

<sup>386</sup> Mrs. F. J. Jackson to George Jackson, November 21, 1809, Jackson, *The Bath Archives*, 1: 57.

<sup>387</sup> Sarah Ridg, March 4, 1809, "Washington in 1809—A Pen Picture," p. 9. A second young New Yorker, Frances Few, wrote that Mrs. Madison lacked taste. Frances Few, October 19, 1808, Few and Cunningham, "Notes and Documents: The Diary of Frances Few, 1808-1809," 351.

<sup>388</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, dairy, November 12, 1812, quoted in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer,"* 85 (books); Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, 155 (uncultivated).

Yet, even her critics could not deny her sociability. Foster called her, "perfectly good-tempered and good-humored," and England's Lady Jackson, who had found Mrs. Madison "sans distinction," recognized that the president's wife was also "*sans prétentions*."<sup>389</sup> Federalist Harrison Gray Otis wrote that Dolley Madison's "want of polished elegance" was "compensat[ed] by graciousness and good humor."<sup>390</sup> The son of Federalist John Tayloe III remembered her as "not highly cultivated," but "a woman of wonderful tact" and "extreme amiability."<sup>391</sup> Cabinet wife, Mary Boardman Crowninshield, found her "very agreeable and sociable."<sup>392</sup> Catharine Akerly Mitchill, wife of a New York senator, further described Madison as a woman defined "by her sociability and friendly attentions."<sup>393</sup> Representative James Milnor delighted in the degree of "dignity, affability, and ease" in which "Madame performed the graces of her drawing-room," and Sally Gales Seaton, wife of newspaper owner William Winston Seaton, described her as "amiable in private life and affable in public."<sup>394</sup>

<sup>389</sup> Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, 155; Mrs. F. J. Jackson to George Jackson, November 21, 1809, Jackson, *The Bath Archives*, 1: 57.

<sup>390</sup> Harrison Gray Otis to Sally Foster Otis, February 24, 1815, as quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harrison Gray Otis, 1765-1848: The Urbane Federalist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 392.

<sup>391</sup> Tayloe, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe*, 154, 155.

<sup>392</sup> Mary Boardman Crowninshield to mother, Mary Hodges Boardman, December 24, 1815, Crowninshield, *Letters of Mary Boardman Crowninshield*, 30.

<sup>393</sup> Catharine Akerly Mitchill to Margaretta Akerly Miller, December 11, 1808, Catherine Akerly Cock Mitchill Family Papers, 1806-1936, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (by her sociability); Catharine Akerly Mitchill to Margaretta Akerly Miller, January 2, 1811, Carolyn Hoover Sung, "Catharine Mitchill's Letters from Washington 1806—1812," *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 34, no. 3 (July 1977), 181 (her civil & polite). Note: As of February 1, 2014, Library of Congress catalogs spell *CathArine* as *CathErine*.

<sup>394</sup> James Milnor, letter, November 27, 1811, as quoted in John Seely Stone, *A Memoir of the Life of James Milnor, D. D.: Late Rector of St. George's Church, New York* (New

Terms like *amiable*, *affable*, and *sociable* appeared repeatedly in descriptions of Dolley Madison, but even better proof of her sociable personality was in her ability to flatter with sincerity and keep communications harmonious. "Mrs. Madison," wrote Washington Irving, "is a fine, portly, buxom dame, who has a smile and a pleasant word for everybody."<sup>395</sup> Representative Milnor was astonished that Madison, after having her drawing-room entertainments verbally attacked by Federalist Josiah Quincy, could speak freely, but without anger, on the subject.<sup>396</sup> And Quincy's wife, although aware that she and her husband were in "the midst of the enemy's camp" at a presidential dinner, found herself "treated with distinction" by her hostess, "and passed a pleasant day."<sup>397</sup> Mary Crowninshield was flattered when Dolley Madison admired her hair ornament, and on another occasion, when she commented on "how much we think alike—both [dressed]

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York: American Tract Society, 1848), 58 (dignity); Sarah Gales Seaton, letter, January 2, 1814, quoted in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer,"* 113 (amiable). Elizabeth Ellet quoted an "accomplished New York lady," who wrote in 1842, "This morning paid a visit to Mrs. Tyler and Mrs. Madison. The latter is a delightful old lady, so amiable, with such fine manners." Elizabeth Fries Ellet, *Court Circles of the Republic, or the Beauties and Celebrities of the Nation; Illustrating Life and Society Under Eighteen Presidents; Describing the Social Features of the Successive Administrations from Washington to Grant...* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Publishing Company, 1869), 340.

<sup>395</sup> Washington Irving to Henry Brevoort, January 13, 1811, Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving*, 1: 263.

<sup>396</sup> James Milnor, letter, January 16, 1813, as quoted in Stone, *A Memoir of the Life of James Milnor*, 83.

<sup>397</sup> Eliza Quincy to Miss Mary Storer, December 20, 1809, Eliza Susan Quincy, *Memoir of the Life of Eliza S. M. Quincy*, 129.

with a little blue and flowers."<sup>398</sup> Sally Seaton felt the same flattery when her presidential hostess insisted she play a waltz on the "elegant" White House piano.<sup>399</sup>

Years later, the widowed Madison still had the capacity to please all "by making all pleased with themselves."<sup>400</sup> When introduced to a Michigan descendent of the large Mason family, so many of whom had been a part of her husband's political life and her own reign as Queen Dolley, the elderly woman recalled how "she had known every branch" of the Mason family and "never knew one whom she did not love."<sup>401</sup> They are easy to recognize, she assured the delighted young woman, by their "beautiful eyes."<sup>402</sup>

Dolley Madison's sociable nature provided the basis for her successful reign. She thoroughly enjoyed the people who comprised Washington's political social circles and enthusiastically participated in their society.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, Madison understood her role as leader of the capital's republican court. She promoted harmony and equality, even as she accepted the stature and precedence that accompanied her rank. Thus, she did not make first calls, as befit her station; but she might send word to a new arrival, as she did Mary Crowninshield, to quickly make a visit to the president's home so they could begin the process toward friendship. As the president's lady, she accepted her place at the head of

<sup>398</sup> Mary Boardman Crowninshield to mother, Mary Hodges Boardman, February 16, 1816, Crowninshield, *Letters of Mary Boardman Crowninshield*, 54.

<sup>399</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, letter, November 12, 1812, quoted in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer,"* 85.

<sup>400</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *A Winter in Washington*, 1: 61.

<sup>401</sup> Emily Virginia Mason to Kate Mason Rowland, January 2, 1844, "MA" Finding Aid Binder: James Madison, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> "I never saw a Lady who enjoyed society more than she does. The more she has round her, the happier she appears to be," Catharine Akerly Mitchill to Margaretta Akerly Miller, January 2, 1811, Carolyn Hoover Sung, "Catharine Mitchill's Letters from Washington 1806—1812," 181.

every promenade, whether at the inaugural ball or at the many assemblies that she attended. Nonetheless, she happily took the arm of whoever was chosen to escort her. She worked with architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe to fashion the White House into a palace, but she assured a visitor who had peeked into a few rooms "without leave," that the mansion belonged as much to the public as it did the current residents.<sup>404</sup> She conducted her weekly drawing room in a lavish setting, dressed regally, and exhibiting the decorum that her position demanded; but no one ever heard Mrs. Madison comment negatively on the respectability of a guest or the appropriateness of an attendee's attire. Dolley Madison was the head of social Washington by virtue of her title. She was the acknowledged leader of that society and its social authority by virtue of her republican manners.

Dolley Madison's republicanism, however, did not make her an equalitarian. Madison was not a democratic person; she was a sociable one.<sup>405</sup> With the sociable personality, wrote sociologist Simmel, the "democratic character can be realized only within a given social stratum: sociability among members of very different social strata often is inconsistent and painful . . . In principle, nobody can find satisfaction . . . at the cost of diametrically opposed feelings" such as those caused by class or racial friction. Sociability, concluded Simmel, "is a democracy of the equally privileged."<sup>406</sup> Accordingly, the sociable Dolley Madison sometimes found relationships outside her

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<sup>404</sup> Eliza Quincy to Miss Mary Storer, December 20, 1809, Eliza Susan Quincy, *Memoir of the Life of Eliza S. M. Quincy*, 129.

<sup>405</sup> Simmel, "The Sociology of Sociability," 257.

<sup>406</sup> Georg Simmel and Kurt H. Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 47-48.

circle "inconsistent and painful."<sup>407</sup> James Madison's enslaved manservant, Paul Jennings, remembered "Mrs. Madison [as] a remarkably fine woman . . . beloved by every body in Washington, white and colored," but she had a troubled relationship with Jennings, as she did with her other enslaved servants.<sup>408</sup> The first lady lent her financial support, her name, and her time to the development of Washington's first orphan asylum; but biographer Catherine Allgor considered her action as much "influence peddling" as it was generosity.<sup>409</sup> The fringes of free Washington, the shoemaker and the clerk's wife, were welcomed into her weekly drawing room; but, for the most part, both they and Dolley Madison understood that "the levee was a sort of homage paid to political equality" and carried with it no presumption of social equality.<sup>410</sup>

Queen Dolley, then, focused her republicanism on the capital's political elite. For them, she nurtured an intimacy between White House and social Washington that was unique to the Madison administration. Both President Jefferson and Dolley Madison assumed that local society revolved around the executive mansion. Both accepted the responsibility of social authority. Jefferson had done so by modeling his version of proper republican manners. His appearance, his conduct, his entertainments, and, abstractly, his canons of etiquette, all spoke of a man who understood himself as the center of his society. Dolley Madison took what had come before and made it her own. She allotted

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>408</sup> Jennings, *Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*, 14. For a revisionist interpretation of Dolley Madison's relationship with her enslaved staff, see Elizabeth Dowling Taylor, *A Slave in the White House: Paul Jennings and the Madisons* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>409</sup> Allgor, *Perfect Union*, 222.

<sup>410</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans: Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor* (1828; Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1848), 2: 60.

her husband the role of modeling proper republican dress; she dressed for the occasion. She continued the presidential hospitalities of the past, but she expanded them to include her popular and inclusive drawing rooms and a generous social schedule. She accepted the stature and special treatment of her position, but she reciprocated with her friendship and her graciousness. Madison was bipartisan in her attentiveness and tireless in her pursuit of harmony within her social circle. Moreover, her social circle encompassed all of elite Washington, not in theory, as it had with Jefferson, but in actuality.

Dolley Madison made the capital, "a most congenial spot," but that period in Washington's social history was as dependent on time and place as it was on the amicable leadership of its queen.<sup>411</sup> As the Madisons departed for Montpelier in 1817, they left behind a different city than the one that had welcomed their arrival in 1801—bigger, more sophisticated, and older. They also left behind the Monroes. And in the same way that the perfect vortex of time, place, and presidential couple had produced the Madisonian Camelot, the Monroes, and a changing city would render its death.

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<sup>411</sup> Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, *Camelot*, from *Camelot*, Columbia Broadway Masterworks, 1960.



**CHAPTER FIVE:**

**“THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN’”**

*Two weeks more, and poor Mrs. Madison's drawing-room . . . will be forever deserted . . . From her successor, I believe, neither the fashionable world nor the suffering poor have much to expect.*

—ELIJAH HUNT MILLS<sup>412</sup>

On March 4, 1817, the reins of presidential social authority transferred from Dolley Madison to Elizabeth Monroe. "Her sun is just descending," Elijah Mills wrote of the departing Madison, "and another rising in an opposite quarter of the heavens, around which all the secondary planets and satellites are to revolve in more or less eccentric orbits."<sup>413</sup> The city understood that the rising sun of the new White House mistress would never offer the same warmth as that of its former queen. The intimate nature of the capital did not fit Elizabeth Monroe's polished reserve. As a cabinet wife for eight years, she had performed her social duties with elegance; but she rarely returned calls or socialized beyond the necessary dinners and drawing rooms. By the time the Monroes moved into the White House, Elizabeth Monroe was in her late forties and in fragile health. Still, social Washington hoped that the camaraderie and reciprocity that had defined the Madison presidency would linger as a precedent.

Unfortunately, the Monroes viewed their responsibilities toward Washington society differently, and they made that clear, beginning immediately after the Monroe

<sup>412</sup> Elijah Hunt Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, February 12, 1817, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 22. Title of chapter: Bob Dylan, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, from *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Columbia Records, 1964.

<sup>413</sup> Elijah Hunt Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, February 12, 1817, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 22.

installation. Although the newspapers reported that the new president and his wife had welcomed a generous number of Washingtonians into their home after the inaugural ceremony, others told a less flattering story.<sup>414</sup> "Those who went to pay their respects to the new President and his wife." wrote one chronicler, "were met with a frigid 'not at home,' and stood with unbelieving eyes, watching the door of the house on I Street . . . slowly close" on them.<sup>415</sup>

By autumn, it was even more evident that the Monroes did not intend to follow in the enthusiastically hospitable footsteps of "Queen Dolly."<sup>416</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith commented to her sister in November, "[f]ew persons are admitted to the great house and not a single lady has yet seen Mrs. Monroe, Mrs. Cutts [Dolley Madison's sister] excepted . . . Altho' they have lived 7 years in W[ashington] both Mr. and Mrs. Monroe are perfect strangers not only to me but all the citizens."<sup>417</sup> Elizabeth Monroe, admittedly delicate in health, had taken to her room while James Monroe sat contemplating the possible demise of a public drawing room. Washington society, and at its heart the ladies and the foreign service, saw signs of an uncomfortable change in presidential social policy.

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<sup>414</sup> "Presidential Inauguration," *Washington City Weekly Gazette*, March 8, 1817; "Washington, March 5," *Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser*, March 6, 1817. Monroe was sworn into office on the steps of the "Old Brick Capitol." His second inauguration was in the House Chamber.

<sup>415</sup> Helen Nicolay, *Our Capital on the Potomac* (New York: The Century Company, 1924), 132. The Monroes were unable to move into the fire-damaged executive mansion until October of that year, 1817.

<sup>416</sup> "Queen Dolly," William T. Barry to Catherine Armistead Mason Barry, February 24, 1815, William T. Barry, "Letters of William T. Barry," 237.

<sup>417</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, November 23, 1817, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 141.

The first to feel a direct blow were the foreign ministers, with whom Monroe had a long and disagreeable relationship. While serving as minister to Great Britain, Monroe's impression of Washington City's foreign legations had been negatively shaped by the letters of Jefferson and Madison, whose letters were filled with news of the Merry uproar. As secretary of state under Jams Madison, James Monroe had dealt with a new set of foreign ministers; but they had not improved his opinion. As a set, he had found them condescending toward the new republic and overly occupied with protocol, so much so that, in 1812, his disapproval became public fare.

The event was the 1812 Birth-night Ball honoring George Washington and it was, according to the newspapers, "a most curious dispute."<sup>418</sup> The distinguished crowd included cabinet officials, members of the foreign legations, and the president's lady. The ball managers chose locally prominent General John Mason to escort Dolley Madison into the dinner. They asked British Minister Augustus Foster and French Minister Louis Sérurier to each "hand to supper two of the American Secretaries' wives."<sup>419</sup> Secretary Monroe objected. He and Secretary of War William Eustis reminded Foster and Sérurier that "the etiquette at the courts of Europe [was] to allow, on all occasions, precedence to their own ministers."<sup>420</sup> Should not the same protocol be observed in Washington? British Minister Foster concurred, and "very politely gave way, but the Frenchman refused to yield, stating that the French government expected precedence to be given to his

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<sup>418</sup> "Curious Dispute," *Federal Republican* (Baltimore), March 2, 1812. See also Phoebe Morris to Rebecca Morris, February 23, 1812, Dolley Madison Collection, Dumbarton House, Washington, DC.

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*

ministers abroad."<sup>421</sup> Eventually Minister Sérurier relinquished, but not without insisting "that on all *future occasions* . . . precedence would be yielded to the minister of France," a posture that did not endear him to future president Monroe.<sup>422</sup>

Public squabble aside, Washington's foreign ministers repeatedly exasperated the patience of Madison's secretary of state. Sérurier proved himself incapable of convincing the French government to cease their attacks on neutral American ships and Foster lacked the ability "to perceive and interpret for his home government" signs that eventually led to the War of 1812.<sup>423</sup> Other members of the diplomatic corps were as frustrating. Russia's Nicolas Kosloff instigated an international dispute by demanding diplomatic immunity for a Russian consul accused of sexual assault in Philadelphia.<sup>424</sup> And the volatile Baron Hyde de Neuville, who succeeded Louis Sérurier as French minister, possessed a self-righteous national vanity that caused him to lash out at the administration over every perceived "criticism, direct or implied."<sup>425</sup> Overall, Secretary Monroe was convinced that the trials generated by "these little men" not only affected his health but also were unworthy of the government's time.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Augustus John Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, xii. On Monroe and Madison's frustrations with Foster and Sérurier, see Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administrations of James Madison* (1891; New York: Library of America, 1986), 423-26.

<sup>424</sup> Daniel L. Schlafly Jr., "The First Russian Diplomat in America: Andrei Dashkov on the New Republic," *The Historian* 60, no. 1 (September 1997): 45-46, 56.

<sup>425</sup> Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 351.

<sup>426</sup> "James Monroe to James Madison, August 31, 1816," The James Madison Papers, Library of Congress, <[http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.26\\_1491\\_1492](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.26_1491_1492) (July 7, 2014). See also Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity*, 351.

As an experienced envoy to England and France, Secretary Monroe was keenly aware of the inflated status enjoyed by foreign ministers stationed in Washington City and, in particular, their unprecedented personal relationship with the head of state. Washington and Adams had treated foreign legations with respect and ceremony, but with formality.<sup>427</sup> Jefferson eliminated the formality. What he denied them in pomp and ceremony, however, he compensated with his time and hospitality. Foreign ministers and their secretaries sat, as among peers, at the president's table, some of them quite frequently. Moreover, although diplomatic business was still officially routed through the secretary of state, as it had been in previous administrations, Jefferson's accessibility meant that a minister could easily bypass channels in favor of speaking directly with the chief executive. Under President James Madison, the ministers retained their generous access to the president and had the added pleasure of Dolley Madison's personal friendship. At the start of the Monroe administration, and as representatives of "Grand Nation[s]" serving in upstart America, the foreign ministers still believed they were owed special respect.<sup>428</sup> James Monroe did not agree.

At his presidential inauguration, the foreign ministers were assigned reserved seating at the installation, and they attended both the afternoon reception and the

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<sup>427</sup> President Washington established for himself that routine official business between foreign ministers and the executive branch must be initiated through the secretary of state, and not by direct contact with the executive. As he explained it to one French minister, "I take [that] to have been the reason for instituting the great Departments, and appointing officers therein." George Washington to Eleonor Francois Elie, Comte de Moustier, May 25, 1789, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 2 Letterbooks, <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>> (February 17, 2014).

<sup>428</sup> "Curious Dispute," *Federal Republican* (Baltimore), March 2, 1812.

inaugural ball. If the ministers were shunned in any manner during the festivities, it did not warrant public reporting.<sup>429</sup> But the following autumn, as the government unpacked its bags for another congressional season, the new president took action. On November 7, 1817, James Monroe advised Secretary of State John Quincy Adams that the days of foreign ministers visiting the presidents at will, of taking "tea at their houses as among individuals" were over.<sup>430</sup> "It was his desire," wrote Adams, "to place the foreign Ministers . . . upon the same footing as the American ministers were placed upon at the European Courts; upon a footing of form and ceremony."<sup>431</sup> With that intent, Monroe already had informed the legations that, effective immediately, the ministers were to work exclusively through the secretary of state. Of course, the president added a bit monarchically, should they require "personal audiences," Monroe "would always grant them and receive them in form."<sup>432</sup>

The president's directive to Secretary Adams left the foreign ministers with their "form and ceremony," but it stripped them of the status and influence that came with free

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<sup>429</sup> "Washington City, March 3. The Inauguration," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), March 15 1817. According to Mary Bagot, wife of the British minister, the ministers were unaware that benches had been reserved for them at the ceremony. "In consequence . . . it was agreed that none of us should attend." Mrs. Bagot was unclear on who, specifically, was included in the "us." The newspaper did mention "foreign officers" at the installation. The Bagots attended the afternoon reception and the inaugural ball, although Mrs. Bagot was unimpressed with the "blackguard" crowd and they left before the supper. Mary Bagot, March 4, 1817, Mary Bagot and David Hosford, "Exile in Yankeeland: The Journal of Mary Bagot, 1816-1819," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 51, (1984): 45; "Washington, March 5," *Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser*, March 6, 1817.

<sup>430</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 30, November 7, 1817, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2004), 271, <<http://www.masshist.org/jqadiaries>> (August 1, 2013).

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

access to the head of state.<sup>433</sup> Without that access, they were able to win only a few minor victories throughout the Monroe administration. As a group, they insisted and received a private reception with the presidential couple a half hour before the opening of the White House on New Year's Day, and they maintained privileged seating at the 1821 inauguration.<sup>434</sup> However, they no longer enjoyed a personal relationship with the presidential family. Events such as the marriage of Monroe's younger daughter in 1820, was off-limits. The foreign ministers did not receive invitations to the wedding (a snub they shared with most of Washington), and when the delegations asked about associated festivities, they were told "to take no notice" of the events.<sup>435</sup> Foreign ministers were reduced to accessing the chief magistrate by requesting a personal audience or by attending the occasional state dinner. Elizabeth Monroe's public drawing room also provided accessibility, although in the first months of the administration, the availability of that venue seemed in question.

The burning of the executive mansion during the War of 1812 left it inhabitable until October 1817, at which time the Monroes moved into a partially reconstructed, partly refurnished residence. By November, John Quincy Adams wrote that "[i]t was under consideration whether [President Monroe] should have weekly Evening parties, as had been customary with the former Presidents who had Ladies."<sup>436</sup> The debate centered not only on the Monroes' natural propensity toward reserve but also on the chaos that

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<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, December 30, 1817, 289.

<sup>435</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 31, March 9, 1820, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 281.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

some felt had surrounded the Madison receptions. "These drawing-room jams can be compared to nothing better than the *Madi gras* [sic] in France and Spain," wrote one observer.<sup>437</sup> Men stood on silk chairs "to view a picture," spit tobacco on the Turkish rugs, arrived unkempt and unclean.<sup>438</sup> The president's house had been turned into "a *tavern*" . . . free to every one," in which the next logical step would be to sell "ice-creams and refreshments . . . and give to the hostess a salary for her attendance."<sup>439</sup>

In December 1817, and under the impression that the Monroes had decided to discontinue the public receptions, the *National Register* reported the community outrage but sympathized with the Monroes' decision. "The District" was getting too big for such a weekly affair, and the crowds entailed too great a physical drain on the "Presidentess."<sup>440</sup> "Th[is] season, therefore, strikes us not only as being favorable to such an altercation, but as requiring it."<sup>441</sup> Then on January 6, 1818, the *Washington Gazette* announced that

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<sup>437</sup> "Views at Court," *Salem Gazette* (MA), June 20, 1817, from a letter dated February 13, 1817.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>440</sup> "From the National Register. The Drawing Room," *City of Washington Gazette*, December 17, 1817. In 1810, one congressman estimated Madison drawing room crowds, on the average, "not less than 200 of both sexes." By 1815, at least the New Year's levee was drawing twice that number. Ebenezer Sage to his niece, January 24, 1810, Ebenezer Sage Correspondence; John Humphrey Noyes to his wife, Harriet Holton Noyes, December 19, 1815, George Wallingford Noyes, *John Humphrey Noyes, the Putney Community* (Oneida, NY: n. p., 1931), 89; available at Hathitrust Digital Library, <[http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b57196;view=1up;seq=9](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b57196;view=1up;seq=9)> (July 2, 2014).

<sup>441</sup> "Washington City, March 3. The Inauguration," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), March 15 1817. According to Mary Bagot, wife of the British minister, the ministers were unaware that benches had been reserved for them at the ceremony. "In consequence . . . it was agreed that none of us should attend." Mrs. Bagot was unclear on who, specifically, was included in the "us." The newspaper did mention "foreign officers" at the installation. The Bagots attended the afternoon reception and the inaugural ball, although Mrs. Bagot was unimpressed with the "blackguard" crowd and they left before



either the source of the *National Register's* information "was greatly mistaken, or that the intention at the President's has been changed. If the latter, the LADIES, we presume, have insisted on their RIGHTS."<sup>442</sup> A presidential drawing room would commence on January 14, 1818.

There were immediate differences between the Monroe drawing rooms and those of Dolley Madison. Where the Madison reception had been held weekly during the congressional session and then lingered into the off-season, the Monroes gave theirs fortnightly and there would be no lingering. "Mrs. Monroe was not calculated for the drawing room," wrote the congressional librarian, George Watterson.<sup>443</sup> "She was sickly and reserved; unable from her bad health or a want of inclination to mingle with the company that visited her house."<sup>444</sup> Dolley Madison had circulated the rooms; Elizabeth Monroe stood or sat in one area, "surrounded by a bevy of female friends."<sup>445</sup> The Monroe attendees were more gentrified than those who had crowded into Queen Dolley's receptions. In 1828, Fenimore Cooper wrote a romantic view of the Monroe drawing room, in which all were welcome, down to the cart man who left his horse in the street while he ventured in "to shake hands with the President."<sup>446</sup> But Washington resident Mary Clemmer, looking back fifty years, related local folklore that at one drawing room, "Mr. Monroe refused admission to a near relative, who happened not to have a suit of

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the supper. Mary Bagot, March 4, 1817, Mary Bagot, "Exile in Yankeeland," 45;

"Washington, March 5," *Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser*, March 6, 1817.

<sup>442</sup> [Some few days ago], *City of Washington Gazette*, January 6, 1818.

<sup>443</sup> George Watterston, *Wanderer in Washington* (Washington, DC: Printed at the Washington Press, by Jonathan Elliot, Jr., 1827), 69.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> Cooper, *Notions of the Americans*, 57.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

small-clothes and silk hose."<sup>447</sup> Wealthy Rosalie Calvert, who had been unimpressed by "Queen Dolla lolla," found the Monroe drawing rooms "better managed" and the quality of the guests improved. As a vehicle for introducing her daughter to society, though, Calvert had to admit that the occasions were "neither pleasant nor rewarding for young people."<sup>448</sup> Historian Constance Green contended that beneath the Monroe festivities "lay a new stiffness."<sup>449</sup> Concerns over who "outranked whom undercut political harmony among officials; private citizens without federal office necessarily found themselves pushed toward the perimeter of a circle in the center of which they had only recently moved freely."<sup>450</sup>

The banishment of the foreign ministers and the cold, obligatory tone of the weekly presidential drawing room weakened the ties between social Washington and the presidential couple. Of even greater consequence was Elizabeth Monroe's decision to severely restrict her visiting schedule. Since George Washington, presidential wives, like their husbands, had been exempt from making first calls. Unlike their husbands, they had

<sup>447</sup> Mary Clemmer, *Ten Years in Washington: Life and Scenes in the National Capital, as a Woman Sees Them* (Hartford, CT: A. D. Worthington & Company, 1873), 203.

<sup>448</sup> Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, August 12, 1810 (Queen Dolla lolla), April 26, 1818 (better managed) (neither pleasant), Calvert, *Mistress of Riversdale*, 224, 334. George Watterson also found the events "very unpleasant," loud, and crowded. George Watterston, *Letters from Washington, on the Constitution and Laws; with Sketches of Some of the Prominent Public Characters of the United States; Written During the Winter of 1817-18* (Washington, DC: J. Gideon, Jr., 1818), 42.

<sup>449</sup> Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878*, 81. On the bad manners, see also Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America A Narrative of a Journey of Five Thousand Miles Through the Eastern and Western States of America: Contained in Eight Reports Addressed to the Thirty-Nine English Families by Whom the Author Was Deputed, in June 1817, to Ascertain Whether Any, and What Part of the United States Would Be Suitable for Their Residence: with Remarks on Mr. Birkbeck's "Notes" and "Letters"* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818), 294.

<sup>450</sup> Green, *Washington: Village and Capital, 1800-1878*), 82.

been expected to return the compliment of a visit. Martha Washington and Abigail Adams had limited the number of return calls to include only the inner circle of political and local society, but Dolley Madison took the practice to new heights of cordiality. She not only returned visits made by the wives of high-ranking officials and prominent citizens but she also called on "all the ladies of our citizens," as well as "strangers who might arrive at the metropolis."<sup>451</sup> In part, it was her commitment to returning calls that had "rendered [Dolley Madison] so amiable in the eyes of every visitant in Washington."<sup>452</sup>

By 1817, however, the city was almost triple the size it had been in 1801. Congress had grown from a 137 members to 218. More of the Washington gentry had past or present ties to the national government, more considered themselves part of official society, more wives stayed the season, and more visitors wished to be acknowledged by the first family.<sup>453</sup> Even Dolley Madison was said to have felt the strain of keeping up with her rounds. "What was begun as a pleasure became a serious and severe duty," reported the *Washington Gazette* at the start of the Monroe presidency.<sup>454</sup> "Toward the end . . . [Mrs. Madison] had not an hour she could call her own, performing a tour of duty which not one woman in a thousand could support."<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> "From the National Register. The Drawing Room," *City of Washington Gazette*, December 17, 1817.

<sup>453</sup> On increasing number of congressional wives, see Louisa Catherine Adams, December 3, 1821, Microfilm Edition of Adams Family Papers, reel 269, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>454</sup> "From the National Register. The Drawing Room," *City of Washington Gazette*, December 17, 1817.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

Given that Elizabeth Monroe had neither Dolley Madison's outgoing personality nor her constitution, the city anticipated that the new "Madame President" would minimize her own return visits.<sup>456</sup> She already had shown herself reclusive. Ladies calling on the White House before its official reopening on January 1, 1818, found Elizabeth Monroe "confined to her room" and not accepting visits.<sup>457</sup> "Some say," wrote Rosalie Calvert, "it is because her health does not permit her to receive company; others say it is because her house is still not furnished."<sup>458</sup> Either way, society did not expect what came next. In late December 1817, the newspaper announced that Elizabeth Monroe would be "at home in the morning to receive all those calls the Ladies of the District, or strangers, may please to make," but that her "delicate health, and the great increase of the population" would not permit the return of calls.<sup>459</sup> The president's lady was staying home.

The women of the city retaliated in a very uncourtly manner. They shunned Elizabeth Monroe's first drawing room. "The house was much crowded," wrote John Quincy Adams of the January reception, "but the number of Ladies there was not very

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<sup>456</sup> Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, April 26, 1818, Calvert, *Mistress of Riversdale*, 334.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, December 30, 1817; John Quincy Adams diary 30, January 1, 1818, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 291.

<sup>458</sup> Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, December 30, 1817, Calvert, *Mistress of Riversdale*, 329. The public kept informed on the state of Elizabeth Monroe's health, see, for example, "Letters from Washington," *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), April 24, 1817.

<sup>459</sup> "Drawing Room News," *Salem Gazette* (MA), December 26, 1817.

considerable."<sup>460</sup> As the Monroes continued to show a lack of proper respect for social Washington, the ladies continued to boycott the receptions. During the next congressional season, Sarah Seaton noted, "The drawing-room of the President opened last night to a 'beggarly row of empty chairs.' Only five females attended, three of whom were foreigners."<sup>461</sup> The same community women who had "insisted on their RIGHTS" to a presidential drawing room, now maintained their right to boycott it.<sup>462</sup> Both in the insisting and in the shunning, Washington society confirmed its democratic roots. The presidential couple was (and would always be) the apex of capital society, but only respect begot respect.

Cabinet wife, Louisa Catherine Adams, also took on the wrath of social Washington when she declined to make first calls on all the ladies of Congress. In early 1818, the congressional wives approached Elizabeth Monroe for her assistance in the matter. It had been their understanding that as strangers arriving to the capital, they were entitled to a first call from the cabinet wives. Mrs. Adams had not done so. In response to their complaint, Elizabeth Monroe, quite literally, *summoned* the secretarial wife to her chambers. The congressional ladies "had taken offence," Monroe explained and she hoped that the situation could be rectified.<sup>463</sup> Louisa Adams was unmoved. She held a weekly drawing room, gave dinners, and returned calls. To also make first visits on every

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<sup>460</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 30, January 14, 1818, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 296.

<sup>461</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, letter, December, 1819, quoted in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer"*, 144.

<sup>462</sup> [Some few days ago], *City of Washington Gazette*, January 6, 1818.

<sup>463</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 30, January 22, 1818, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 299.

lady arriving to town as a stranger, congressional or otherwise, was a massive undertaking to which she would not commit.<sup>464</sup>

John Quincy Adams supported his wife in a long missive to the vice president, and James Monroe refused to become involved.<sup>465</sup> As for the congressional wives, when it turned out that Elizabeth Monroe did not have control over the conduct of her cabinet wives, the ladies changed strategies. Unable to rely on the White House, they dealt with Louisa Adams directly by snubbing her entertainments. Even a year after the quarrel began, Adams reported that at one of her drawing rooms, "only two Ladies attended and about sixty gentlemen."<sup>466</sup> And at another entertainment, to which "Mrs. Adams *invited* a large party," Sarah Seaton was surprised to find "not more than three ladies" in attendance.<sup>467</sup> Eventually, the women forgave Louisa Adams her noncompliance. By the end of the Monroe administration, her parties were "the most agreeable and best attended in Washington."<sup>468</sup> The women had worked out their differences, but they had done so from within the framework of their social circle and not through arbitration from either the president or the president's lady.

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid, 299-300.

<sup>465</sup> John Quincy Adams to the Vice President of the United States, Daniel D. Tompkins, December 29, 1819, quoted in full in Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, *Etiquette of Social Life in Washington* (Lancaster, PA: Inquirer Printing and Publishing Company, 1873), 64-69; see also John Quincy Adams to the Vice President, December 29, 1819, John Quincy Adams and Worthington Chauncey Ford, *Writings of John Quincy Adams, Vol. VI, 1816-1819* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 569-73.

<sup>466</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, December 14, 1819, Louisa Catherine Adams and Judith S. Graham. *Diary and Autobiographical Writings of Louisa Catherine Adams* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 2: 444.

<sup>467</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, letter, December 1819, in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer"*, 144.

<sup>468</sup> "From the Providence American," *Essex Register* (Salem, MA), March 10, 1823.

Elizabeth Monroe's aversion to freely mingling with the ladies of society, whether from "bad health or a want of inclination," was evident not only at her drawing rooms and by her unwillingness to return visits but also at the Monroe dinners.<sup>469</sup> Unlike the Madison dinners, "the dinner-parties of Mrs. Monroe [were] very select," wrote one Washingtonian, and the dining room more likely to be filled with gentlemen guests.<sup>470</sup> In 1825, George Ticknor wrote that President Monroe "gives a dinner, once a week, to thirty or forty people—no ladies present—in a vast, cold hall."<sup>471</sup> In 1821, John Quincy Adams attended a "Dinner to the Corps Diplomatique" at which the president had invited no ladies, but more men "than could sit down."<sup>472</sup> That same year, Elijah Mills wrote home that "Mrs. Monroe does not appear at the dinner parties this year at all, to the . . . mortification and disappointment of the few ladies who are here with their husbands, and who are thus deprived of the honor of sitting at her table."<sup>473</sup>

Often at the table in place of Elizabeth Monroe was her "proxy," Eliza Monroe Hay, the Monroes' married daughter, and a woman that Louisa Catherine Adams described as more clever than agreeable.<sup>474</sup> Following the pattern of her mother, Eliza Hay declined to make first visits, but as the daughter, not the wife, of the sitting

<sup>469</sup> Watterston, *Wanderer in Washington*, 69.

<sup>470</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, letter, March, 1818, in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer"*, 136.

<sup>471</sup> George Ticknor to William H. Prescott, January 16, 1825, George Ticknor and George Stillman Hillard, *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor* (London: Sampson Low & Company, 1876), 349.

<sup>472</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, February 21, 1821, Graham, *Diary and Autobiographical Writings*, 2: 567.

<sup>473</sup> Elijah Hunt Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, January 6, 1821, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 29.

<sup>474</sup> Sarah Gales Seaton, letter, March, 1818, in Josephine Seaton, *William Winston Seaton of the "National Intelligencer"*, 136.

president, the city found that stance arrogant. She was also viewed as a gossip, and inclined, wrote Louisa Adams, to find her "own excellence entirely upon the errors and failings of others."<sup>475</sup> Moreover, although Hay had no problem spreading rumors about ministerial wives, she refused to associate with them except on occasions when her father demanded it.<sup>476</sup> Otherwise, Eliza Hay was determined to "neither visit [these ladies], nor receive visits from them, nor accept of any invitation to their parties."<sup>477</sup> Elizabeth Monroe supported her daughter's decision. James Monroe was caught in the middle, between an appreciation for his social responsibilities and affection for his wife and daughter. More than once, the president found etiquette decisions he made in his office renegotiated in his private quarters.

One covert test of wills between the president and his ladies ensued during May 1820, beginning when Monroe informed Secretary Adams that he wished to give a dinner party for departing French Minister Hyde de Neuville. The dinner was to include his wife, Anne Marguerite Hyde de Neuville, other members of the diplomatic corps, the cabinet, and their wives. However, since "Mrs. Monroe has been some time very ill . . . and Mrs. Hay has not been in the habit of visiting the families of the foreign Ministers,"

<sup>475</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, February 27, 1820, Graham, *Diary and Autobiographical Writings*, 2: 478.

<sup>476</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams wrote that Eliza Hay was spreading rumors about Mary Bagot, the popular young wife of the former British minister. There were rumors to be spread. Before arriving in Washington, Mrs. Bagot had scandalized London with a "decided [and] undisguised" extra-marital affair. Harriet Granville to Georgiana Howard, Countess of Carlisle, August 4, 1810, Harriet Granville, *Georgiana Howard, and Virginia Surtees, A Second Self: The Letters of Harriet Granville, 1810-1845* (Salisbury, Wiltshire: Michael Russell, 1990), 21; Louisa Catherine Adams, February 27, 1820, Graham, *Diary and Autobiographical Writings*, 2: 478.

<sup>477</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 30, December 12, 1818, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 456.



Monroe hoped that Mrs. Adams, as wife of the secretary of state, would preside over the table.<sup>478</sup> Adams suggested instead that the president give that honor to the French minister's wife. Such a gesture would flatter Madame De Neuville and please Mrs. Adams. The next day, though, the president changed his mind, or had it changed for him. Perhaps it might be best, he told his cabinet, if "no ladies should be invited, but that, instead, Mrs. Hay should invite Madame De Neuville to a small evening tea-party."<sup>479</sup> Several hours later, Adams received word that ladies *would* be invited to the dinner (and there would be no tea party). He rushed to inform the French minister, whose wife then attended the dinner, but sans the presence of either the first lady or her daughter.<sup>480</sup>

This confusion occurred two months after what would remain Eliza Hay's greatest insult to the ladies of the foreign service—their banishment from the wedding festivities of her younger sister, Maria Monroe. Washington's elite had been upset when the Monroes decided on a private marriage ceremony, March 9, 1820, instead of creating what the city had hoped would be the event of the social season. The Monroes then arranged two drawing rooms on March 13 and 14 to appease the public. Any good will that might have generated was negated when society learned that, at the request of Eliza Hay, the foreign ministers and their ladies "were not to be admitted" to either of the public receptions.<sup>481</sup> Although President Monroe attempted to rescind the request through state department channels, John Quincy Adams was notified of the reprieve too late to be

<sup>478</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 31, May 19, 1820, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 348.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid*, May 20, 1820, 31: 349.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid*, 31: 350.

<sup>481</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, March 10, 1820, Adams Family Papers. See also Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity*, 407.

helpful.<sup>482</sup> Members of Washington society, wrote his wife, were shocked. Such ill treatment at the hands of the presidential family had "terribly wounded" the dignity of those shunned.<sup>483</sup>

Social dignity was everything in Washington City. The political wives of the city felt a strong empathy toward the ministerial ladies. They, too, were fighting to maintain their own social standing as they pressed for first visits and argued for returned calls from "Madame President."<sup>484</sup> John Quincy Adams called such concerns the "paltry passion for precedence," but it was not paltry to the ladies of Washington.<sup>485</sup> Social dignity brought with it status, respect, and beneficial alliances, not only for themselves but also for their husbands, for their children, for the family name, and—in many cases—for their communities back home. Dolley Madison had nurtured the city's social dignity with her personal friendship and her welcoming nature. The Monroes wore away at that dignity. By restricting access to the presidential family, they belittled social Washington's role in the complex fabric of national politics. Society could excuse Elizabeth Monroe because of her fragile health, but it found the continued insults of her daughter less forgivable.

All of this was happening amid a changing city. Since its birth, Washington City's official society had entertained and socialized independently of the president. Nonetheless, and in large part because of the provincial nature of the capital and the lack of other cultural diversions, social Washington had operated as a satellite around the chief

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<sup>482</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, March 10, 1820, Adams Family Papers.

<sup>483</sup> Ibid.

<sup>484</sup> Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, April 26, 1818, Calvert, *Mistress of Riversdale*, 334.

<sup>485</sup> John Quincy Adams diary 31, December 20, 1819, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 234.

executive and his family. With each administration, Congress, the government, and the city matured. By the start of the Monroe administration, although still a metropolis in the making, the capital was no longer the "rural retreat" of 1801.<sup>486</sup> In 1817, foreign minister Charles Bagot playfully called his diplomatic post, "Washington in the Wilderness," but the Englishman had not known the city in its earlier days.<sup>487</sup> If he had, he might still have complained of summers that "could thaw Europe," the vast distances between public building and private homes alike, the rudimentary sanitation system, the lack of public entertainments, and the muddy roads.<sup>488</sup> However, he also would have noticed that the city proper had grown to over two thousand homes, a hundred shops, a dozen churches,

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<sup>486</sup> "History of the Establishment of a Permanent Seat of Government for the United States," *Executive Documents . . . Forty-First Congress*, 13: 178.

<sup>487</sup> Charles Bagot to John Sneyd, March 24, 1817, George Canning and Josceline [sic] Bagot, *George Canning and His Friends Containing Hitherto Unpublished Letters, Jeux D'esprit, Etc.* (London: John Murray, 1909), 2: 40.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid*, Charles Bagot to John Sneyd, June 12, 1816, 2: 21. For complaints on distances between dwellings, see Elijah Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, February 15, 1823, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 39; and C. J. Jeronimus Bernard, William Jeronimus, and Heinich Luden, *Travels by His Highness Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach Through North America in the Years 1825 and 1826* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 242. For sanitation and water problems, see Crew, Webb, and Wooldridge, *Centennial History Of The City Of Washington*, 198. By 1829, the city still had no regular theater and very few public entertainments, besides listening to congressional debates. E. Cooley, *A Description of the Etiquette at Washington City: Exhibiting the Habits and Customs That Prevail in the Intercourse of the Most Distinguished and Fashionable Society at That Place, During the Session of Congress* (Philadelphia: L. B. Clarke, 1829), 59, 43-52. Mrs. Edward Livingston, whose husband would serve in Jackson's second cabinet, called Washington in 1824 "neither a city nor a village, but unites the inconveniences of both without the advantages of either," Louise Moreau de Lassy Livingston and Louise Livingston Hunt, *Memoir of Mrs. Edward Livingston: With Letters Hitherto Unpublished* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1886), 75-76.

and a population of over 13,000.<sup>489</sup> And he would have recognized that, although he and his diplomatic peers still maintained the most luxurious of the city's residencies, other families now had the ability to entertain as well as they, in homes no longer devoid of "Confectioners &c or French Cooks."<sup>490</sup>

By the Monroe administration, Washington politics was changing along with the city. During the Jefferson period, most of the capital's political power could be traced directly back to the president. His advisors worked in close harmony with him; he appointed both the mayor and the mayor's board; and Congress was small and manageable. As of 1820, however, the mayor and his board were no longer presidential appointments.<sup>491</sup> Congress had expanded from 137 members at the beginning of the Jefferson presidency to 261 members by the end of the Monroe administration. As Congress grew, it became increasingly independent of the executive branch. Furthermore, senators, with their six-year terms and smaller numbers, had been able to forge political status within the community. As a group, they became the object of attention and flattery by foreign ministers looking for ways to reinforce what little governmental influence they had left.<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> Crew, Webb, and Wooldridge, *Centennial History Of The City Of Washington*, 186; Green, *Washington Village and Capital, 1800-1878*, 21.

<sup>490</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, January 1, 1805, "Adventures of a Nobody," Graham, *Diary and Autobiographical Writings*, 1: 219.

<sup>491</sup> Washington (DC), *Charter of the City of Washington, Being the Act of Incorporation, and the Acts Supplementary to and Amendatory of, and in Continuation of the Same, Passed by the Congress of United States* (Washington, DC: Robert A., Printer, 1859), 4.

<sup>492</sup> Elijah Mills to Harriette Blake Mills January 16, 1821, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 30.

Furthermore, by the Monroe administration cabinet members had established their own sources of political power. They had complete autonomy over their departments and direct access to Congress. "With the development of cabinet-committee relations and secretarial salons, department heads had probably better sources of intelligence about goings-on at the Capitol than Presidents did," argued James Young.<sup>493</sup> "Nothing except a sense of courtesy . . . required [them] to bring any of their legislative business to the President's attention."<sup>494</sup> Thus, added Young, Monroe learned first from a congressman, and not from his Secretary of the Treasury, that "his administration had run up a deficit."<sup>495</sup>

Washington City was evolving from village to city and its political society was evolving with it. As the Monroes continued to disappoint, social Washington found they had alternate ways to entertain themselves. Theirs was no longer a capital in which one would have to live like a bear, "brutalized and stupefied," if not for White House entertainments.<sup>496</sup> Instead, holes in one's social calendar, previously filled by a presidential dinner or Queen Dolley's jam, were easily refilled, and often more stylishly, by a series of parties and drawing rooms around the city.

"Mrs. Monroe is open but once a fortnight," wrote Elijah Mills. "To make up . . . for the infrequency . . . Mrs. Bagot and Mrs. de Neuville have open rooms each one

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<sup>493</sup> Young, *The Washington Community*, 241.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid.

<sup>496</sup> Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, 8.

evening" during the week.<sup>497</sup> These women were with the foreign ministry, but the John Quincy Adamses also entertained extensively, as did the other cabinet families, members of Congress, and the established citizenry. "Mrs. D\*\*\*\*\*'s ball, last evening, was the most splendid thing ever seen in our country," wrote one member of social Washington in 1820. "This evening the secretary of war gives a ball—on Saturday Mr. Gales—on another day, senator Brown—on Wednesday is the drawing room—on Thursday the Washington ball—nabob col. Tayloe gives a great route—and on Saturday is the French minister's weekly ball."<sup>498</sup> Unlike in the Madison era, when Queen Dolley's attendance highlighted any Washington event, once society realized that the Monroes had no plans to modify their reclusiveness, private and public entertainments gaily proceeded without them at "large and brilliant" parties, sans the presidential couple, and with no mention of their being missed.<sup>499</sup>

The Monroe family remained aloof of Washington society, only performing the social duties they considered unavoidable. They felt no tendency to carry on where Dolley Madison had left off, and they were unapologetic in their refusal to do so. Elizabeth Monroe's fragile health caused secondary issues. She was often unable to entertain and, in 1823, her illness closed the White House for part of the season.<sup>500</sup> James

<sup>497</sup> Elijah Mills to Harriette Blake Mills December 20, 1820, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 29.

<sup>498</sup> "Picture of the Metropolis," *Metropolitan* (Georgetown), February 29, 1820.

<sup>499</sup> Elijah Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, January 6, 1821, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 29.

<sup>500</sup> Louisa Catherine Adams, November 30, 1823, Louisa Catherine Adams, Margaret A Hogan, and C. James Taylor, *A Traveled First Lady* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 315.

Monroe fulfilled what he considered his social responsibilities. He did so, though, with an eye to his wife's health and an appreciation that his daughter served as her mother's proxy out of a personal obligation to the family, and not from a public obligation to Washington society. As it turned out, Dolley Madison would be the exception, and not the rule in social Washington's relationship with the White House. Few first ladies after Queen Dolley returned visits as a point of etiquette or routinely attended public entertainments, and none did so to the extent of Dolley Madison. Presidential drawing rooms continued after the Madisons, and some were brilliant and crowded, but never again would they dominate society's social schedule as they had during the Madison years. Presidential dinners lost any signs of intimacy as Congress and the government grew bigger, and fewer auxiliary members of Washington society found a seat at the table.

As for presidential social authority, it had always been a byproduct of the role social Washington had assigned itself as "secondary planets and satellites" around the chief executive and his lady.<sup>501</sup> Jefferson had assumed social authority, but he enforced it only abstractly or by personal example. Dolley Madison had been a member of Washington society since its conception. As the president's lady, she accepted that her

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<sup>501</sup> Elijah Hunt Mills to Harriette Blake Mills, February 12, 1817, Mills, "Letters of Hon. Elijah H. Mills," 22. One example from the Jefferson period shows how society followed behind the president. Social custom during that period dictated that newcomers to a city receive the first visit. As the cabinet wives prepared to call on the new British minister's wife, Elizabeth Merry, they learned that the president wished Minister Merry to make the first call on his cabinet members. The women panicked. Did the president wish this change in protocol to extend to the families of the minister and the cabinet? To make matters worse, the secretary of state's wife, Dolley Madison, had already made her call on Elizabeth Merry. Instead of following their own social instincts, the women engaged in "a great deal of . . . whispering, and consulting." When it became clear that Jefferson's protocol was meant only for the men, they followed Madison's lead. "From the United States Gazette," *The Evening Post* (New York), January 19, 1804.

place was at the core of that society and she worked hard to nurture a congenial relationship between herself and its members. Like Jefferson, her social authority was assumed, and she led by example, not through decree or arbitration.<sup>502</sup>

This was not true after the Madisons left the White House. Elizabeth Monroe's request for obedience from cabinet wife, Louisa Catherine Adams, showed that the president's wife assumed she had social authority over at least the women of her husband's cabinet. However, when Elizabeth Monroe tried to mandate Adams's calling schedule, she quickly learned the democratic boundaries of any good republican court. As it turned out, Jefferson and Madison had ruled society only by the consent of that society, and that consent was based on social dependency, which society had outgrown, and on reciprocity, which the Monroes were not supplying in sufficient amounts.

With the Monroes, Washingtonian society shifted its center of gravity off presidential grounds and into the city where they could conduct business in a consistent and orderly fashion, no longer dependent on the whims of the presidential couple. The residents in the White House, whoever they might be, retained their title as head of Washington's political society, but their participation in that society was now less expected than appreciated. Social Washington would run itself, negotiating protocol and precedence among themselves, without consideration of any presidential social authority. Their new relationship with the presidential couple exhibited itself in empty chairs at the Monroe drawing rooms, Louisa Adams's noncompliance with Elizabeth Monroe's

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<sup>502</sup> For example, in the "Curious Dispute" between Secretary Monroe and the foreign ministers at the 1812 Birth-night Ball, Mrs. Madison did not attempt arbitration. "Curious Dispute," *Federal Republican* (Baltimore), March 2, 1812.



request, and the popularity of diplomatic families within social Washington despite their weakened status in the White House.

In 1824, the House of Representatives granted John Quincy Adams the presidency over Andrew Jackson. By that time, social Washington had redefined its relationship with the White House. The changes, however, were not a surprise to the Adamses. They had been frequent members of capital society since the Jefferson presidency. Louisa Catherine Adams had not only witnessed the social issues of the Monroe administration, she had been an active participant. As White House mistress, she benefited from the precedents set by Elizabeth Monroe. She did not return calls and she participated, or did not participate, in society as she wished. Louisa Adams also benefited from a newly independent social Washington that no longer expected the first lady to function as its queen. Society delighted in the generous entertainments she chose to give, but demanded no more of her. The absence of a republican court worked to the advantage of Louisa Adams and she passed the four years of her husband's presidency in relatively calm social waters.

Capital society's newfound autonomy would not, though, go untested. With the 1828 election came a new president, Andrew Jackson. Unlike every chief executive since George Washington, Jackson's experience with official society was limited to a year in Philadelphia and then, after an almost twenty-five year gap, two years as a Tennessee senator during the Monroe years. Jackson was a self-made man, a recent widower, a duelist, a military giant, and a man who liked to get his own way. For all practical purposes, a Washington outsider, he entered the White House assuming social authority

over a Washington society that no longer accepted its role as republican court. When events proved him wrong, it was left for Jackson to question society's autonomy and demand its return into the presidential fold. The result was the Eaton affair.

**CHAPTER SIX:**

**WICKED PEGGY AND THE LADIES OF WASHINGTON**

*Who should I see first in this wicked city but Mrs. Eaton.*

—LEVI WOODBURY<sup>503</sup>

Fortune favored Senator Levi Woodbury when his wife, Elizabeth, chose to stay in New Hampshire for the first two social seasons of Andrew Jackson's presidency. If she had come, the socially prominent Elizabeth Woodbury might well have been drawn into the issues of manners, morals, and politics that dominated Washington society from the winter of 1829, into the summer of 1831.<sup>504</sup> As a member of official society, Elizabeth Woodbury might have sided with the Washington women who disapproved of Secretary of War John Eaton's marriage to a local girl with a poor reputation. She, like they, might have refused to accept Peggy Eaton into her parlor despite Eaton's standing as a cabinet wife. Moreover, Elizabeth Woodbury's husband might have been forced, as others were, to defend his wife against the rampages of Andrew Jackson during the political storm known as the Eaton affair.

Woodbury, however, arrived in Washington alone. Because of that, he was able to bow unrestricted "at the [Jacksonian] footstool of power."<sup>505</sup> Instead of being on the firing end of Jackson's anger, Woodbury benefited from the Eaton marriage and its

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<sup>503</sup> Levi Woodbury to wife, Elizabeth Williams Clapp Woodbury, December 6, 1829, The Family Papers of Levi Woodbury, microfilm, reel 4, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>504</sup> On Elizabeth Williams Clapp Woodbury's status in national society, see Ellet, *Court Circles of the Republic*, 226-33.

<sup>505</sup> Levi Woodbury to wife, Elizabeth Williams Clapp Woodbury, January 9, 1830, The Family Papers of Levi Woodbury, microfilm, reel 5, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

complications. In 1831, he became the new secretary of the navy, and in 1834, secretary of the treasury, eventually earning a Supreme Court position in 1845. For others in Woodbury's circle, the events surrounding the Eaton affair proved less favorable.

Born in 1799, Margaret O'Neale was the daughter of a respectable Washington City innkeeper and tavern owner.<sup>506</sup> Considered handsome, intelligent, and witty, she had a reputation for being too "willing to dispense her favors wherever she took a fancy."<sup>507</sup> At seventeen, she married navy purser, John Timberlake. In 1828, Timberlake died at sea. Rumors spread that he had committed suicide after learning of his wife's indiscretions

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<sup>506</sup> Peggy Eaton, *Autobiography of Peggy Eaton* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), xi, 2. The spelling of Peggy's maiden name as O'Neale is from the 1827 *Washington Directory*. It is the spelling used by Jon Meacham in *American Lion* and John F. Marszalek in *The Petticoat Affair*. Margaret Bayard Smith in *First Forty Years of Washington Society* spelled it O'Neal, as did the cigar box company that put Peggy's name on their label. Her own autobiography spelled it O'Neil, but Marszalek argued that Peggy Eaton's death before publication prevented her from making the needed correction to O'Neale. Daniel Feller spelled it O'Neill in his 1995 book, *The Jacksonian Promise*, but as an editor of *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, he since made the change to O'Neale. *Washington Directory, Showing the Name, Occupation, and Residence of Each Head of a Family & Person in Business* (City of Washington: S. A. Elliot, 1827), 59; Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008), 66; John F. Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 252; Peggy Eaton cigar box image, Lantern Press, <<http://www.lanternpress.com/catalog/item/27629?from=250>> (July 8, 2014); Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815 to 1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 161; Andrew Jackson, Daniel Feller, Harold D. Moser, Laura-Eve Moss, and Thomas Coens, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume VII: 1829* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 71.

<sup>507</sup> John Floyd, March 8, 1831, in Charles Henry Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd: Governor of Virginia: Governor of Virginia, an Apostle of Secession, and the Father of the Oregon Country* (Richmond, VA: Richmond Press, 1918), 125; Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, January 1829, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 252; Peggy Eaton, *Autobiography of Peggy Eaton*, 4.

during his four-year absence, including a possible miscarried pregnancy.<sup>508</sup> Some of the rumors reported widower John Eaton, a close friend of Andrew Jackson, as being at least one of Peggy Timberlake's lovers.<sup>509</sup> The marriage of Eaton and Timberlake on New Year's Day 1829 caused a sensation within social Washington, but it was Eaton's appointment as secretary of war, three months later, that produced outrage.<sup>510</sup>

Because cabinet families were considered the *crème de la crème* of local political society, the appointment of Eaton placed his wife at the center of Washingtonian society—at least on paper. In reality, the elite families of the capital balked at admitting Peggy Eaton into their circle.<sup>511</sup> Her affair with John Eaton had been common knowledge since the Monroe administration, and cause, so the rumor went, for Elizabeth Monroe having barred Peggy Timberlake from her drawing rooms.<sup>512</sup>

Floride Calhoun, wife of the vice president, indicated her displeasure earlier than anyone, immediately after the Eaton wedding. There are two versions of the story. In the

<sup>508</sup> For a detailed account of John Timberlake's death, see Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*: 42-44. Marszalek left the last word to Peggy Eaton, who considered her husband's chronic and severe asthma as the cause for slitting his own throat. "Officers who were on the vessel at the time," she wrote, "assured me that it was quite evident that [Timberlake] did not do this in any attempt at suicide . . . It was simply the mad act of a man in a delirium." Peggy Eaton, *Autobiography of Peggy Eaton*, 38.

<sup>509</sup> John Floyd, May 7, 1833, in Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd*, 216.

<sup>510</sup> United States Congress, "Executive Proceedings of the Senate, U. S., at a Special Session, Being the Fifty-Second," March 9, 1829, *Senate Executive Journal*, 4: 8; Margaret Bayard Smith to J. Bayard H. Smith, February 25, 1829, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 282.

<sup>511</sup> Society matron, Margaret Smith, after hearing of Eaton's impending cabinet appointment, wrote her son that the entire Tennessee delegation had advised Jackson against the appointment because of Mrs. Eaton's reputation. "The authority of a President," she added, "was very different from that of a military chief and must yield to council." Margaret Bayard Smith to J. Bayard H. Smith, February 25, 1829, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 282.

<sup>512</sup> John Floyd, May 7, 1833, in Ambler, *Life and Diary of John Floyd*, 216.

Eaton version, the newlyweds returned from their honeymoon in mid-January 1829 to find a visiting card from the wife of incoming vice president, John Calhoun. Peggy Eaton and her husband, who had yet to be appointed secretary of war, returned the call, had a pleasant chat with their hostess, and thus ended the exchange of visits.<sup>513</sup> In the Calhoun version of the story, Floride Calhoun received a first call from the Eatons that January, "treated them with civility," but choose not to return the visit in light of Mrs. Eaton's questionable reputation.<sup>514</sup> Whichever version is correct, Floride Calhoun made sure that interaction between Peggy Eaton and herself was limited to that one occasion. Shortly after the inauguration, she departed Washington City, choosing to stay in the "untainted atmosphere of South Carolina" rather than risk the "contamination of Mrs. Eaton's company."<sup>515</sup>

Andrew Jackson was aware that Washington gentility disapproved of the new Mrs. Eaton, but he refused to heed to rumors. The president remembered Peggy O'Neale from his days as senator and had always liked her. Furthermore, Jackson linked the public gossip surrounding Peggy Eaton to the previous defamation of his own wife, Rachel

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<sup>513</sup> First version of the story: Peggy Eaton, *Autobiography of Peggy Eaton*, 54; "Major Eaton's Reply," September 17, 1831, and "Letter from the rev. F. S. Evans," November 5, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 41 (September 1831-March 1832): 52, 180.

<sup>514</sup> "Mr. Calhoun's Reply to Major Eaton," November 5, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 41 (September 1831-March 1832): 178-79.

<sup>515</sup> John Quincy Adams, December 30, 1829, *Memoirs*, 8: 159. According to John Marszalek, Floride Calhoun had always planned to return to South Carolina after the inauguration. Her children were there, and she was due to deliver a baby in August. However, in March 1829, Mrs. Smith commented, "Mrs. Calhoun goes home, not to return again, at least for 4 years," a statement that insinuates hidden meaning. John Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair*, 53-54; Margaret Bayard Smith to Mrs. Anna Bayard Boyd, Spring 1829, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 290.

Donelson Robards Jackson during the 1828 presidential campaign. At that time, Rachel Jackson found herself the target of scandal over legal issues surrounding her first marriage. Thinking that husband Lewis Robards had filed the necessary divorce papers, Rachel married Andrew Jackson in 1791. When the couple found out that Robards had not filed the papers, the error was corrected. John Quincy Adams supporters, though, publicly cast the incident as bigamy during the 1828 election. Jackson was convinced when Rachel Jackson died on December 22, 1828, that her death had been hastened by the humiliation of the slander.<sup>516</sup> Still in mourning as the events of the Eaton affair unfolded, the new president saw in society's reaction to Peggy Eaton, the same backbiting and malice that had followed his wife. Throughout the Eaton affair, Jackson would insist that, like Rachel Jackson, Peggy Eaton was the innocent victim of petty gossip. The bride was "as chaste as those who attempt to slander her," he wrote a Donelson relation, and appeals to the contrary from old friends and the local clergy only strengthened his resolve.<sup>517</sup>

Widower Jackson chose as his White House hostess, twenty-one year old Emily Tennessee Donelson, whose husband was both Jackson's nephew and his new

<sup>516</sup> Meacham, *American Lion*, 22.

<sup>517</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Christmas McLemore, April 26, 1829, Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume VII: 1829*, 184. Jackson's oft-repeated quote that the twice-married Peggy Eaton was "as chaste as a virgin" originated from James Parton's *Life of Andrew Jackson*. On September 10, 1829, Jackson called a special cabinet meeting (sans Eaton) for the express purpose of clearing Peggy Eaton's name. Parton wrote that what "occurred at the meeting . . . General Jackson did not think proper to have recorded." However, Parton continued, "From other sources I learn some particulars." Parton then related what he had heard of the meeting from his unnamed sources. Some of Parton's narrative is in dialogue form, including Jackson's comment that Eaton was "as chaste as a virgin." James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 3: 204.

presidential secretary. Local society wasted little time advising Emily Donelson of Peggy Eaton's poor reputation. Within six weeks of arriving to the capital, the young woman already had informed her sister back home of the discontent caused by Major Eaton's cabinet appointment. "[H]is wife is held in too much abhorrence here ever to be noticed or taken in society," she wrote. "The ladies here with one voice have determined not to visit her."<sup>518</sup> The new presidential hostess agreed with these women. Her few contacts with Peggy Eaton had left her "so much disgusted" with Mrs. Eaton's pretensions that she had decided not to call on the cabinet wife again, despite Donelson's awareness that the social clamor had become "a great source of mortification to [her] dear old Uncle."<sup>519</sup>

Emily Donelson's resolve to avoid Peggy Eaton prompted a letter from John Eaton. On April 8, 1829, Major Eaton sent a note reminding Donelson of their long acquaintance, his loyalty to her uncle, and her own inexperience with "the malice and insincerity of the world."<sup>520</sup> He compared the "fire side whispers" now in play about his wife to the "little scandalous tales" the same local society had related about Rachel

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<sup>518</sup> Emily Tennessee Donelson to Mary (Polly) Donelson Coffee, March 27, 1829, quoted in full by Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee* (Richmond, VA: Garrett and Massie, 1941), 1: 178, and originally located by Burke in the manuscripts of Mrs. Anna Nye Martin of Memphis, Tennessee. Emily's maiden name was also Donelson. She and her husband were first cousins. Jackson's wife, Rachel Donelson Jackson, had been a bloodline aunt to both.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> Secretary John Henry Eaton to Emily Donelson, April 8, 1829, and April 9, 1829, Andrew Jackson Donelson Papers, 1779-1943, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.



Jackson. In a postscript sent the next day, he asked her to provide details of the gossip she had heard.<sup>521</sup>

With the firm support of her husband, Emily Donelson stood her ground against Major Eaton's plea. In her written response, the young White House mistress expressed faith in society's ability to accurately determine between the wanton and the virtuous.<sup>522</sup> She dismissed Eaton's comparison between his wife and Rachel Jackson, explaining patiently that public scandal had never affected her aunt's acknowledged standing in local society, nor the esteem with which she was held by that society. She not only defended the Washingtonian women who John Eaton had accused of slander, but pointed out her own unsullied reputation and her conviction that, at life's end, "I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that my character has not only been pure but unsuspected."<sup>523</sup> She ended by advising Eaton, who had reminded Donelson of her public responsibilities as the presidential hostess, that it was not her place to dictate Washington etiquette or expect "honor or privilege" from her relationship to her uncle.<sup>524</sup> Instead, her actions would be

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<sup>521</sup> John Eaton to Emily Donelson, April 8, 1829, Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 1: 184.

<sup>522</sup> Emily Tennessee Donelson to Secretary John Henry Eaton, April 10, 1829, quoted in full by Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 1: 186-87, and originally located by Burke as a copy in the author's private collection. Emily's husband, Andrew Donelson, added a note to his wife's reply to Eaton. In it, Donelson reiterated that Emily had not been influenced by local gossip. He then stated that he would show the Eatons "every proper mark of respect and by my example to recommend these sentiments which justified it to my family." However, that was as far as his "duty to society" required of him. Andrew Jackson Donelson to Secretary John Henry Eaton, April 10, 1829, Donelson Papers.

<sup>523</sup> Emily Tennessee Donelson to Secretary John Henry Eaton, April 10, 1829, quoted in full by Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 1: 186.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 187.

"the proper one as [a] private individual."<sup>525</sup> As a result, once her duties in Washington City were concluded, she would be able to return to Tennessee with her virtue and dignity intact.

The summer months following the Eaton-Donelson exchange of letters drew little fire. The White House was still officially mourning Rachel Jackson's death; it was the off-season; and Emily was pregnant. There was, though, at least one incident. On a July boating excursion, attended by both the Donelsons and the Eatons, Emily had refused Peggy Eaton's assistance, preferring, it was rumored, to faint rather than to accept the cabinet wife's offer of cologne and a fan.<sup>526</sup> But with late autumn, the city came alive. Congress returned, and with it, a new social season. The first significant sign of trouble occurred when Andrew Jackson insisted, against his niece's wishes, that the Eatons attend baby Mary Rachel Donelson's November christening.<sup>527</sup> By that time, the administrative branch had firmly drawn its battle lines. On one side stood President Jackson, Secretary of State Martin Van Buren, Postmaster General William Barry, and Secretary of War John Eaton. Added to that mix was Eaton's former brother-in-law and current White House resident, William Berkeley Lewis, who had served under Jackson in the War of 1812, and was now a loyal presidential advisor.<sup>528</sup> On the other side stood the "moral party," which included the Donelsons, Vice President John Caldwell Calhoun, and

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> Andrew Jackson Donelson to Andrew Jackson, October 25, 1830, Donelson Papers.

<sup>527</sup> John Quincy Adams, March 3, 1830, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 197.

<sup>528</sup> On William Lewis, see Lorman A. Ratner, *Andrew Jackson and His Tennessee Lieutenants: A Study in Political Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 57-64.

the rest of the cabinet—Secretary of the Treasury Samuel Ingham, Attorney General John Berrien, and Secretary of the Navy John Branch.<sup>529</sup>

Closely following the baby's christening came the president's official dinner for his cabinet and their wives.<sup>530</sup> According to Secretary Van Buren, Jackson had delayed scheduling the dinner until late November because of his "undefined apprehension that the violent feelings of the members on both sides of the social problem . . . might lead to unavoidable acts on his part."<sup>531</sup> What those unavoidable acts might have been, Van Buren did not share. As it turned out, the dinner was well attended, and "both sides of the social problem" exhibited no outward signs of hostility.<sup>532</sup> "Nevertheless," wrote Van Buren, there were "sufficient indications of its existence to destroy the festive character of the occasion and to make it transparently a formal and hollow ceremony."<sup>533</sup>

The cabinet wives then saved themselves from another uncomfortable evening by declining *en masse* their invitations to the next administrative dinner, that of Martin Van Buren. In this case, both sides declined, including Peggy Eaton and her ally, Sarah Barry, "who it appeared had also resolved to remain behind their batteries."<sup>534</sup> For those

<sup>529</sup> John Quincy Adams, February 6, 1830, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 185.

<sup>530</sup> William T. Barry to daughter, Susan Barry Taylor, November 27, 1829, William T. Barry, "Letters of William T. Barry," *William and Mary Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (April 1905): 243. Barry described the dinner as "the most splendid entertainment" he had yet seen in the capital. It was held on November 26, 1829.

<sup>531</sup> Martin Van Buren and John Clement Fitzpatrick, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1920), 347.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

attending, the absence of the disputing cabinet wives made for a dinner table "freed from . . . embarrassment," contended Van Buren.<sup>535</sup> "Their joy was unconfined."<sup>536</sup>

By the new year, what Van Buren called the "Eaton malaria" was a social epidemic.<sup>537</sup> Levi Woodbury observed at the president's first levee, January 7, 1830, that the crowd was "less full than one would expect" and that Mrs. Donelson kept "the length of the room" between herself and Peggy Eaton.<sup>538</sup> Across the city, the Eatons were ignored by much of society. Secretaries John Berrien, Samuel Ingham, and John Branch held "large evening parties" in keeping with their station, but they did not include the Secretary of War and his wife on their guest lists.<sup>539</sup>

Madame Huygens, wife of the Dutch foreign minister, and the only ministerial wife residing at the capital, incensed the president when he heard that she had declared her intentions to use her social influence to personally "put Major Eaton and his family out of society."<sup>540</sup> Madame Huygens had been insulted when, at the Russian ball, she was assigned the arm of Major Eaton, while her host escorted into supper, the disreputable Mrs. Eaton. The minister's wife retaliated with a huge party from which she excluded the Eatons.<sup>541</sup> When three department heads then gave parties to which the Eatons were not

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid, 403.

<sup>538</sup> Levi Woodbury to Elizabeth Williams Clapp Woodbury, January 9, 1830, Family Papers of Levi Woodbury.

<sup>539</sup> John Quincy Adams, February 6, 1830, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 184-85.

<sup>540</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 354-55; August 13, 1831, *Nile's Weekly Register* 40 (March 1831-September 1831): 427.

<sup>541</sup> Account of the incident at the Russian ball, Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 352; account of Huygens party, John Quincy Adams, January 8, 1830, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 166.

invited, Jackson saw the hand of the minister's wife at play. In response, Jackson threatened to "send Mr. Huygens his passports."<sup>542</sup> He would have done so, Van Buren insisted, if the secretary of state had not convinced the president that Madame Huygens had never verbalized a threat to the Eatons.<sup>543</sup>

"The Administration party," wrote John Quincy Adams in early 1830, was firmly split over a "point of morals."<sup>544</sup> As local society matron Margaret Bayard Smith noted, "One woman has made sad work here; to be, or not to be, her friend is the test of Presidential favour."<sup>545</sup> At the center was Peggy Eaton, who exhibited confidence from the start that Jackson would remain loyal to her cause, and was not above making threats to barter her way into society.

In July of 1829, in response to Emily Donelson's perceived rudeness on the boat trip, Peggy Eaton informed Andrew Donelson that his uncle had promised to send the Donelsons back to Tennessee unless they changed their "disposition not to be intimate with her."<sup>546</sup> A year later, Peggy Eaton tested the president's resolve. On June 9, 1830, she sent Jackson a note declining dinner at the White House because "circumstances my dear Genl are such that under your kind and hospitable roof I cannot be happy."<sup>547</sup> She had concluded that no matter how much she "endeavored to return good for evil," certain

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<sup>542</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 353.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid*, 354.

<sup>544</sup> John Quincy Adams, February 6, 1830, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 185.

<sup>545</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, January 26, 1830, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 310.

<sup>546</sup> Andrew Jackson Donelson to Andrew Jackson, October 25, 1830, Donelson Papers.

<sup>547</sup> Peggy O'Neale Timberlake Eaton to Andrew Jackson, June 9, 1830, Donelson Papers.

members of the Jackson household continued their "unkind treatment."<sup>548</sup> The violent family quarrel that followed the letter resulted in exactly what Peggy Eaton had warned of a year before.<sup>549</sup> That month, the Donelsons packed up for a permanent move back to Tennessee.<sup>550</sup>

By late summer, Andrew Donelson decided to continue as the president's secretary. He returned to Washington with Jackson that September 1830, but his wife stayed back. Jackson had demanded that, if his niece were to return to the capital, she do so determined to "harmonise and unite in council with me and my friends, instead of associating with my hidden and secrete enemies."<sup>551</sup> In this case, though, he was no more successful in asserting his patriarchal authority over Emily Donelson than he was in asserting social authority over the ladies of Washington. His niece refused to comply. She maintained her conviction that Jackson's "secrete enemies" were correct in their denunciation of Peggy Eaton, and she remained committed to defending her own standards of virtue, even if it meant staying in Tennessee.<sup>552</sup>

Then, on April 21, 1831, the resignations of Secretaries Martin Van Buren and John Eaton appeared in the *National Intelligencer*.<sup>553</sup> Eaton's notification, dated April 8, pleaded his original reluctance to accept the cabinet post and a confidence that the

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Andrew Jackson Donelson to Andrew Jackson, October 30, 1830, Donelson Papers. Of the argument, Donelson wrote that he had "not forgotten the language which [Jackson] employed on that occasion, and the determination you then expressed of carrying us home and leaving us there."

<sup>550</sup> Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 1: 232.

<sup>551</sup> Andrew Jackson Donelson to Andrew Jackson, March 24, 1831, Donelson Papers.

<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

<sup>553</sup> John Quincy Adams, April 21, 1831, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 358.

president's administration was now stable enough to allow Eaton to "indulge in his wish to retire."<sup>554</sup> Van Buren's resignation, dated a day after Eaton's, announced that he was leaving the cabinet in response to talk, "much against his own will," of his being a presidential candidate, and that "propriety" dictated his resignation.<sup>555</sup> In actuality, it was Van Buren, rather than Eaton, who first approached Jackson about resigning. In his autobiography, Van Buren wrote of a wish to bring administrative and familial peace to Jackson's presidency.<sup>556</sup> As secretary of state and highest-ranking member of the cabinet, Van Buren's resignation, followed by Eaton's, allowed Jackson to request resignations from secretaries Ingham, Berrien, and Branch in order to "organize anew his Cabinet."<sup>557</sup> Left standing were Vice President Calhoun, whose cabinet support disappeared with the Ingham, Berrien, and Branch resignations, and Postmaster General William Barry, whose wife had accepted Peggy Eaton into their private social circle.

With the published resignations, the Peggy Eaton affair went national. As Van Buren wrote years later: "If no blood was spilled, . . . a sufficient quantity of ink certainly was shed upon the subject."<sup>558</sup> Although the resignations only referred to a non-harmonious cabinet, *The United States Telegraph* decided that the cause of that "want of harmony" should be exposed.<sup>559</sup> The paper maintained that the dismissal of Ingham, Branch, and Berrien was because of "the refusal of their families to visit major

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid.

<sup>556</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 403, 406.

<sup>557</sup> John Quincy Adams, June 28, 1831, John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs*, 8: 373.

<sup>558</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 358.

<sup>559</sup> "Politics of the Day—from the *United States Telegraph* of June 28," July 23, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 40 (March 1831-September 1831): 374.

Eaton's."<sup>560</sup> The newspaper went further by siding against Eaton, writing that the major had belatedly called "for the blood of the husbands of the offending ladies," although he had known before his appointment that those ladies would not associate with *his*."<sup>561</sup>

That defense upset the Democrats, who condemned the remarks as traitorous to the party.<sup>562</sup> As a result, *Telegraph* editor, Duff Green, became a casualty of the Eaton debacle. He lost his favored status with the Jackson administration, which brought in a new editor, Francis Preston Blair, to run a new Jacksonian organ, the *Globe*. The *Telegraph* and the *Globe* battled all summer over the Eaton affair. Their editorials, along with a series of public accusations and retorts by Eaton, Berrien, Ingham, and Calhoun, filled newspapers across the nation into November of 1831.<sup>563</sup>

If the newspapers kept the issue alive nationally, Eaton's resignation solved what ailed the White House. Emily Donelson returned to the capital on September 5, 1831.<sup>564</sup> By the time of her arrival, the new cabinet members, all with socially acceptable spouses, were firmly in place. On September 19, the Eatons left Washington for John Eaton's

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<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.

<sup>563</sup> For other examples of the national publicity, see "A Mess of Politics," June 25, 1831, "Politics of the Day—from the *Washington Globe* of July 11," July 16, 1831, "Politics of the Day - from the *United States Telegraph* of June 28," July 23, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 40 (March 1831-September 1831): 298-304, 348-49; "Major Eaton's Reply," September 17, 1831, "Mr. Calhoun's Reply to Major Eaton," November 5, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 41 (September 1831-March 1832): 49-56, 178-80. See also, Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 358.

<sup>564</sup> Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 2: xvi.



home in Franklin, Tennessee. Two days before, Andrew Donelson wrote his brother-in-law, "Conciliation and harmony are now the order of the day."<sup>565</sup>

For Martin Van Buren, the Eaton affair proved a political godsend. According to his autobiography, Van Buren refused to become entangled in the debate over Peggy Eaton's virtue and was even accused by one Eaton supporter of maintaining "a degree of lukewarmness, in the matter, quite unexpected."<sup>566</sup> The intentions of his autobiography, however, were suspect.<sup>567</sup> His "*apparently disinterested* interference to heal the difficulties," wrote Davy Crockett, was immediately understood to be far more political than altruistic.<sup>568</sup> Van Buren did not create the Eaton controversy, but he did use it as an opportunity to impress Jackson with his loyalty. Whatever his personal view on Peggy Eaton's virtue, Van Buren's "lukewarmedness" toward the Eaton dispute resulted in his

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<sup>565</sup> Andrew Jackson Donelson to William Donelson, September 17, 1831, Donelson Papers.

<sup>566</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 343.

<sup>567</sup> Prior political antics earned Van Buren such unflattering monikers as "the Little Magician," "the American Talleyrand," "the Red Fox of Kinderhook," and the "Mistletoe Politician," Mark O. Hatfield and Senate Historical Office, "Martin Van Buren (1833-1837)," *Vice Presidents of the United States, 1789-1993* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), <[http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/martin\\_vanburen.pdf](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/martin_vanburen.pdf)> (May 10, 2014).

<sup>568</sup> Davy Crockett and Augustin S. Clayton, *The Life of Martin Van Buren, Heir-Apparent to the "Government," and the Appointed Successor of General Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia: R. Wright, 1837), 158, 37. The italics in the quote are Crockett's. Van Buren's 1854 retelling of the resignation expands over several pages of his autobiography, but never reveals the deals and manipulations behind his resignation. Martin Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 401-08.

becoming, as Margaret Bayard Smith observed, the president's "constant riding, walking and visiting companion."<sup>569</sup>

The Eaton affair produced less positive results for John Calhoun. His presidential ambitions were squelched in its aftermath. For that he blamed Martin Van Buren and John Eaton, whose "artful machinations" had turned the issue of "Mrs. Eaton's relation to the society of Washington" from a private question among the ladies into a public issue "with political considerations."<sup>570</sup> By openly and ardently siding with cabinet members Berrien, Ingham, and Branch on the issue of Eaton's morality, wrote historian John Nixon, Calhoun had been forced into a position that directly opposed the will of the president and undermined their already fragile relationship.<sup>571</sup>

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. questioned the purity of the vice president's moral outrage. He concluded, instead, that the Peggy Eaton affair was a failed attempt by Calhoun partisans to drive the secretary of war out of the cabinet. "The wives friendly to Calhoun *began* to snub her," he wrote.<sup>572</sup> "Men like Attorney General John M. Berrien and Justice McLean . . . both of whom had actually attended her wedding, now ostentatiously withheld all civilities."<sup>573</sup> Jackson, too, blamed Calhoun. Initially he had considered the

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<sup>569</sup> Martin Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 343; Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, January 26, 1830, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 310.

<sup>570</sup> "Mr. Calhoun's Reply to Major Eaton," November 5, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 41 (September 1831-March 1832): 180, 179.

<sup>571</sup> John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union: A Biography* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 174.

<sup>572</sup> Arthur Meier Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 54.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.* Although Schlesinger does not footnote his comment, it may come from William Barry's letter to his daughter, which he footnoted on other pages. In the letter, Barry

Eaton affair the work of Henry Clay, writing in 1829 that he was "fully warranted in charging Mr. Clay with circulating these slanderous reports."<sup>574</sup> By 1831, the president had changed his mind, settling on "mr and mrs Calhoun" as "the wire workers behind the scene."<sup>575</sup> The newly disposed cabinet, Jackson decided, had followed "that base man, Calhoun" in a plot to injure the president through his association with the Eatons.<sup>576</sup>

Historian Michael Holt argued along similar lines as Schlesinger. He maintained that John Calhoun was angry over the choice of John Eaton as secretary of war because Calhoun had his own candidate in mind. Moreover, the vice president was humiliated by Eaton's control over the selection of other cabinet members. As a result, "he determined

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wrote that "Judge McLean, Mr. Berrien and others, who are now unwilling to exchange civilities with Mrs. Eaton, were *present* at her marriage," William T. Barry to daughter, Susan Barry Taylor, February 25, 1830, William T. Barry, "Letters of William T. Barry, 1806-1810, 1829-1831," *American Historical Review* 16, no. 2 (January 1911): 334. If Berrien and McLean went to the wedding, it is possible that their wives did not. "The ladies declare they will not go to the wedding, and if they can help it will not let their husbands go." So wrote Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, January 1829, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 253.

<sup>574</sup> Andrew Jackson to Ezra Stiles Ely, March 23, 1829, Feller, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume VII: 1829*, 114, 113. Intelligence had reached Jackson that Mr. and Mrs. Clay had both spoken of Mrs. Eaton in "the strongest and most unmeasured terms," proving their attempt to "destroy the character of Mrs. Eaton . . . so that a deep and lasting wrong might be inflicted on her husband" (114).

<sup>575</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, July 10, 1831, Andrew Jackson, John Spencer Bassett, and David Maydole Matteson, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson: 1829-1832* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1929), 310.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid*, 311. Jackson's suspicion of Calhoun's complicity in the Eaton affair followed two events: a dinner toast to states' rights that Calhoun made in direct response to Jackson's own toast to preserving the Union, April 13, 1830, and Jackson's discovery shortly thereafter that in 1818, Calhoun had supported Jackson's being reprimanded for his military raid into the Spanish Florida. Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 120-23; Robert Vincent Remini, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 196-99.

to drive Eaton from the cabinet."<sup>577</sup> After two of Eaton's cabinet choices, John Branch and John Berrien, joined Calhoun's morality camp, the "cabinet was reorganized to expunge the Calhoun influence."<sup>578</sup> Sean Wilentz, though, argued against the Calhoun theory. He noted Jackson's early indictment of Henry Clay, and the president's shift in blame to "his own power-hungry vice president John C. Calhoun."<sup>579</sup> Wilentz concluded that "despite Mrs. Calhoun's prominence in shunning the Eatons, Calhoun was not the hidden instigator, and the Eaton 'malaria,' as it was soon called, appears to have had no clear-cut factional origins."<sup>580</sup>

As to the role of Washington society women in the Eaton affair, those historians who have written about the debacle have acknowledged that women played a part in its unfolding. Scholars have disagreed, however, on both the historical significance of their involvement and on the extent to which the ladies won or lost their battle against Andrew Jackson.

Nineteenth-century biographer, James Parton weighed in first. For him, there was no debate. Jackson had pitted himself against the unyielding structure of nineteenth-century society and lost. At the core of the uproar, Parton wrote, "[t]he two strongest things in the world were in collision — the will of Andrew Jackson and the will of lovely

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<sup>577</sup> Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development: From the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 45.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. Holt argued that Berrien and Branch blamed Van Buren for their forced resignations, and that "their firings were the most significant factors in the creation of opposition parties" in their home states of Georgia and North Carolina (46).

<sup>579</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson: The American Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 61.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*

woman."<sup>581</sup> He then quoted eighteenth-century dramatist, Aaron Hill. "For if she will, she will, you may depend on 't; And if she won't, she won't; so there 's an end on 't."

According to Parton, Jackson had battled the ladies of Washington, and they won. Moreover, as if to confirm the supremacy of Washington's calling card society over Jacksonian might, Parton ended volume three of his biography with a long, long list of Jackson achievements, concluding that the General failed at nothing he attempted "*except* compelling the ladies of Washington to associate with Mrs. Eaton."<sup>582</sup>

After James Parton, there was an almost hundred year stretch of scholarly indifference toward both the Eaton affair and the Washington women involved. Only a few Jacksonian historians before 1960 mentioned either the Eaton affair or the women who catapulted the events.<sup>583</sup> In 1953, John William Ward summarized the incident by writing, "As the Peggy Eaton affair proved later, it was better to err on the side of quixotism than to be found arraigned against a woman."<sup>584</sup> In 1959, Glyndon Van Deusen discussed the Eaton affair, but he dismissed the involvement of local society in a sentence, "Floride Calhoun . . . refused to have anything to do with Peggy, and the ladies

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<sup>581</sup> Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3: 287, 3: 302. It is Parton who wrote "that the political history of the United States, for the last thirty years, dates from the moment when the soft hand of Mr. Van Buren touched Mrs. Eaton's knocker" (287).

<sup>582</sup> Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3: 614.

<sup>583</sup> There is nothing of Peggy Eaton or her husband in any of the following Jackson studies: Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921); Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition: And the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948); Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960).

<sup>584</sup> John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 196.

of the Cabinet followed the example thus set."<sup>585</sup> Van Deusen quoted Andrew Jackson's line that he had not come to Washington "to make a Cabinet for the Ladies of this place, but for the Nation."<sup>586</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote in detail on the Eaton affair in 1945. His argument, however, concentrated on John Calhoun, whom he blamed for taking advantage of "the ambiguous social position of Peggy Eaton" in order to drive Secretary Eaton out of office.<sup>587</sup> Schlesinger agreed with Secretary William Barry that Peggy Eaton probably would have remained "unmolested" if not for her husband's political position, an argument that forgets how long Washington society and Peggy O'Neale Timberlake had been at odds.<sup>588</sup> In the end, Schlesinger used a footnote to dismiss his own theories on any Calhoun intrigue. "The facts," he wrote, "are inconclusive, however, and it may be plausibly argued that [the Eaton affair] was simply a social issue."<sup>589</sup>

With the late 1960s, arrived historians more willing to delve into the cultural significance of the Eaton affair. It was possible, they wrote, that the episode was neither a political conspiracy nor "simply a social issue."<sup>590</sup> Historian Edward Pessen found that "to men who live for office, nothing that threatened their hold or their chances is paltry," including the seeming triviality of whether or not Mrs. Eaton would be accepted by

<sup>585</sup> Glyndon Garlock Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era 1828-1848* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), 38.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid. Jackson's quote is from Andrew Jackson to John Christmas McLemore, April [26], 1829 and can be found in Jackson and Matteson, *Correspondence*, 21.

<sup>587</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson*, 54.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid. Schlesinger quoted Secretary Barry from William T. Barry to daughter, Susan Barry Taylor, February 25, 1830, in Barry, "Letters of William T. Barry, 1806-1810, 1829-1831," 334. John Calhoun argued that Peggy Eaton had been a social outcast long before her marriage, "Mr. Calhoun's Reply to Major Eaton," November 5, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register* 41 (September 1831-March 1832): 179.

<sup>589</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *Age of Jackson*, 54, n17.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

capital society.<sup>591</sup> Ten years later, Richard Latner concurred. "The Eaton affair," he wrote, "has often been characterized as a petty social feud," but, in actuality, it had significant "personal and political dimensions."<sup>592</sup> Both historians emphasized the ballot box over the drawing room when examining the significance of the Eaton affair.

In 1984, and for the first time in a century, Jacksonian scholar Robert Remini gave both the Eaton affair and its social dimensions major consideration.<sup>593</sup> His was not a cultural study, nor did he make the women of Washington his key focus, but Remini devoted not only pages, but chapters to the Eaton affair, and ensured, in so doing, that the topic would not be forgotten by future Jacksonian historians. Upfront, as had Parton before him, Remini discussed the Reverends John Nicholas Campbell and Ezra Stiles Ely.<sup>594</sup> These men were Jackson supporters who, early on, tried unsuccessfully to convince the president of Peggy Eaton's unacceptability as an appendage to the new administration.<sup>595</sup> The moral view of local Presbyterian minister Campbell fortified Washington society's stand against Eaton, a point that Victorian Parton assumed his

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<sup>591</sup> Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Quality, and Politics* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1969), 291, 288-92.

<sup>592</sup> Richard B. Latner, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson: White House Politics, 1829-1837* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 59.

<sup>593</sup> Robert Vincent Remini, *Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984). Remini not only devoted an entire chapter to "The Eaton Imbroglio" (203-16), but also wove that "imbroglio" in and out of the rest of the volume.

<sup>594</sup> Remini, *Course of American Freedom*, 205-09; Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 3: 185-205. Parton reported, in full, every correspondence between Jackson, Campbell, and Ely, and detailed reports on the personal meetings between Campbell and the president (3: 204).

<sup>595</sup> "Mr. Campbell, as the original cause of all this uproar and difficulty . . .," Margaret Bayard Smith to J. Bayard Smith, February 25, 1829, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 282.

readers recognized, but that Remini stipulated with a quote by Jacksonian supporter Amos Kendall. The whole Eaton debacle, argued Kendall, laid at the feet of "females with clergymen at their head . . . [who think they can determine] who shall & who shall not, come into society — and who shall be sacraficed [sic] by their secrete slanders."<sup>596</sup>

President Jackson's response to the minister's appeal was to write long letters, send out investigators, and call meetings, all in what Remini called, "a lunatic campaign" to clear Peggy Eaton.<sup>597</sup> When that crusade did not bring the proper results, the president took a more direct approach, demanding that his wayward secretaries treat the Eatons with due respect. "I will not part with major Eaton from my cabinet," the president told them, "and those . . . who cannot harmonise [sic] with him had better withdraw for harmony I must and will have."<sup>598</sup> Jackson's strong reaction to the treatment of Peggy Eaton was based, Remini argued, on his suspicions of political intrigue. However, the historian concluded, Jackson was wrong.<sup>599</sup> The Eaton affair was not about political intrigue. It was, instead, a societal issue centered on the ladies of the city, and they, Remini insisted, "simply disliked Peggy (with apparent good reason, let it be noted) and refused to socialize with her."<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Remini, *Course of American Freedom*, 213, citing Amos Kendall to Francis Preston Blair, November 22, 1829, Blair-Lee Papers, Princeton University Library.

<sup>597</sup> Remini, *Course of American Freedom*, 209. Francis Preston told his brother-in-law that Jackson had him read a ninety page manuscript "containing certificate evidence to prove the innocence" of Peggy Eaton, Floyd, March 8, 1831, in Ambler, *The Life and Diary of John Floyd*, 125.

<sup>598</sup> Memorandum in Jackson's Handwriting," January 29, 1830, Andrew Jackson, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson: 1829-1832*, 124.

<sup>599</sup> Remini, *Course of American Freedom*, 243.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid*, 243-44.



Although Remini allowed that the women of Washington had "apparent good reason" for their refusal to associate with Peggy Eaton, he tended to sympathize with the young woman's situation.<sup>601</sup> At three points in his narrative, the historian referred to Eaton kindly as "poor Peggy."<sup>602</sup> He concluded that her letter to the president in 1830, which declined further dinners at the White House, was not, as Andrew Donelson had written, the product of a veiled threat made a year earlier, but the action of a woman worn down not only by Washington society but also by the excessive patronization of both Martin Van Buren and the president.<sup>603</sup>

Since Robert Remini, other historians who have examined the Eaton affair have been equally sympathetic to Eaton's plight. In 2005, H. W. Brands wrote that, although "political rivalries sustained the boycott" against Mrs. Eaton, "[j]ealousy of Peg, who was still one of the most beautiful women in Washington, inspired much of the campaign against her."<sup>604</sup> Peggy Eaton biographers Leon Phillips and Queena Pollack arrived at the same conclusion, as did Peggy Eaton, herself.<sup>605</sup> In 1874, she informed an interviewer that her problems in Washington City had stemmed from the jealousy of other women in

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid, 213, 214, 239.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid, 239.

<sup>604</sup> H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 424.

<sup>605</sup> Leon Phillips, *That Eaton Woman: In Defense of Peggy O'Neale Eaton* (Barre, MA: Barre Publishing, 1974); Queena Pollack, *Peggy Eaton: Democracy's Mistress* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1931); Peggy Eaton, *Autobiography of Peggy Eaton*.

President Jackson's circle, all of whom, unlike herself, had no "beauty, accomplishments, or graces in society of any kind."<sup>606</sup>

Eaton's perspective on the cause of her ostracization was more self-serving than accurate. If beauty, accomplishment, and grace were causes for omission into Washington society during the Jacksonian period, there would have been no Washington society during the Jacksonian period. The degree of beauty may have varied among the women of the city, but men generally did not bring to the capital wives and daughters who did not have the poise and polish to hold their own place in the public arena. Many of Washington's ladies were defined in terms similar to the way Peggy Eaton defined herself. Edward Livingston's daughter described Emily Donelson as "beautiful accomplished and charming."<sup>607</sup> Benjamin Ogle Tayloe wrote of the Washington ladies of 1825 forming "together a galaxy of talent, beauty, and accomplishment."<sup>608</sup> And Levi Woodbury, at a Jackson dinner in 1829, noted that Mrs. Johnson was "exceedingly gracious," Mrs. Knight and Mrs. Findley, "just as they should be," and Emily Donelson and Mary Easton, another White House resident, "ladylike and intelligent."<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>606</sup> Interview of Peggy Eaton given to the *National Republican of Washington*, 1874, as recorded in Samuel Gordon Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History* (Nashville, TN: Ambrose Printing Company, 1921), 3: 324-34. Quote on p. 330. Meacham argued, "Jackson's interpretation of the Eaton affair was that he was acting for the common democratic good while aristocratic elites, jealous of his power in Washington, did everything they could to stop him," Meacham, *American Lion*, 74.

<sup>607</sup> Quote by Cora Livingston in Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 1: 172, and originally located by Burke in Meade Minnigerode, *Some American Ladies: Seven Informal Biographies 1924-1925* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), 244. Minnigerode did not cite her quote.

<sup>608</sup> Tayloe, *In Memoriam: Benjamin Ogle Tayloe*, 22.

<sup>609</sup> Levi Woodbury to Elizabeth Williams Clapp Woodbury, December 17, 1829, Family Papers of Levi Woodbury.

If Brands' jealousy theory did not flatter the ladies of Washington, at least it attempted to view the events from their perspective, an effort not previously made by any historians since James Parton. The jealousy theory, though, would be contradicted by two contemporaries of Brands, Kirsten Wood and Catherine Allgor. For them, the Eaton turmoil was about autonomy. The women of Washington society battled with the president over power, particularly the power to maintain their own criteria for admittance, which included genteel standards of womanly virtue and morality.

Kirsten Wood argued that in order to understand the women who shunned Peggy Eaton, it was necessary to view them, not as a collection of individuals, each playing a minor part, but as a unit of authority. As such, they "set the terms for the debate that followed both within the executive branch and in the public press."<sup>610</sup> Their goal, according to Wood, was threefold. First, they hoped to completely avoid a woman who by association might sully their own reputations. Second, "they were worried that others might be drawn to the admittedly attractive and amusing" Peggy Eaton, despite her lack of propriety.<sup>611</sup> Third, they found strength in numbers. In a time that was celebrating "the will of the people, it was heady stuff for women to ally with each other in the name of virtue and female purity and thereby to challenge powerful men."<sup>612</sup>

Pro-Eaton forces accused Washington gentility of using "moralistic language to camouflage their determination to make breeding and birth the keystone of social rank," but to do otherwise, insisted Wood, was to deny that the women of Washington not only

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<sup>610</sup> Kirsten Wood, "One Woman so Dangerous," 241, 256.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

considered "moral agency . . . an inseparable element of social rank" but also held themselves up as models for the nation.<sup>613</sup> The purity of those admitted into their society was firmly tied to a sense of national civic virtue, and female society's responsibility to safeguard civic virtue was in keeping within their sphere of domestic dominance.<sup>614</sup>

In this regard, Wood supported historian Barbara Welter's argument that Jacksonian men, increasingly focused on expansion and profit, allocated "virtue and moral guardianship to [their] women."<sup>615</sup> Women accepted this role as their own. Persuaded by religion, by their husbands and fathers, and by the popular press, they came to identify their own worth, and the worth of other women, in terms of purity, piety, and domesticity.<sup>616</sup> Welter confined herself to the white, middle and upper class ladies who had the leisure to pursue the "cult of True Womanhood."<sup>617</sup> They were educated women, who in the 1840s could indulge in a subscription to Welter's oft-quoted *Godey's Magazine*; fashionable, well-mannered women with honed domestic skills. These women understood the importance of a good marriage and were given the proper social venues for finding the right husband. That is a severely limited group of nineteenth-century women, but it is the type of woman who sat in parlors across Washington City.<sup>618</sup> These were the women of Washington, and during the Eaton affair, Wood argued, they were

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<sup>613</sup> Ibid, 256-57.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid, 256. See also Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 151-74.

<sup>616</sup> Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 152.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>618</sup> Scholarship that reexamines the Welter argument include Linda M. Perkins, "The Impact of the 'Cult of True Womanhood' on the Education of Black Women," *Journal of Social Issues* 39 (1983): 17-28; Mary Louise Roberts, "True Womanhood Revisited," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 150-55; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Taking the True Woman Hostage," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 156-62.

determined to uphold the standards of community morality and civic virtue.

Wood contended that the Eaton affair illustrated the complex way in which antebellum America negotiated the division of gender roles. She recognized the acceptance of Washington women as arbiters of morality and virtue, along with their insistence on autonomy, but she concluded that once their authority expanded into the political arena, it was easily squelched.<sup>619</sup> "There was precious little room," she argued, "for powerful women in most men's conceptualizations of politics, even though (and quite probably because) women and womanhood helped shape the political order."<sup>620</sup> Jacksonian democracy, according to Wood, promoted a "limited faith in women's abilities and a defensive limitation of women's potentially extensive influence."<sup>621</sup> The Eaton affair marked an end to the social authority that the ladies of Washington had enjoyed previously, leaving instead a chastened and benign society, who, for Wood, turned to reform and evangelism as an alternative.

Catherine Allgor agreed that the Eaton affair chastened Washington society, but while Wood focused almost exclusively on the Eaton years, Catherine Allgor formed a discussion that dated back to the Jefferson presidency. Unlike Wood, who maintained that the power of Washington women was vested in their unity, Allgor focused on four women with access to the president – Dolley Madison, Louisa Catherine Adams, Margaret Bayard Smith, and Margaret Eaton, and the methods they employed to gain

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<sup>619</sup> Kirsten Wood, "One Woman so Dangerous," 272.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

indirect political power. Washington society, as a whole, was only the stage on which these "women worthies" performed their feats.<sup>622</sup>

Similar to Wood, Allgor argued that society, which considered itself "a stabilizing force" on capital politics, found the chaotic aftermath of the Eaton affair "unsettling."<sup>623</sup> Like Wood, Allgor concluded that Washington society sacrificed its informal political influence when it resolved to uphold its strict moral standards, even at the cost of political careers. Andrew Jackson "brought democracy to Washington City," argued Allgor, "by insisting that one's standing in official society would be determined solely by political status, and not by arbitrary standards set by the ladies of the city."<sup>624</sup> With that, "the republican aristocracy in which the women of Washington had flourished" disappeared.<sup>625</sup> "Though they won the battle," argued Allgor, "they lost the war."<sup>626</sup>

Allgor, however, underestimated the ladies of Washington. They understood very well, and long before President Jackson, that one's standing in official society was determined by political title. They had been instrumental in creating that standard. One reason they were so upset with John Eaton's ascension to the cabinet was their appreciation of official precedence. They recognized their obligation to respect Peggy Eaton's position as a cabinet wife. They did not, however, respect the woman herself.

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<sup>622</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 1976): 83-103. The term *women worthies* is associated with Gerda Lerner, but Lerner gave credit to Davis for its coinage in Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women In History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 164, n1.

<sup>623</sup> Kirsten Wood, "One Woman so Dangerous," 273; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 236.

<sup>624</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, 237.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

That is why occasions such as Jackson's cabinet dinner became, as Van Buren worded it, "formal and hollow" ceremonies.<sup>627</sup> Their understanding of protocol and precedence, and their determination that it be maintained in Washington society, was one reason why these women refused to invite the Eatons to their private entertainments. The ladies of Washington recognized that, by their own self-determined rules of protocol, if Peggy Eaton were to be present at these entertainments, deference must be paid, and that was a courtesy they wished to avoid.

The Eaton affair did not mark an end to the social authority that the ladies of Washington had previously enjoyed. Instead, after the dust settled, society resumed "the grace, dignity, etiquette, and exclusiveness which [had] adorned" it before the Eaton affair.<sup>628</sup> Certainly, some of that society wore battle scars. The Dutch minister and his wife ate humble pie after Madame Huygens insulted the Eatons. Five members of the cabinet lost their posts and Calhoun's dream of becoming president ended. Emily Donelson and Floride Calhoun were forced to banish themselves from Washington City for a time. Four cabinet wives (including Peggy Eaton) had to relocate and the ladies of Washington were undoubtedly shaken by the extent of turmoil caused by their resolute stand. But Allgor wrongly stated that members of the new Jackson cabinet, "fearing a repetition of the affair, did not bring their families" to Washington.<sup>629</sup> Edward Livingston's wife and daughter were in and out of Washington society before, during, and after the Eaton affair. By the end of 1831, after Livingston replaced Martin Van Buren as

<sup>627</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 348.

<sup>628</sup> Samuel Clagett Busey, *Pictures of the City of Washington in the Past* (Washington, DC: Wm. Ballantyne & Sons, 1898), 362.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*

secretary of state, Margaret Smith considered Madame *Louise Moreau de Lassy* Livingston the leader of Washington's "fashionable world."<sup>630</sup> Catherine Milligan McLane, whose husband succeeded Samuel Ingham as secretary of the treasury, was also in town by the end of 1831.<sup>631</sup> Lewis Cass, the new secretary of war, brought his wife and four daughters from Detroit.<sup>632</sup> Floride Calhoun returned, as did Emily Donelson.<sup>633</sup> Levi Woodbury, after replacing John Branch as secretary of the navy in May of 1831, brought his wife to the capital that fall and outfitted her with a house and a carriage, for a cabinet wife without these amenities, he wrote her, "might as well not be a Cabinet Lady at all."<sup>634</sup> Although both Wood and Allgor quoted Margaret Bayard Smith as proof of a quieter, more reclusive society after the Eaton affair, Emily Donelson predicted "a good deal of gayety" as the new congressional season commenced in 1831.<sup>635</sup> During that same

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<sup>630</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, December 9, 1831, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 325.

<sup>631</sup> Ibid. In 1829, Jackson wrote that Catherine McLane had "*fainted* at hearing that her daughter *had visited* [Mrs. Eaton]." Andrew Jackson to Richard Keith Call, July 5, 1829, Feller, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume VII: 1829*, 327.

<sup>632</sup> Willard Carl Klunder, *Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1996), 61. Klunder wrote that the family lived first on F Street and then on G Street. They entertained on a grand scale, and the "daughters blossomed in the glow of Washington society" (61).

<sup>633</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, December 15, 1831, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 332. Emily Donelson returned to the White House on September 5, 1831; Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee: 2*: 1.

<sup>634</sup> Levi Woodbury to Elizabeth Williams Clapp Woodbury, July 28, 1831, Family Papers of Levi Woodbury.

<sup>635</sup> Emily Donelson to Catherine Donelson Martin, December 4, 1831, quoted in full in Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 2: 7.



season, Margaret Smith, herself, mused that her visiting list of "70 or 80" was the shortest "of any lady in Washington."<sup>636</sup>

With the Eaton affair behind them, the White House residents experienced a renewed enthusiasm for their social roles. On December 4, 1831, Emily Donelson wrote her sister of a grand dinner for about forty of the city's most elite, followed by a reception for three hundred. Jesse Benton Frémont would later remember President Jackson's "great supper parties" for a thousand or more, and a White House "adorned and ready for company."<sup>637</sup> Jackson's presidential entertainments proceeded in a manner not unlike what had come before him. Historian Gibbs Myers put it this way: "Although the old leaders of Washington society defied President Jackson in the Peggy O'Neal imbroglio, Jackson himself, during his second administration, showed a marked tendency to eat the cake of custom."<sup>638</sup>

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The gentle wives and daughters of the capital judged harshly. To modern sensibilities, they might appear to be, as historian Sean Wilentz wrote, "self-important Washington fixtures" with control issues.<sup>639</sup> However, these nineteenth-century women understood the precariousness of their social power in a period in which " . . . only a select few [women] of the exemplary elite could claim legitimate authority in

<sup>636</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith to Jane Bayard Kirkpatrick, December 9, 1831, Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society*, 323-24.

<sup>637</sup> Jessie Benton Frémont, *Souvenirs of My Time* (Boston: D. Lothrop and Company, 1887), 95.

<sup>638</sup> Myers, "Pioneers in the Federal Area," 157.

<sup>639</sup> Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 318.

Washington."<sup>640</sup> The woman who obtained that honor had to prove her gentility through her marriage, her manners, and her husband's official position. She then had to demonstrate herself a diligent gatekeeper—willing to socially exclude other women in order to assure that her family and her social circle remained unsullied by those "deemed vulgar, loose in morals, and uppity."<sup>641</sup>

The importance of feminine morality to a proper civic society was clear to all of those involved in national politics. It was why a decade before the Eaton affair, Jackson advised his nephew, Andrew Donelson, for whom he hoped a distinguished future, to seek only the company of "virtuous females."<sup>642</sup> It is why the wife whom Donelson chose wrote in 1829 that she hoped to die with "the satisfaction of knowing that my character has not only been pure but unsuspected."<sup>643</sup> It is why the ladies of Washington, vigilant over their own fragile position of influence and authority, balked at admitting Eaton into their society. Moreover, it is why John Calhoun defended his wife's right to censor Peggy Eaton, and why he publicly doubted if "official rank and patronage" should supersede

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<sup>640</sup> Nancy Morgan, "She's as Chaste as a Virgin!" in Sean Patrick Adams, *A Companion to the Era of Andrew Jackson* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 310.

<sup>641</sup> Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 318.

<sup>642</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, February 24, 1817, Andrew Jackson, Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume IV: 1816-1820* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 92.

<sup>643</sup> Emily Tennessee Donelson to Secretary John Henry Eaton, April 10, 1829, quoted in full by Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee*, 1: 186.

that "which the sex exercises over itself, and on which . . . the purity and dignity of the female character mainly depend."<sup>644</sup>

Right or wrong, and long after Old Hickory, Washingtonian women continued to use their own standards of virtue and morality as a basis for acceptance into capital society. Kate Chase Sprague, the unquestioned queen of Civil War Washington society, found that her affair with Roscoe Conkling, and subsequent divorce, would leave her "a social and political outcast."<sup>645</sup> The reputation of Natalie Benjamin, wife of a respected antebellum senator, prompted the ladies of Washington to treat her only with curiosity and as the subject of gossip.<sup>646</sup> During the same period, Senator Daniel Edgar Sickles, who murdered his wife's lover in Lafayette Square, was left "unfriended [and] melancholy" in the halls of Congress, not because he killed Philip Barton Key II, but "because he condoned his wife's profligacy and took her back."<sup>647</sup>

Eaton, Sykes, Chase, and Benjamin aside, the ladies of Washington were generally able to conduct society without overt battles of censorship. Participation in the capital's vibrant social life was a choice. Women who did not want to participate, or

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<sup>644</sup> John C. Calhoun, "Mr. Calhoun's Reply to Major Eaton," John Caldwell Calhoun, Richard K. Crallé, *The Works of John C. Calhoun: Reports and Public Letters: Vol. VI* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), 439.

<sup>645</sup> Peg A. Lamphier, *Kate Chase and William Sprague: Politics and Gender in a Civil War Marriage* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 201, 156. Chase turned to Conkling after years in a loveless and abusive marriage. Conkling's career was unaffected, as was that of William Sprague.

<sup>646</sup> Eli N. Evans, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 103-05; Virginia Clay-Clopton and Ada Sterling, *Belle of the Fifties; Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, of Alabama, Covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853-66* (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1905), 53-54.

<sup>647</sup> Mary Boykin Chesnut, June 12, 1862, Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut and Comer Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), 379.

feared rejection, could stay back in their home states, or behind closed doors. Constituents of that period did not typically vote for gentlemen from unseemly families, and the executive branch did not typically nominate gentlemen with unseemly wives. The vast majority of those who engaged in Washington society before and after Peggy Eaton, and those who functioned around her, either met the expected standards of virtue or managed to keep issues of morality out of the public eye.<sup>648</sup>

In the end, the Eaton affair was a fight over power. Jackson, who had always maintained that Peggy Eaton was as "as chaste as a virgin," attempted to inflict his personal definition of morality on a society of genteel women who had been taught from birth that they, not men, determined the meaning of virtue. When these women refused to accept Eaton on Jackson's terms, the president demanded blind obedience from a court that, perhaps he did not understand, had defected under the Monroes. The affair reconfirmed the autonomy of those in Washington's elite political circle. They had grown up, and never again would a president presume social authority over the parlors of the city. Thirty years after the fact, and as Thomas Jefferson had so wished, the "court of the US" was officially dead and buried.<sup>649</sup>

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<sup>648</sup> As one Gilded Age journalist worded it, "Washington seldom bothers itself about the skeletons in its inhabitants' closets. Lucifer himself will be welcomed if he will dress well, keep his hoofs hidden in patent leathers, and his tail out of sight." Frank G. Carpenter and Frances Carpenter, *Carp's Washington* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960), 111.

<sup>649</sup> "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### "A SOCIAL AS WELL AS A POLITICAL AUTONOMY"<sup>650</sup>

In 1837, Andrew Jackson relinquished the presidency to his chosen successor, Martin Van Buren. Van Buren, who had used the Eaton affair to establish his political place in line behind Jackson, accepted a social Washington that functioned independently. He used their hard-earned stance on autonomy as permission to conduct presidential etiquette to his own liking. In a manner reminiscent of President Jefferson, Van Buren eliminated weekly presidential receptions, rode out on horseback unaccompanied, and served epicurean dinners.<sup>651</sup> He also made the rare presidential decision to attend dinners off executive grounds—at the homes of cabinet members, foreign ministers, and members of Congress. "Such occasions," argued Joel Sibley, were a pleasant "means of keeping tabs on the political currents across town on Capital Hill."<sup>652</sup>

The widower president went without a surrogate White House mistress until the 1838 marriage of his eldest son and private secretary, Abraham Van Buren, to Angelica Rebecca Singleton. Even then, Angelica Van Buren's role was limited. Although accorded the highest status at presidential functions, she held no weekly receptions of her own, was generally in Washington only during the official season, and was twice confined by pregnancy.

<sup>650</sup> Dahlgren, *Etiquette of Social Life in Washington*, 7.

<sup>651</sup> Busey, *Pictures of the City of Washington in the Past*, 361-62 (entertainments); James Silk Buckingham, *America: Historical, Statistic, and Descriptive, Volume 1* (London: Fisher, Son, & Company, 1841), 289 (horseback).

<sup>652</sup> Joel H. Sibley, *Martin Van Buren and the Emergence of American Popular Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 112. For evidence of dinners off White House grounds, see John Quincy Adams diary 33, November 4, 1837, *The Diaries of John Quincy Adams: A Digital Collection*, 377.

The young White House mistress occasionally turned to her distant cousin, Dolley Madison, for advice. The widowed Madison was by that time enjoying extended visits to the capital, making it permanent in 1844, and had played matchmaker to Angelica and her future husband.<sup>653</sup> Her painted brick home on the northeast corner of President's Square welcomed not only the inexperienced first lady "anxious to see [her]" but also much of Washington's official society.<sup>654</sup> "She is a *young* lady of fourscore years and upward," wrote New York mayor Philip Hone in 1844. "[She] goes to parties and receives company like the 'Queen of this new world.'"<sup>655</sup> By New Year's 1839, it was the custom for many to first attend the president's annual reception and then cross the park to wish Mrs. Madison the compliments of the season.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> On the matchmaking, see Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, 291. On the move to DC, see Holly C. Shulman, "Dolley Madison's Life and Times: Widowhood," The Dolley Madison Digital Edition, <<http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/dmde/bio-intro.xqy#widowhood>> (May 1, 2014). Shulman quoted the *National Intelligencer*, December 12, 1843, which reported, "the respected widow of the late illustrious President MADISON, has again taken up her residence, for the winter season, in this city." At the time though, negotiations were in place to sell Montpelier to Richmond merchant Henry Moncure, and Madison's move to Washington turned out to be permanent.

<sup>654</sup> "I am very anxious to see you for a few minutes to consult you on a very important subject," Angelica Van Buren to Dolley Madison, undated note, Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, 292. President's Square, or President's Park, is the current Lafayette Square, north of the White House.

<sup>655</sup> Philip Hone, March 15, 1842, Philip Hone and Bayard Tuckerman, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1889), 2: 121.

<sup>656</sup> For evidence of the New Year's custom, see Lucius Lyon to Lucretia Lyon, January 1, 1844, Lucius Lyon and George W. Thayer, "Letters of Lucius Lyon, One of the Two First United States Senators from Michigan," *Collections and Researches Made by the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society* 27 (1896): 457; Elizabeth Dixon, Thursday, January 1, 1846, Elizabeth Lord Cogswell Dixon, "Journal written during a Residence in Washington during the 29th Congress Commencing with the first of December 1845," *White House History* 33 (Summer 2013): 54; Marian Gouverneur. *As I Remember*;

Dolley Madison accepted with ease her role as Washington's dowager queen. Twenty years after her initial reign, she had returned to an autonomous social Washington, "grown independent of White House and Cabinet," but in search of a stable center of gravity, the kind offered in other cities by prominent families with regional longevity.<sup>657</sup> Thus, social Washington was eager to anoint icons of the past as its leaders.<sup>658</sup> "Ex-President Adams, Mrs. Madison, and Mrs. Alexander Hamilton were each the centre of a coterie of cultivated people," wrote Samuel Busey.<sup>659</sup> Of these men and women, the widowed Dolley Madison was the most treasured. She brought back to the city her charm, her political pedigree, and a willingness to start up from where she had left off in 1817.

Madison returned to Washington City with an unshakable conviction as to what constituted proper Washingtonian etiquette and a confidence in her own standing as a social authority. In a letter from Montpelier in 1833, while still tending to her ailing husband, she reiterated the foundation of that authority to two of her nieces.<sup>660</sup> The young women were, at the time, visiting Washington, and they had written their aunt to complain that the French minister's wife had refused them, as visitors to the city, the honor of a first call. That honor to visitors, they might have added, was standard in other cities, and had, incidentally, been the custom that Jefferson recommended in his

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*Recollections of American Society During the Nineteenth Century* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1911), 197.

<sup>657</sup> Busey, *Pictures of the City of Washington in the Past*, 362.

<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

<sup>660</sup> Dolley Madison to Mary E. E. Cutts, November 4, 1833, Mattern and Shulman, *Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 301.

canons.<sup>661</sup> However, their aunt would have none of it. She was shocked that they did not "know better the etiquette near courts, where ambassadors and ministers reside."<sup>662</sup> Madison directed her nieces to make the first call immediately and reminded them that she spoke from authority. "I lived sixteen years in the midst of *ceremonies* in Washington," she wrote.<sup>663</sup> "I was also four years in Philadelphia, where Mrs. Washington presided."<sup>664</sup> She had been "intimate with the heads of Departments and Ministers from Europe and I never," she scolded, "knew their ladies to visit young girls first—indeed!"<sup>665</sup>

Madison's confidence in her social authority did not waver with her return to Washington in late 1837, and she willingly served as mentor to a series of White House mistresses and political wives. She guided through example, coupled with charm. When Elizabeth Dixon left her card for Madison and then returned a week later for a visit, she was surprised to receive an apology from "the Dowager Queen" for not having returned Dixon's initial call.<sup>666</sup> "She was prevented by a cold," wrote Dixon, who then added, "We had not expected [an apology] but considered [it] our duty to call first on her and not to think of her coming to see us."<sup>667</sup> However, for Dolley Madison the rules were clear. As a

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<sup>661</sup> Abby Buchanan Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1878), 33; Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive, December 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, Correspondence, 1651-1827, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (July 3, 2013), 2nd tenet.

<sup>662</sup> Dolley Madison to Mary E. E. Cutts, November 4, 1833, Mattern and Shulman, *Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, 301.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>666</sup> Elizabeth Dixon, Saturday, December 6, 1845, Dixon, "Journal," 38.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*



relict of a former president, she was a dignitary of state, and it had been her duty, even as a septuagenarian, to return her visits in an "*instant*," or at least within a few days.<sup>668</sup> Elizabeth Dixon's second visit, it should be noted, was reciprocated four days later.

The "Dowager Queen" advised nothing that did not reflect her own cordial actions as secretarial wife and first lady.<sup>669</sup> When President John Tyler's daughter-in-law, who resided in the White House, asked Madison if it were necessary to return all of her calls in person, the woman famous for her sociability, instructed her to do so, "by all means."<sup>670</sup> That advice not only reflected Dolley Madison's own extensive visiting schedule while in the White House but also gave authority to social Washington's opinion, first argued in the Monroe administration, that there was a difference between the official status of a presidential wife and that of a presidential female relation. The latter was expected to return visits. That was true even if the relation were serving as a surrogate hostess for the first lady, as daughter Eliza Hay had for the fragile Elizabeth Monroe, or as Priscilla Tyler was then doing for her invalid mother-in-law, Letitia Tyler. "There was a doubt at first whether I must visit in person or send cards," Priscilla Tyler wrote, "but I asked Mrs. Madison's advice . . . and she says, return all my visits . . . So

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<sup>668</sup> Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, *The Social-Official Etiquette of the United States*, 6th ed. (John Murphy & Company, 1894), 67.

<sup>669</sup> Elizabeth Dixon, Saturday, December 6, 1845, Dixon, "Journal," 38.

<sup>670</sup> Priscilla Cooper Tyler, letter, 1841, quoted in Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison*, 307.

three days in the week I am to spend three hours a day driving from one street to another in this city of magnificent distances."<sup>671</sup>

If the Eaton affair proved that social Washington acted autonomously and without presidential interference, by the Tyler administration it appeared that those in the White House not only lacked social authority over Washington society but also were captive to its wishes. The irony of that turnaround, though, was lost on the widowed Madison, her social authority so engrained in her that its transference from presidential grounds to President's Square seemed natural.<sup>672</sup> From the parlor of her Washington home, Dolley Madison instructed the innocent on proper capital etiquette as she had learned it forty years before. For the rest of official society, her own actions and societal expectations validated the standards of protocol it had been advocating since the Madisons' departure from the capital in 1817.

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The "venerable Mrs. Madison" helped cement into place a set of unwritten, and often unyielding, rules of protocol that dominated all of official Washington society into

<sup>671</sup> Ibid. Priscilla Tyler served as official first lady from the time of mother-in-law Letitia Tyler's death on September 10, 1842 until the marriage of her father-in-law to Julia Gardiner on June 26, 1844.

<sup>672</sup> Dolley Madison was not the only former first lady living in Washington during the 1830s and 1840s. Louisa Catherine Adams returned with her husband when he took his position as a congressional representative for Massachusetts. Although Louisa Adams was a respected member of Washington society during those decades, she kept to a small circle of friends. "When I lived in the stir and hustle of political life," she wrote in 1839, "I thought it my duty to avoid all marks of distaste to persons whom I did *not* like— When I retired to a private station, I resumed the privileges of an individual in the right to choose my associates," adding that perhaps she had narrowed her circle too severely. [ca. 17 June] 1839, Graham, *Diary and Autobiographical Writings*, 2: 729.

the twentieth century.<sup>673</sup> By 1849, President Zachary Taylor was complaining to a guest that he had difficulty understanding the official rules of etiquette.<sup>674</sup> In 1903, a diplomat opined that, thanks to the "wives of your public men," the capital was entangled "in the folds of an etiquette as tight as that which surrounded the king of Spain who was burned to death because there was at hand . . . [no one who dared] to touch the royal person."<sup>675</sup>

This dissertation did nothing to untangle the "folds of . . . etiquette" created by the women of Washington by the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>676</sup> Instead, its purpose was to explain the origins of their genteel official society. The study first compared Washington City to the previous seats of government and described the physical and cultural conditions of the virgin capital. It then focused on Jefferson, the Merry affair, and the political elites who willingly formed a social satellite around the third president while they struggled to create a community amid boardinghouses and workmen's shanties. The study explained that by the time of the Madison administration, women were the workhorses of Washington society, and none more so than their amicable leader, Dolley Madison. The study argued that the more exclusive and private Monroe White House and the changing dynamics of the capital transformed social Washington. Under the Monroes,

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<sup>673</sup> James K. Polk, February 8, 1849, James Knox Polk and Milo Milton Quaife, *The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849: Now First Printed from the Original Manuscript Owned by the Society* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Company, 1910), 4: 326.

<sup>674</sup> Taylor comment reported by Frances Adeline Seward, as found in Ruth Van Deusen, "Mrs. Seward in Washington," *University of Rochester Library Bulletin* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1964): n. p., <<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=2472>> (May 18, 2014).

<sup>675</sup> "Democracy and Etiquette: A Foreign Diplomat on Washington Official Society," from *Collier's Weekly*, New York, reprinted February 26, 1903 in *Public Opinion* 34 (New York: Public Opinion, 1903), 279.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

society abandoned its role as a republican court. From that time forward, it would act independently and without presidential authority. In the chapter on the Eaton affair, the study established how the elite women of Washington, with the support of their husbands, capably defended their right to an autonomous society against Andrew Jackson's determination to force the city's social authority back onto presidential grounds. Through letters and journals, this dissertation verified the changes to Washington society as it transformed from republican court to independence. The dissertation left its readers on a path that eventually led to a society so powerful that its rules and regulations would frustrate a diplomat accustomed to the courts of Europe.

From the beginning, the ladies of Washington were fundamental to the development of this dissertation. They came to the Potomac with certain expectations as to the roles they would play in national politics. They understood that their first responsibility would be to build a genteel political community and their second responsibility would be to ensure that it remained stable. Because of the women of Washington, the capital grew away from the fraternity image that James Sterling Young portrayed and became a community with a set of core standards that emulated those in the rest of the nation. From Elizabeth Merry through Peggy Eaton, the women of Washington took charge of building a capital society, determining its standards, and then defending their right to regulate that society as they saw fit. When the widowed Madison instructed White House mistress Letitia Tyler to return calls, the message was not only one of proper etiquette. Madison understood that one power women had in the capital was the right to dictate the rules of society to the entire community, including to its

politically powerful men. The pleasure was not in the carriage rides around the city, but in being the gender that determined those rides were necessary.

These women understood, too, the power of political status, and many of the events covered in this dissertation exemplify their determination to maintain for themselves and their husbands the stature that came with rank and position. Elizabeth Merry had decided, even before the infamous Jefferson dinner, that within the social hierarchy of the former colonies' rustic capital, she was deserving of its highest rank. As the wife of the British minister, she represented Great Britain and as a well-bred Englishwoman, she represented the sophistication and culture of European court life. She was stunned when the president did not agree with her and her actions after the December 1803 dinner, including the grand entertainments she gave and her exaggerated pomposity, can be explained as those of a women looking to regain the status that Jefferson had negated. The same fierce defense of political status is seen again when the congressional wives approached Elizabeth Monroe about first visits. Like Merry, those women understood precedence to be an instrument of power for their husbands and a measure of their own social worth.

A topic not explored in this dissertation but ripe for investigation is Washington City's role in marriage broking. During the official social season, the capital was filled with women debuting their daughters in hope that a successful politician, a high-ranking military officer, or a prominent son might find his way onto the family tree. Rosalie Stier Calvert and Elizabeth Washington Gamble Wirt, for example, were eager matchmakers who both utilized Washington's social season for their own purposes. Calvert, who was

figured in this dissertation because of her pithy remarks about Elizabeth Monroe and Dolley Madison, showed minimal interest in driving into Washington from her Maryland plantation until daughter Caroline needed to access capital society in 1817. Letters to her sister discuss the gowns bought for Caroline's debut, the number of trips made into the city, the gala events, and Calvert's concerns over her efforts. "I am not a good judge of Caroline's success [in Washington]," she wrote.<sup>677</sup> "She . . . doesn't lack for dancing partners, but she has no avowed suitor up to now."<sup>678</sup> Neither had Congress offered up many prospects. "[T]here were some young members who were quite nice," Calvert opined, "although none with a large fortune."<sup>679</sup>

Elizabeth Wirt, who turned from Republican Wife into Republican Mother in the introduction of this dissertation, refurbished the Wirts' Washington home in anticipation of their eldest daughter's debut in 1825.<sup>680</sup> "As your father says, this is all for you, Laura," wrote Wirt as she supervised the construction of an addition and readied the east parlor with fresh paint and new carpets.<sup>681</sup> "[A]n expense we would have dispensed with," she noted, "but for your sake."<sup>682</sup> Dolley Madison had no daughters, but that did not keep her from playing matchmaker. She adeptly assisted in finding husbands for her sisters and other elite young women around the capital and she did what she could to arrange a wife

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<sup>677</sup> Rosalie Stier Calvert to Isabelle van Havre, April 26, 1818, Calvert, *Mistress of Riverdale*, 335.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Ibid.

<sup>680</sup> Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 112.

<sup>681</sup> Ibid.

<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

for her son. Phoebe Morris spent time as a houseguest in the Madison White House, in part, so that she might be convinced of the eligibility of Payne Todd.

A related topic of Washington history still unexplored is the development of the city's old-money families. By the Gilded Age, the capital had formed its own set of blue bloods, wealthy families who claimed two or more generations as Washingtonians. Nicknamed the Cave Dwellers or the Antiques, this select group of under a hundred families (including Georgetown) maintained a small elitist social circle.<sup>683</sup> They held themselves above the flashy *nouveau riche* who invaded the capital after the Civil War and above the work-a-bee politicians who came and went with elections. The Antiques often looked down on those whom history has admired. Of sophisticated and urbane Henry Adams, who resided in Washington in the late century, one matron of the Antiques had only these words: "Of course it may be nicer to have had your great grandfather & grandfather presidents than to be one yourself, still as those who went before the great grandfather were very plain people, we of older blood do not think [Adams] such a great aristocrat."<sup>684</sup>

Kathryn Jacob touched on the Antiques in her examination of post-Civil War "high society in Washington," but her focus was the newly arriving industrialist families.<sup>685</sup> It is left for another historian to explore the formation of the Antiques, which,

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<sup>683</sup> Green, *Washington: Capital City, 1879-1950*, 2: 88.

<sup>684</sup> Violet Blair Janin, as quoted by Virginia Jeans Laas, *Love and Power in the Nineteenth Century: the Marriage of Violet Blair* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>685</sup> Jacob, *Capital Elites*, title.

it might be speculated, would have roots dating back to the antebellum matchmaking days of Calvert, Wirt, and Madison.

The political wives who dominated social Washington in the later nineteenth century offer another opportunity for scholarly study. Besides Violet Janin's *Love and Power in the Nineteenth Century: the Marriage of Violet Blair*, interest in the women of post-Civil War capital society has been limited to biographies of its various White House mistresses.<sup>686</sup> Those writing about these first ladies, and those reading about them, might assume that Washington society was directed by the sequence of women who presided over the executive mansion. As this dissertation revealed, although first ladies throughout the century continued to be accorded "respectful deference" because of their position, after Queen Dolley, Washington society no longer looked to the White House for its leadership.<sup>687</sup> That power went to other women and as the century grew older, that power appears to have increased. James G. Blaine's wife, Harriet Stanwood Blaine had a twenty-year history in official Washington society.<sup>688</sup> She was a "masterful, high-spirited woman, unblessed with tact and far too prone to interfere with her husband's political

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<sup>686</sup> Two books that do focus on non-White House women during the Civil War period are Virginia Jeans Laas and Dudley T. Cornish, *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999) and Peg Lamphier's *Kate Chase and William Sprague*.

<sup>687</sup> Dahlgren, *The Social-Official Etiquette of the United States*, 17. It could be argued that the series of surrogate and invalid first ladies, from Monroe on, ensured that social power remained off presidential grounds.

<sup>688</sup> Blaine's published letters are available at archive.org. Harriet Bailey Stanwood Blaine and Harriet Stanwood Blaine Beale, *Letters of Mrs. James G. Blaine*, 2 vols. (New York: Duffield, 1908).



concerns."<sup>689</sup> Kate Hughes George Williams, wife of Ulysses Grant's attorney general, was an "undisputed leading hostess" whose "interference in legislative and departmental actions" disgusted Associate Justice Samuel Freeman Miller.<sup>690</sup> Justice Miller's own wife, Elizabeth Winter Reeves Miller, was a prominent Washington society matron who balked when Miller suggested retiring from the Court. "The Judge will not resign at present," wrote his brother-in law, "[He says] his wife is strongly opposed to it, that it wd weaken their social position influence &c."<sup>691</sup> A series of women led post-Civil War Washington society from within, forming alliances, building status, and perhaps wielding real political power, but no historian has pieced together their story.<sup>692</sup>

Lastly, the question might be raised, "what if?" Given that Jefferson assumed social authority over a community willing to act as a republican court, what if the seat of government had never moved from Philadelphia? How far would Jefferson's social

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<sup>689</sup> Harry Thurston Peck, *Twenty Years of the Republic, 1885-1905* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1905), 288.

<sup>690</sup> Edward S. Cooper, *William Worth Belknap: An American Disgrace* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 160 (hostess); Samuel Freeman Miller to "Dear brother," December 10, 1873, as quoted in Charles Fairman, *Mr. Justice Miller and the Supreme Court, 1862-1890* (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 1939), 260 (interference). Kate Williams received mention by Kathryn Jacob for her fruitless attempt to halt the custom of first calls by cabinet wives to their senate counterparts (*Capital Elites*, 96-97). Williams would eventually force her husband's resignation over rumors she had accepted a \$30,000 bribe to influence one of his cases.

<sup>691</sup> William P. Ballinger, April 4, 1886, as quoted in Fairman, *Mr. Justice Miller and the Supreme Court*, 392.

<sup>692</sup> Kathryn Jacob (in a book on congressional lobbying) and Rachel Sheldon have argued for the importance of "sociable Washington" in manipulating legislation and cutting deals," but both focused on men. Rachel Sheldon wrote on what she called "Washington's political fraternity" in antebellum Washington society while Jacob studied post-Civil War lobbyists. Rachel A. Sheldon, *Washington Brotherhood: Politics, Social Life, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 3, 7; Kathryn Allamong Jacob, *King of the Lobby: The Life and Times of Sam Ward, Man-About-Washington in the Gilded Age* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010).

authority have extended? Certain elements of the Jefferson presidency may not have been dependent on place. No matter where, he would have dressed in "a state of negligence" and refused to participate in elements of presidential ceremony.<sup>693</sup> His congressional dinners could have continued on schedule in Philadelphia, Federalist and Republican, but his contact with capital society would have been far more restricted. In the earlier years of his presidency, Jefferson invited the local Republican elites to dine with him, and included their families during the summer off-season. The small population of Washington meant that the president could be very inclusive. As his second term progressed, Jefferson's dinner table became even more communal. He added to his guest list, for example, Georgetown Federalist, Philip Barton Key, and former Federalist mayor of Georgetown, John Threlkeld, who both shared an interest in horticulture with the president.

In Philadelphia, Jefferson would have been kept busy just trying to entertain all of the prominent local Republican families. Time and his preferred table size, ten to fifteen guests, would have kept even that list more exclusive, which might have added an additional tier to the hierarchy of local society. Including local Federalists might have been prohibitive. To accommodate more Philadelphian residents, Jefferson might have expanded his usual number of guests to a grander size, but the intimate casualness of a

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<sup>693</sup> From notes taken by Josiah Quincy, January 1806, after hearing the story from Anthony Merry, and quoted in Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts*, 92-93.

Jefferson dinner is, according to a number of historians, where the power rested.<sup>694</sup> The same comparisons could be made of Jefferson's two annual receptions, on New Year's Day and the Fourth of July, which in Philadelphia would have been too largely attended to be anything but obligatory occasions.

What Jefferson built with his Washington dinners and receptions, besides any political power, was social power over the provincial capital. That would have been impossible to duplicate in Philadelphia, with its large population and established society. Although difficult to prove, one could speculate (perhaps wildly) that without the Washington City setting and the constant social contact between members of the Federalist and Republican Parties, the melding of the two political parties into one by the time of the Monroe administration, might have taken place later—if it happened at all.

The seat of government, however, did make the move to Washington City. Thomas Jefferson was crowned its "Democratic Majesty" and capital society began to take shape. From the beginning, the goal of the founding political elites was to form a social community that respected its republican roots, promoted self-respect for its members, and gave dignity to the politics of a raw young nation. That goal took them from republican court to independence. With women as its backbone, social Washington moved from self-direction into a place of power, and with that change, all memories of its days as a republican court faded away. In 1881, social arbitrator and society matron, Madeleine Dahlgren argued that Washington was not, nor never had been, a "Court

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<sup>694</sup> For example, Young, *Washington Community*, 172; Robert M. Johnstone Jr., *Jefferson and the Presidency: Leadership in the Young Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 144.

Circle."<sup>695</sup> We have instead, she insisted, "a social as well as a political autonomy. Let us preserve these with an equal jealous care and dignity."<sup>696</sup> The genteel women of the Eaton affair would have been proud.

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<sup>695</sup> Dahlgren, *Etiquette of Social Life in Washington*, 7.

<sup>696</sup> *Ibid.*

**APPENDIX A:**

**THE THREE VERSIONS OF THOMAS JEFFERSON'S**

**CANONS OF ETIQUETTE**

First Version: The original draft, early December 1803<sup>697</sup>

I. In order to bring the members of society together in the first instance, the custom of the country has established that residents shall pay the first visit to strangers, and among strangers, first comers to later comers, foreign and domestic; the character of stranger ceasing after the first visits. To this rule there is a single exception. Foreign ministers, from the necessity of making themselves known, pay the first visit to the ministers of the nation, which is returned.

II. When brought together in society, all are perfectly equal, whether foreign or domestic, titled or untitled, in or out of office. All other observances are but exemplifications of these two principles.

I. Ist. The families of foreign ministers, arriving at the seat of government, receive the first visit from those of the national ministers, as from all other residents.

2d. Members of the Legislature and of the Judiciary, independent of their offices, have a right as strangers to receive the first visit.

II. Ist. No title being admitted here, those of foreigners give no precedence.

2nd. Differences of grade among diplomatic members, gives no precedence.

3d. At public ceremonies, to which the government invites the presence of foreign ministers and their families, a convenient seat or station will be provided for them, with any other strangers invited and the families of the national ministers, each taking place as they arrive, and without any precedence.

4th. To maintain the principle of equality, or of *pêle mêle*, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the Executive will practice at their own houses, and recommend an adherence to the ancient usage of the country, of gentlemen in mass giving precedence to the ladies in mass, in passing from one apartment where they are assembled into another.

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<sup>697</sup> Rules of Etiquette, [Nov.?, 1803], Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 8: 276-77. See also Rules of Etiquette, [November ?, 1803], Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009931>> (June 10, 2013). See Appendix B for an argument against Ford's dating of this version of the canons.

Second Version: "Canons Of Etiquette To Be Observed By The Executive,"  
December 1803.<sup>698</sup>

1st. Foreign Ministers arriving at the seat of government pay the first visit to the ministers of the nation, which is returned; and so likewise on subsequent occasions of reassembling after a recess.

2d. The families of foreign Ministers receive the first visit from those of the national Ministers, as from all other residents, and as all strangers, foreign or domestic, do from all residents of the place.

3d. After the first visit the character of stranger ceases.

4th. Among the members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Executive Government, in its own principles of personal and national equality, considers every Minister as the representative of his nation, and equal to every other without distinction of grade.

5th. No titles being admitted here, those of foreigners give no precedence.

6th. Our Ministers to foreign nations are as private citizens while here.

7th. At any public ceremony to which the Government invites the presence of foreign Ministers and their families, no precedence or privilege will be given them other than the provision of a convenient seat or station with any other stranger invited, and with the families of the National Ministers.

8th. At dinners, in public or private, and on all other occasions of social inter course, a perfect equality exists between the persons composing the company, whether foreign or domestic, titled or un titled, in or out of office.

9th. To give force to the principle of equality, or *pêle mêle*, and prevent the growth of precedence out of courtesy, the members of the Executive, at their own houses, will adhere to the ancient usage of their ancestors, — gentlemen *en masse* giving place to the ladies *en masse*.

10th. The President of the United States receives visits, but does not return them.

11th. The family of the President receives the first visit and returns it.

12th. The President and his family take precedence everywhere, in public, or private.

13th. The President when in any State receives the first visit from the Governor and returns it.

14th. The Governor in his State receives the first visit from a foreign Minister.

<sup>698</sup> Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the Executive, December 1803, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (July 3, 2013).

Third Version: "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia),

February 13, 1804.<sup>699</sup>

The Washington Federalist of the 1st. inst. has published what he calls the 'Etiquette of the court of the US' in his facts, as usual, truth is set at nought, & in his principles little correct to be found. The Editor having seen a great deal of unfounded stuff on this subject, in that & other papers of a party whose first wish it is to excite misunderstandings with other nations (even with England, if they cannot with Spain or France) has taken pains to inform himself of the rules of social intercourse at Washington, and he assures his readers that they may rely on the correctness of the following statement of them.

In the first place there is no 'court of the US' since the 4th. of Mar. 1801. That day buried levees, birthdays, royal parades, and the arrogation of precedence in society by certain self-styled friends of order, but truly stiled friends of privileged orders.

The President receives but does not return visits, except to the Vice-President.

The Vice-President pays the 1st visit to the President, but receives it from all others, and returns it.

Foreign ministers pay the 1st visit here, as in all other countries, to all the Secretaries, heads of department.

The Secretaries return visits of the members of the legislature & foreign ministers, but not of others, not from any principle of inequality, but from the pressure of their official duties, which do not admit such a disposal of their time.

No distinction is admitted between Senators & Representatives. That pretension of certain would-be Nobles was buried in the grave of federalism on the same 4th. of March. The members of both houses & the domestic ministers interchange visits according to convenience, without claims of priority.

Members of both houses & foreign ministers also interchange visits according to convenience & inclination; no intercourse between them being considered as necessary or due. Were it necessary, the former, as newcomers, might claim the 1st. visit from the latter as residents, according to the American & English principle.

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<sup>699</sup> Thomas Jefferson, February 1804, Response to Etiquette of the Court of U.S., Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013233>> (March 22, 2013); see also "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

In social circles all are equal, whether in, or out, of office, foreign or domestic; & the same equality exists among ladies as among gentlemen, no precedence therefore, of any one over another, exists either in right or practice, at dinners, assemblies, or on any other occasions. 'Pell-mell' and 'next the door' form the basis of etiquette in the societies of this country. It is this last principle, maintained by the administration, which has produced some dissatisfaction with some of the diplomatic gentlemen. Not that they question the right of every nation to establish, or alter, its own rules of intercourse, nor consequently our right to obliterate any germs of a distinction of ranks, forbidden by our constitution; but that it is a part of their duty to be watchful for the relative standing of their nation, and to acquiesce only so soon as they see that nothing derogatory of that is contemplated.



**APPENDIX B:**  
**THE FIRST DRAFT OF JEFFERSON'S CANONS—**  
**AN ARGUMENT AGAINST PAUL LEICESTER FORD'S**  
**NOVEMBER 1803 DATE**

Thomas Jefferson wrote three versions of his presidential canons—the first was a rough memorandum; the second was the "Canons of Etiquette to be observed by the Executive"; the third was a version that appeared in the Philadelphia *Aurora* on February 13, 1804.<sup>700</sup> (See Appendix A.) To understand the canons, it is important to appreciate that they were written out of provocation over events of the Merry affair, and not as routine presidential business. Unfortunately, generations of historians, misinformed by a master, have assumed that Jefferson devised the first draft of his etiquette rules in "Nov. ? 1803" before the Merry dinner on December 2, and perhaps before the couple arrived in Washington City on November 26, 1803.<sup>701</sup>

Paul Leicester Ford, the editor of numerous Jefferson manuscripts, produced the standard transcription of Jefferson's first, and most scrutinized, version of the canons—the memorandum. Despite working with a document that the president neither titled nor dated, Ford, in transcribing Jefferson's memo, labeled it "Rules of Etiquette," and dated it

<sup>700</sup> Rules of Etiquette, [Nov. ? 1803.], Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 8: 276-77. See also Thomas Jefferson and Paul Leicester Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 10: 47, and Rules of Etiquette, [November ?, 1803], Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009931>> (June 10, 2013); Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the President, December 1803, The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (June 9, 2013); "Etiquette," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 13, 1804.

<sup>701</sup> Rules of Etiquette, [Nov. ? 1803.], Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 8: 276-77.

"[Nov. ? 1803.]." <sup>702</sup> The president officially received Anthony Merry on November 29, 1803. <sup>703</sup> The Merry dinner was on December 2. Ford's use of a November date implied that Jefferson had an etiquette code in place by the time the Merrys reached Washington, or shortly thereafter. It has misled historians ever since.

For example, under the assumption of a November date, Edward Channing argued that Jefferson used the Washington arrival of Mr. Merry as a "good opportunity to lay down a new policy of . . . social customs" and to show the new minister "some of the want of consideration" Jefferson had believed himself subjected to while in England. <sup>704</sup> Fawn McKay Brody surmised that Merry had not been "mollified by a perusal of Jefferson's 'Rules of Etiquette,' drawn up for the use of diplomats in Washington City." <sup>705</sup> And although Henry Adams wrote that Jefferson "waited [until] Merry's arrival in order to establish, once and for all, a new social code," Adams considered the codes firmly in place by the December 2 dinner. <sup>706</sup> All three of these scholars understood Jefferson's

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<sup>702</sup> Ibid. The memo has a date "[~~ea January 1804~~]" written and crossed off high above the original text and, seemingly, not in the president's hand. Rules of Etiquette, [November ?, 1803], Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009931>> (June 10, 2013).

<sup>703</sup> Henry Adams, *Administrations of Thomas Jefferson*, 529.

<sup>704</sup> Edward Channing, *The Jeffersonian System, 1801-1811*, volume 12 of *The American Nation: A History from Original Sources by Associated Scholars*, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart, LL.D. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), 179.

<sup>705</sup> Fawn McKay Brody, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1974), 413.

<sup>706</sup> Henry Adams, *Administrations of Thomas Jefferson*, 548, 553.

preference for a minimal government and his attitudes toward "arbitrary and senseless" protocol, but allowed Ford's November date to cloud their judgment.<sup>707</sup>

Two other Jeffersonian scholars, Merrill D. Peterson and Dumas Malone, inferred in their work that Jefferson's code of etiquette was written after the Merry problems surfaced, but refused to confront the inaccuracy of Ford's date. Peterson, in his volume of Jefferson manuscripts, titled the Jefferson memo, "A Memorandum (Rules of Etiquette)" and dated the draft "c. November, 1803," but wrote in *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*, that Jefferson's rules of etiquette "codified the experience of the administration in the Merry affair."<sup>708</sup> Dumas Malone concluded in *Jefferson the President* that sometime toward the end of December 1803, Jefferson and his cabinet "set down in black and white the principle that he called pell mell."<sup>709</sup> Malone cited Ford's transcription, but ignored Ford's date.<sup>710</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Count de Moustier, Paris, May 17, 1788, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Jefferson Randolph, *Memoirs, Correspondence, and Private Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. II* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1829), 310.

<sup>708</sup> Thomas Jefferson and Merrill D. Peterson, *Writings: Autobiography; a Summary View of the Rights of British America; Notes on the State of Virginia; Public Papers; Addresses, Messages, and Replies; Miscellany; Letters* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 705; Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 734. This book was not footnoted, but Peterson used Ford's title, "Rules of Etiquette," and included Ford in his selected bibliography. Peterson also included Andrew Lipscomb's *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* in his selected bibliography. Lipscomb put Jefferson's memo in his "Miscellaneous Papers" section, gave no date, and titled the missive "Etiquette." Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Adgate Lipscomb, and Albert Ellery Bergh, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, DC: Issued under the auspices of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1903), 17: 365.

<sup>709</sup> Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President: First Term, 1801-1805* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 385.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid.*

Other historians, less interested in the Merry Affair, have still been led astray by the November date or have discreetly ignored it while using Ford as their source.<sup>711</sup> British historian Malcolm Lester, in a book devoted to Merry's diplomatic stint in Washington, concluded that Jefferson and his cabinet did not establish "the principles of *pêle-mêle* in official society" until in the midst of the diplomatic commotion.<sup>712</sup> He then avoided any conflicts caused by his Ford source by arbitrarily changing Ford's memo title to "Rules of Etiquette, n. d. [before Jan. 12, 1804]."<sup>713</sup> According to Lester, January 12 was the approximate day that Anthony Merry received an official copy of the document.

The Library of Congress used Ford's *The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes* in creating its online depository of Jefferson's writings. It accepted Ford's approximated date when it scanned an image of Jefferson's etiquette memo, and titled the scan "Thomas Jefferson, [November ?, 1803], Rules of Etiquette."<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>711</sup> For examples, see Sean Patrick Adams, who used Ford's transcription of the "Rules of Etiquette," but argued in his introduction that the document was a response to the Merry situation, or John Hailman who wrote that the rules "first appeared in November of 1803 . . . sort of like a trivial version of the Declaration of Independence." He cited Saul Padover, who accepted the Ford transcription title and date. A more far-reaching example is Jay Fliegelman, who wrote, "when Jefferson became president, he issued . . . [a] "Memorandum on Rules of Etiquette" to his cabinet. Fliegelman used as his citation, Miss Manners, Judith Martin. Her book, *Star-Spangled Manners*, is not footnoted, but her title suggests Merrill D. Peterson's work, which in turn, supported Ford's November date. Sean Patrick Adams, *The Early American Republic: A Documentary Reader* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 37; John Hailman, *Thomas Jefferson on Wine* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 293; Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 113.

<sup>712</sup> Lester, *Anthony Merry Redivivus*, 39.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid*, 39, 135n.

<sup>714</sup> Thomas Jefferson, [November ?, 1803], Rules of Etiquette, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009931>> (June 10, 2013).

However, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that the date is erroneous. According to Henry Adams, Merry did not receive a formal directive on protocol until late January 1804.<sup>715</sup> Since Jefferson's memo on etiquette was in large part directed at the diplomatic corps, to speculate that the standards of diplomatic protocol were drafted in November, but not shared immediately with the British foreign minister upon his arrival makes no sense. Moreover, until the Merry affair proved otherwise, Jefferson wrote William Short (who was at the dinner) that he was unaware that anyone objected to his methods of entertainment. "Mrs. Merry's jealousy," he wrote, "was the first admonition to me that my usage, at my social dinners, could be misconstrued."<sup>716</sup> Those are not the words of a president who had prepared beforehand, or had felt the need to prepare beforehand, a written system of protocol.

Additionally, Jefferson complained to James Monroe on January 8, 1804, that in response to Anthony Merry having claimed both "the first visit from national ministers" and "precedence at dinners &c. over all others . . . We have told him that the principle of society, as well as of government . . . is the equality of the individuals composing it."<sup>717</sup> Jefferson's use of the phrase *have told him*, instead of *had told him*, indicates both an ongoing process and verbal instruction. Neither Jefferson nor Madison, in their letters to Monroe, mention the pre-existence of a written set of diplomatic instructions, although

<sup>715</sup> Henry Adams, *During the First Administration of Thomas Jefferson*, 2: 372.

<sup>716</sup> Thomas Jefferson to William Short, January 23, 1804, in "Jefferson to William Short on Mr. and Mrs. Merry, 1804," *The American Historical Review* 33, no. 4 (July 1928): 833.

<sup>717</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, January 8, 1804, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013083>> (July 7, 2014).

such information would have been useful to Monroe as he attempted to defend Jeffersonian protocol to the English.

Ford's November date also conflicts with the Federalist response to Jefferson's canons. Although it had taken opposition newspapers only months after Jefferson's inauguration to opine over the president's "whimsical fondness . . . for novelty and change," including the elimination of "the aristocracy of levees" and his "meekness of appearance," it was only after the Merry affair that they began reporting on the administration's having established written tenets on protocol.<sup>718</sup>

Jefferson worked with advisors to create the original canons. That is supported by a short note in Jefferson's hand on the back of the memo, "Etiquette. this rough paper contains what was agreed on."<sup>719</sup> On December 18, 1803, Madison wrote to his former minister to the Court of St. James, Rufus King, who was living in New York. He explained to the Federalist that he was "mortified at troubling" him on a subject "in itself unworthy [of] the attention of either of us," but "neither public prudence, nor social considerations will allow [it] to be disregarded."<sup>720</sup> The administration's social protocol, which had been accepted "without an intimation of discontent" until the Merrys arrived, were now being called into question.<sup>721</sup> Madison wanted to know what was customary in the English court, and asked specifically about first visits and the handing in of ladies to

<sup>718</sup> "Communication," *Republican or, Anti-Democrat* (Baltimore), February 10, 1802.

<sup>719</sup> Thomas Jefferson, [November ?, 1803], Rules of Etiquette, Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib009931>> (June 10, 2013).

<sup>720</sup> James Madison to Rufus King, December 18, 1803, Brugger, *The Papers of James Madison: 1 November 1803–31 March 1804*, 186.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid.

the table. The letter reveals a cabinet advisor who was seeking answers for Jefferson as the president was in the midst of drafting the canons, questions most likely raised as the original memo was being written. King responded to Madison on December 22, 1803.<sup>722</sup>

Thus, given the evidence, Jefferson wrote the first draft of his etiquette rules after the December 2 dinner, but sometime in December. (He dated the second version "[Dec. 1803].")<sup>723</sup> If James Madison's letter to Rufus King was, in fact, written in response to questions raised after Jefferson and his advisors first drafted the canons, which puts the date of that original memo between late in the day, December 2, and December 18, 1803.

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<sup>722</sup> Rufus King to James Madison, December 22, 1803, Brugger, *The Papers of James Madison: 1 November 1803–31 March 1804*, 199.

<sup>723</sup> Canons of Etiquette to be Observed by the President, December 1803, The Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1, General Correspondence, 1651-1827, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib013045>> (June 9, 2013). Also, if one subscribes to Federalist gossip, the *New-England Repertory* reported that "Mr. Jefferson and his ministers had been closetted nine hours without intermission" sometime before January 2, 1804, which may or may not be the period when they developed the first draft of the canons. "A letter from Washington . . .," *New-England Repertory* (Newburyport, MA), January 14, 1804.

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**ABSTRACT****ASSUMPTIONS OF AUTHORITY:  
SOCIAL WASHINGTON'S EVOLUTION FROM  
REPUBLICAN COURT TO SELF-RULE, 1801-1831**

by

**MERRY ELLEN SCOFIELD****December 2014****Advisor:** Marc Kruman**Major:** History**Degree:** Doctor Of Philosophy

Washington City's political society was born in late November 1800, when the early republic moved its seat of government from Philadelphia to the banks of the Potomac. Washington's political elite, many of them accustomed to the urban pleasures of the nation's largest city, found themselves forming a proper society among boardinghouses, muddy roads, and half-built public buildings. A simple social hierarchy developed based on political position. Despite Jefferson's protests that the Court of the United States had died with the Federalist era, a republican court formed around him. His issuance of a set of social tenets, written after the Merry affair, proved his assumption of social, as well as political, authority over the city. Jefferson's social successor, Dolley Madison, kept the court alive with her amicable personality, her famous Wednesday night drawing room, and her respect for traditional etiquette and protocol. She set a standard, though, impossible to follow, even if the next presidential couple had wished to do so, which James and Elizabeth Monroe did not. The Monroes' reserved manner forced social

Washington to rethink its relationship with those in the executive mansion, and a larger, more complex governmental community made change possible. By the 1820s, Washington society no longer considered the White House its social nucleus, nor the president and his lady its source of social authority. When President Andrew Jackson attempted to force official society to accept the less than reputable wife of his secretary of war, he learned that the ladies of that society did not follow presidential edicts when it came to who they would admit, or not admit, into their social circle. This dissertation explores the thirty-year journey of Washingtonian society from a republican court to an autonomous institution determined to stand its ground against Andrew Jackson. Furthermore, it dispels the theory that Washington's social power ended in the aftermath of the Eaton affair. The Peggy Eaton affair was an aberration and social Washington continued after the Eaton affair as it had since the Monroes, insistent on a set of manners and protocol that it would dictate for itself.

### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Merry Ellen (Melly) Scofield is a doctoral candidate at Wayne State University. She holds master degrees in education and history, with additional teaching certifications in fine art and mathematics. She has taught American history to eighth grade students for two decades, enjoying a profession that is never stagnate and constantly challenging. Her most recent publication is "Yea or Nay to Removing the Seat of Government: Dolley Madison and the Realities of 1814 Politics," (*The Historian*, Fall 2012). Three articles preceded: "Celebrating Peace on the Detroit Frontier," in *Border Crossings: The Detroit River Region in the War of 1812* (2012), "The Dolley Myths" (*White House History*, 2012), and "The Fatigues of His Table: Politics of Presidential Dining During the Jefferson Administration" (*Journal of the Early Republic*, 2006). A chapter on the Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison first ladies is in production for the Blackwell Companions to American History series. Scofield was honored with a travel grant through the White House Historical Association in 2007, and three graduate awards from the Wayne State history department in 2011, 2013, and 2014.