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# GROWTH OF A NATION

## Securing the Republic

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## Introduction

In 1814, a young lawyer and poet named Francis Scott Key witnessed the awesome shelling of Fort McHenry, in Baltimore, during the War of 1812. As British bombs exploded overhead, Key rightfully wondered whether the fort—and the United States, itself—would survive.

Out-gunned and out-numbered, Americans rose to the defense of their outpost. And, by the first light of dawn, Key could see the fifteen stars and fifteen stripes waving defiantly about the garrison, declaring the American victory.

So it was throughout the nation’s early history. Time and again the fledgling republic faced challenges and embraced opportunities to achieve its destiny.

This is the story of an exhilarating era—when the United States set its historic course. This is the story of the Growth of a Nation.



## Federalists and Republicans

In 1800 the United States was just eleven years old. The federal government was still a fragile work-in-progress. The sixteen states were united, but Americans were often bitterly divided. One partisan crisis after another threatened America’s experiment in democracy. George Washington, himself, feared the bickering would “tare the [federal] machine asunder.”

This tense environment gave rise to two opposing political factions: the Federalists and the Republicans—who were also known as the Democratic-Republicans. Each party had its own vision for America’s future.

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The Federalists were the party of Alexander Hamilton and John Adams. They championed a strong central government and central bank, a protective trade tariff, and a powerful navy. The Federalists aimed to create a stable and secure country that was safe for business and wealthy property owners. Their main support came from the shippers and merchants of New York and New England. Federalists believed in a loose interpretation of the Constitution.

The first chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Jay, enunciated the Federalist belief that, “Those who own the country, ought to govern it.”



On the other side of the debate, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison led the opposition Republicans. Their party favored a weak federal government to preserve states' rights; state banks over a national bank; and a minimal navy—primarily for coastal defense. They promoted the extension of democracy to farmers, craftsmen and other so-called ordinary people, and drew their strongest support from the agrarian and frontier states. Republicans believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution.

To Jefferson and other Republicans, the New England Federalists were no better than the old English monarchy.

The distrust and hostility between the two parties was intense. In 1800, Thomas Jefferson and President John Adams faced-off in one of the nastiest presidential contests in American history. The campaign descended to a level of personal innuendo and character attacks that was stunning. Each party was utterly convinced that victory for the other would result in the certain demise of their country.

In the end, Jefferson prevailed by the slimmest of margins. The triumphant candidate called his election the “Revolution of 1800”—not because blood was shed, but because it was

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not. The event marked the first peaceful transfer of authority from one political party to another, a precedent that is followed and admired to the present day.

## President Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson's 1801 inauguration was the first to be hosted in the nation's new capital city, Washington D.C. In his address to the American people, the new president sought to reconcile the nation's political differences:

"Let us, then...unite with one heart and one mind...We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists."



True to his belief in limited government, President Jefferson worked to reduce taxes and cut the national debt. He slashed military spending. And he pressured Congress to repeal the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts, which had been passed under President Adams.

Jefferson spurned the pomp and ceremony common during the Washington and Adams administrations. Instead, he insisted on the conservative republican values that seemed well-suited to the capitol's rustic setting.

In foreign relations, Jefferson pledged, "...peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none;" But once in the White House, such pacifism gave way to the realities of protecting the nation's sovereignty and commerce. Just months after his inauguration, President Jefferson was forced to send naval ships to North Africa where pirates were blackmailing and plundering American merchant vessels. After four years of fighting marked by swash-buckling adventures, the First Barbary War concluded in 1805, when the U.S. claimed victory and signed a peace treaty.



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While the nation's exploits in the Barbary Wars earned it respect from abroad, the greatest foreign policy achievement of the age came right at home.

## Louisiana Purchase

President Thomas Jefferson relished small government, but his aspirations for the nation were enormous. In 1802, he faced a foreign relations challenge that shaped the destiny of the republic. At the time, the United States commanded only a fraction of the North American continent. The rest was controlled by foreign powers.

The area north of the Great Lakes was owned by Great Britain, which claimed title to the Oregon Country in the Pacific Northwest as well.

Florida, Mexico, and most of the Southwest, including California, was Spanish-owned territory.



And, the continent's expansive interior, a territory known as Louisiana, had recently been acquired by France in a secretly-negotiated treaty with Spain.

News of this treaty alarmed Americans—and with good reason. The territory included the Mississippi River and the Port of New Orleans, which were vital to the frontier economy. Secretary of State, James Madison, spoke for the farmers and traders whose livelihoods depended on the waterway: “The Mississippi is to them everything. It is the Hudson, the Delaware, the Potomac, and all the navigable rivers of the Atlantic states, formed into one stream.”

President Jefferson feared that sharing the continent with France might lead to war. Seeking to avert a conflict, he instructed his diplomats to offer \$10 million dollars for New Orleans and surrounding coastal lands. But even as negotiators were meeting in Paris, France

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presented a surprising new proposal. A disastrous slave revolt in the French Caribbean and an ongoing war with Great Britain convinced French ruler, Napoleon Bonaparte, to sell big. Napoleon offered the United States not just New Orleans, but the entire territory of Louisiana—some 828,000 square miles—for the sum of just \$15 million dollars. Sensing a historic bargain, the American diplomats, Robert Livingston and James Monroe, quickly agreed.

Most Americans welcomed the Louisiana deal, but some considered it foolish—or even unconstitutional. The prominent Federalist, Fisher Ames, criticized the acquisition, saying “We are to give money of which we have too little for land of which we already have too much.” Even President Jefferson—an ardent supporter of limited government—had reservations. But recognizing its great significance to the future of the country, he reluctantly signed the treaty, reasoning, “...by a reasonable and peaceable process, we have obtained in 4. Months what would have cost us 7. Years of war, 100,000 human lives, 100 millions of additional debt.”

In December 1803, France officially ceded control of the Louisiana territory to the United States. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the nation and secured land for more than a dozen future states. It ensured transportation access to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico, and it provided a seemingly endless supply of timber and other natural resources. Perhaps most importantly, the territory represented a fertile “valley of democracy,” where the blessings of liberty and freedom could spread and flourish.

## Lewis and Clark



When the United States purchased Louisiana from France in 1803, the territory was largely unexplored. Maps of the era showed a vast emptiness west of the Mississippi. Trappers and fur-traders who trekked the region returned with tales of unicorns and other

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fanciful creatures. Even President Jefferson, an enthusiastic scientist and fossil collector, held far-fetched notions of what might be found there:

“In the present interior of our continent there is surely space and range enough for elephants and lions, if in that climate they could subsist; and for mammoths and megalonyxes who may subsist there.”

The President enlisted his private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and a frontiersman named William Clark to explore the uncharted land. They were given instructions to evaluate the economic potential of the territory, to establish trade with the region’s natives, and to search for the fabled water route to the Pacific Ocean.

The Lewis and Clark expedition, christened the Corps of Discovery, embarked from St. Louis in May 1804. Some forty-eight men in all, traveled northwest on the Missouri River... across the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains...before descending along the Columbia River to the Pacific Coast...and then retracing their steps on the journey home.

It was an amazing odyssey of discovery and adventure. The explorers didn’t find a water route to the Pacific, but they recorded hundreds of species of plants and animals, many of them new to American science. They made notes on the geography and climate of the region. With the help of a Shoshone interpreter and guide named Sacagawea, they forged relations with dozens of indigenous tribes they encountered along the way. And they mapped a great expanse of the American West, laying a path for future exploration and settlement.

The Corps of Discovery returned to St. Louis in May 1806—a remarkable 8,000 miles and more than two years after they departed. In the subsequent years and decades, countless others traveled in their footsteps as the the United States sought to fulfill its “Manifest Destiny”—the idea that the nation was pre-ordained to expand from coast-to-coast. This ideology fueled the growth of the United States, and with it, the removal of American Indian groups, the expansion of slavery, and by 1846, war with Mexico.

## **Prelude to War**

Thomas Jefferson won reelection in 1804 by an overwhelming margin. But during his second term in office, his aversion to “foreign entanglements” slowly withered. Britain and France were engaged in the Napoleonic Wars, and the neutral United States was increasingly

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caught in the crossfire. The U.S. merchant fleet was the chief victim as the aggressor nations sought to disrupt transatlantic supply shipments.

Compounding these problems, in 1807, Britain reasserted its right to seize U.S. Sailors, claiming they were deserters from the Royal Navy. This practice was called impressment and it outraged Americans. Between 1803 and 1812 thousands of American sailors were pressed into foreign service. The issue came to a head when the British frigate Leopard fired on the American ship Chesapeake off the coast of Virginia, killing three Americans. The incident became known as the Chesapeake Affair and it provoked a quick response.



In December 1807, the United States Congress passed the Embargo Act, which forbid trade with all foreign ports. The law was intended to “starve the offending nations” but it wrought great havoc at home. With overseas commerce shut-down, shipping centers like this one in Salem, Massachusetts, were devastated. One commentator described the port’s once-imposing fleet: “152...square-riggers lay empty and idle at the wharves...their decks were cleared; their hatches fastened down; and scarcely a sailor was to be found aboard. Not a box, bail, cask, barrel, or package was to be seen upon the wharves.”

Unemployed merchants and seamen laid the blame squarely on President Jefferson. Former congressman John Randolph said of the trade ban. “It can be likened to curing corns by cutting off the toes.” To make matters worse, the economic pressure failed to starve the British into a change of policy.

These events brought the United States to the crossroads of peace and war with Great Britain. Americans were divided on which path to take. The merchants of New England and New York relied on overseas trade and strongly opposed going to war. On the other side of the aisle, Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky led a coalition of congress members who were eager to defend America’s sovereignty through military force.



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Clay and his fellow “War Hawks” also aspired to wipe-out a perceived threat posed by natives on the frontier. They were convinced that British agents in Canada—notoriously referred to as “scalp buyers”—were inciting attacks by providing weapons and other supplies to local tribes. In fact, the American Indians of the region were increasingly outnumbered by white settlers and in danger of losing their lands altogether.

## Tecumseh’s War

At the turn of the 19th century, the great Ohio valley became the flashpoint in the conflict between American Indians and westward expansion. Accounts of Indian attacks, though often exaggerated, terrified white settlers. At the same time, the natives were rightfully outraged to see their land—and their way of life—literally going up in smoke.



Beginning around 1808, a Shawnee chief named Tecumseh forged an alliance of Eastern Indian tribes to resist further white encroachment along the frontier. Tecumseh was assisted by his brother, a one-eyed religious leader known as the Prophet. Together, the two promoted a potent blend of tribal tradition and political unity that attracted thousands of followers.

The brothers’ chief nemesis was General William Henry Harrison, governor of the Indiana territory. Harrison was determined, by whatever means necessary, to secure title to Indian lands to allow for American expansion. A series of diplomatic and military altercations between the parties during the early 1800s is known as Tecumseh’s War.

A climax to their conflict came in November 1811 when Harrison’s U.S. Army forces marched on Tecumseh’s headquarters at Prophet’s Town, in present day Indiana. In the Battle of Tippecanoe, Harrison’s troops surrounded the settlement, defeated Tecumseh’s men, and burned the village to the ground. Tecumseh was not involved in the battle, but in its

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aftermath, he and his followers allied themselves with the British and played a key role in the approaching War of 1812.

## War of 1812

James Madison succeeded Thomas Jefferson as president in 1809. As he assumed office, the old issues vexing British-American relations remained: harassment on the high seas, impressment of American sailors, and the arming of hostile American Indians.

On June 1, 1812, after many months of heated debate, President Madison asked Congress to declare war on Great Britain. He argued it would be a defensive war against British imperialism. Two weeks later, Congress obliged. Speaking for the War Hawks, Congressman John Calhoun of South Carolina predicted victory within four weeks time. The War of 1812, as it became known, would last two and half years.



The president's critics called it "Mr. Madison's War"—and it began badly. Throughout the summer of 1812, defeat followed defeat throughout the Great Lakes Region. On August 16, the British captured Fort Detroit. That same day Fort Dearborn, the site of present day Chicago, was attacked by a band of Potawatomi Indians. They burned the outpost to the ground and killed scores of unarmed men, women and children as they fled.

Within just a few short months, much of the territory along the Canadian border had fallen to the British and their American Indian allies.

Meanwhile, the small but superbly-manned American navy fared much better. In 1812, the American warship Constitution defeated the British ship Guerriere off the east coast of Canada. The following year, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry smashed the British fleet on Lake Erie, allowing forces under General William Henry Harrison to reoccupy Detroit. One

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month later, Harrison's army defeated British and American Indian forces at the Battle of the Thames in Ontario. The Shawnee chief, Tecumseh, was among those killed in the fighting.

Buoyed by the turn of fortunes, the American public delighted in political satire published in local papers. But, if King George's England had been bloodied by the fighting, it was far from beaten.

In August 1814, British troops converged on Washington D.C., intent on destroying the city. First Lady Dolley Madison was forced to flee from the White House—securing Gilbert Stuart's famous painting of George Washington before she left. During her final hours in the nation's capitol Madison wrote her sister: "...it is done...and the precious portrait placed in the hands of two gentlemen of New York...now... I must leave this house...When I shall again write to you, or where I shall be tomorrow, I cannot tell!"

That night British troops put torch to the city, burning most of the public buildings, including both the White House and Capitol.

A month later, the British fleet attacked Fort McHenry in Baltimore. The British "bombs bursting in air..." inspired Francis Scott Key to write a poem called "The Defence of Fort McHenry." The fort held, Key survived, and nearly one-hundred years later, the poem was adopted as the United States' national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

As the war dragged on, the combatants were increasingly eager to end the bloodshed. Diplomats from both nations agreed to meet in Belgium to discuss a peace settlement. Finally, on Christmas Eve 1814, they signed the Treaty of Ghent which ended the fighting. The agreement restored all territories captured during the war and promised "peace, friendship, and good understanding" between the parties. It made no mention of impressment, Indian hostilities, or the other issues that had started the war in the first place.

Ironically, the War of 1812's most famous battle was fought after the peace agreement was signed. In August 1814, British troops launched an attack in southern Louisiana. They were met by American militiamen led by General Andrew Jackson. In the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson's men won a resounding victory. Jackson himself became an American hero. For the United States, it was a momentous conclusion to an otherwise inconclusive war.

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## Winners and Losers

The War of 1812 lasted two-and-a-half years and consumed perhaps 25,000 British, American, and American Indian lives. Even though it did not result in a clear victory, Americans generally celebrated the outcome.

The conflict affirmed American sovereignty and fixed its status as a commercial and military power. Even the London Times had to concede: “[America’s] first war with England made them independent; their second made them formidable.”



The war burnished the stars of many future politicians, most notably Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison, who rode their military fame all the way to the White House.

Henry Clay and the War Hawks didn’t get Canada as they had hoped, but they were empowered to advance their agenda of territorial expansion, trade, and economic growth.

President James Madison enjoyed tremendous popularity following the campaign. During his final years in office, Mr. Madison was justly recognized for his roles in both the founding and securing of the republic.

The New England states were transformed during the war as their foundries and textile mills worked around the clock to meet the demand for both military and domestic goods. This hastened America’s industrial revolution and redefined New England life and its economy for the next century.

New England Federalists, on the other hand, were not so fortunate. In 1814, the party representatives convened in Hartford, Connecticut to discuss their grievances against the federal government and formulate a list of demands. The so-called Hartford Convention was seen by many Americans as unpatriotic, even treasonous, and helped speed the demise of the already-wounded Federalist party.



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The war's biggest losers were the American Indians who fought alongside the British. They hoped victory would help stem the tide of pioneer settlement of their territory. Instead, they were abandoned altogether following the war. Within a generation, the proud and once-powerful tribes of eastern North America would be virtually eliminated from their ancestral homelands.

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