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Sectionalism and national consciousness in the early Republic :: the case of New England Federalists, 1800-1815/

Denis A. Kozlov

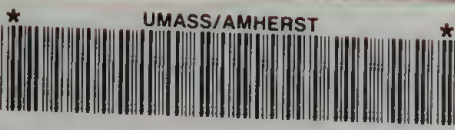
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**SECTIONALISM AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC:
THE CASE OF NEW ENGLAND FEDERALISTS, 1800-1815**

A Thesis Presented

by

DENIS A. KOZLOV

**Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

September 1997

History

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SECTIONALISM AND NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC:

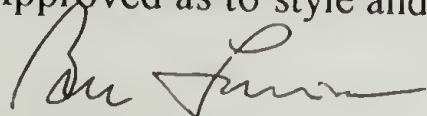
THE CASE OF NEW ENGLAND FEDERALISTS, 1800-1815

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by

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INTRODUCTION

This work is an attempt to describe and analyze the outburst of sectional feeling that took place in New England in 1800-1815, and arguably brought the United States under threat of disintegration and civil war. The threat did not come true, having died in embryo and producing no sanguinary battles, dramatic moments, or heroic personalities. However, its significance is indisputable. Inconspicuous as it was, New England sectionalism is important as an illustration of the development of American national consciousness and deserves attention in the first place from this standpoint.

Practically no book that concerns American political history during the Jefferson and Madison administrations fails to mention the opposition of New England to the federal government. But there are not many detailed studies of New England sectionalism. Not many historians have gone beyond merely mentioning its existence in the early 1800s. What receives attention and comment most often is, of course, the Hartford Convention.

The question that has attracted most scholarly interest is whether the convention represented a serious threat. What was this political forum in the capital of Connecticut in the winter of 1814-15 -- a harmless and legitimate gesture of political opposition or a separatist conspiracy?

The discussion started right after the convention. Contemporary politicians were the first to argue about the meaning of this forum. The leaders of both political parties, gradually retiring to the backyard of politics, devoted their time and energy to mutual accusations about the past. A good example is Harrison Gray Otis, one of the most eminent Federalists of the early 19th-century Massachusetts. In 1820 he published a

series of anonymous letters about the convention in which he tried to prove that there was not "any document extant, except the Farewell Address of Washington, in which the vital importance of the Federal Union is more seriously inculcated than in the report of that Convention...".¹ Many former Federalist leaders expressed this point of view, until it took final shape the famous History of the Hartford Convention by Theodore Dwight (1764-1846).² Historians use this book now chiefly because of the journal and the report of the convention, that Dwight, himself the former secretary of this forum, published.

Federalist praise of the Hartford Convention met with serious objections from their Republican opponents. One of the most ardent accusers was President John Quincy Adams, previously a Federalist who had left his party to become a Republican in 1808. Adams affirmed that there had existed a secessionist conspiracy in the early 19th century in New England, and that the Hartford Convention was part of it. In 1828-29, Adams indulged into long polemics with former Federalist leaders -- Harrison Gray Otis, Israel Thorndike, John Lowell, William Sullivan and others. During a heated newspaper debate with the old Federalists, Adams wrote a volume over two hundred pages long respecting the alleged separatist movement in New England in the early 1800s. This work, together with previous correspondence between the contending parties, was published in 1877 by Adams's grandson, the great historian Henry Adams,³ who shared the opinion of his grandfather. In the same book, Henry Adams also published some Federalist

¹ Harrison G. Otis, Letters Developing the Character and Views of the Hartford Convention: By "One of the Convention", (Washington, D.C., 1820), 33.

² Theodore Dwight, History of the Hartford Convention. With a Review of the Policy of the United States Government Which Led to the War of 1812, (1833. Reprint, Freeport, N. Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970).

³ Henry Adams, ed., Documents Relating to New England Federalism. 1800-1815 [hereafter DRNEF], (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1877).

correspondence from the papers of Timothy Pickering and Harrison Gray Otis. Together, they made a strong case in favor of John Quincy Adams's opinion about New England secessionism. Since then, this collection of documents has become a major source for historians of early national politics. Confident of the existence of a separatist plot in New England in the early 19th century and of the secessionist character of the Hartford Convention, Henry Adams fully developed this theory in his History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.⁴

Adams represented the trend of scholars who might be called "family historians." All of them were descendants of those very politicians who had ruled New England several dozen years before. These "grandsons" were the first scholars who took New England sectionalism into serious consideration. Along with Adams, we should mention William Plumer, Jr., Henry Cabot Lodge, and Samuel Eliot Morison in this group of historians.⁵ Plumer did not openly declare that the convention had been a separatist forum. However, he mentioned that in the Convention's Report "...the question of dissolving the Union was discussed at some length."⁶ Plumer, though, did not pay much attention to this question. The attitudes of two other scholars -- Samuel E. Morison and Henry C. Lodge are more interesting, since their ancestors, Harrison Gray Otis and George Cabot respectively, both had been delegates of the convention, while William Plumer had not. In 1913, Morison wrote what has been generally recognized as the

⁴ Henry Adams, History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. 2 vols., (New York: The Library of America, c1986).

⁵ William Plumer Jr., Life of William Plumer, (Boston, 1857); Henry C. Lodge, Life and Letters of George Cabot, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1878); Samuel E. Morison, The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis, Federalist. 1765-1848, 2 vols. (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin company, 1913).

⁶ William Plumer Jr., Life of William Plumer, 422.

classical study of the Hartford Convention in American historiography,⁷ arguing that the convention's aim was to change the nature of the American "national compact" by means of a radical revision of the Constitution. Constitutional changes, the statement of local grievances, and the provision of defense measures -- such were, in Morison's view, the principal aims of the convention. As for separation, it was, as he said, "squarely rejected." Thus, despite all possible reservations, Morison largely assumed the Federalist standpoint.

Henry Cabot Lodge sought a neutral ground between Morison and Henry Adams, arguing that there was truth in the statements of both scholars. He described a strong inclination towards secession that had existed in New England by the time of the Hartford Convention and suggested that the Convention itself had been "the exponent and result of a strong separatist feeling." However, Lodge stated that the delegates had "used these separatist forces to maintain the Union." They had threatened separation, he thought, and perhaps would have followed through if their demands had not been fulfilled. Nevertheless, on the premises of Federalist indecision and passivity, Cabot finally came to the conclusion that "the Hartford Convention was not intended to dissolve the Union."⁸

David Hackett Fischer has justly said that the impact of family origin and tradition on such historians as Adams, Lodge, and Morison was very strong. He therefore doubted the objectivity of their research. "It is magnificent -- he said about Henry Adams' work -- but is it history?"⁹ The question is well founded. Nevertheless, it was these historians who

⁷ Samuel E. Morison, *Life and Letters*, 78-199.

⁸ Henry C. Lodge, *Life and Letters*, 516-19.

⁹ David H. Fischer, "The Myth of the Essex Junto," In *William and Mary Quarterly* (hereafter WMQ), 3d ser., vol. 21, no. 2 (April 1964): 194.

shaped the pattern of later discussions about New England regionalism and the Hartford Convention in particular.

One can generally trace two major lines in the attitudes of historians towards the convention and events related to it. One may call them the "Adams" (after both Adamses mentioned) and the "Morison" lines. The first implies that the Convention was a full-blown secessionist conspiracy, the second that it was legitimate protest rather than outright secession. In fact, these two lines retrace the age-old controversy between the Federalists and the Republicans. Practically every book concerning the presidency of James Madison, the party politics of that period or the War of 1812 describes the Hartford Convention from Adams's¹⁰ or Morison's¹¹ standpoint. It is not hard to find that there

¹⁰ For Adams's followers see, e. g., Charles Beard and Mary Beard, A Basic History of the United States, (Philadelphia, 1944), 174; Stephen F. Bemis, A Diplomatic History of the United States, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 169; Ulane Bonnel, La France, Les États-Unis et la Guerre de Course (1797-1815), (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions latines, 1961), 305; Albert H. Z. Carr, The Coming of War. An Account of the Remarkable Events Leading to the War of 1812, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), 335; Lloyd Gardner, W. LaFeber, T. McCormick, The Creation of the American Empire: U. S. Diplomatic History, (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973), 95; Ruth W. Gavian and W. Hamm, The American Story, (Boston, 1945), 161; D. Lawson, The War of 1812, (New York, 1966), 128; Allan Nevins and Henry S. Commager, America: The Story of a Free People, 4th ed. (London, 1976), 143.

¹¹ For Morison's followers, see, e. g., James T. Adams, The Epic of America, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, ©1931), 144, 146; H. C. Bailey, America: The Framing of a Nation, Vol. 1. (Columbus, Ohio, 1975), 146-47; Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic, 2d ed. (Boston, Toronto, 1961), 217-18; Idem., ed., The American Spirit, United States History as Seen by Contemporaries, Vol. 1. (Lexington, Mass., 1973), 203-4; P. N. Carroll and D. W. Noble, The Restless Centuries: A History of the American People, (Minneapolis, 1973), 169-70; O. P. Chitwood, R. W. Patrick, F. L. Owsley, The American People: A History, Vol. 1. (Princeton, N. J., 1962), 293-4; R. N. Current, T. H. Williams, F. Freidel, American History: A Survey, 5th ed. Vol. 1. (New York: Knopf, 1979,) 216; Paul D. Erickson, The Poetry of Events: Daniel Webster's Rhetoric of the Constitution and the Union, (New York: New York University Press, 1986); Homer C. Hockett, Political and Social Growth of the American People, 1492-1865, (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 442-45; R. Hofstadter, W. Miller, D. Aaron, The United States: The History of a Republic, (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 225-6; Reginald Horsman, The War of 1812, (New York: 1969); H. Jones, The Cause of American Diplomacy, From the Revolution to the Present, (New York: 1985), 77; Maldwyn A. Jones, The Limits of Liberty: American History, 1607-1980, 4th ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 104-5; J. A. Krout and D. R. Fox, The Completion of Independence, 1790-1830, (New York: Macmillan: 1944), 200-8; Benjamin W. Labaree, Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 197-8; Élise Marienstras, Naissance de la République Fédérale (1783-1828), (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1987), 136-7; R. A. McCaughey, Josiah Quincy, 1772-1864: The Last Federalist, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 25, 82-83; D. Perkins and G. G. Van

have been many more historians who side with the latter point of view, that is, that the convention had nothing to do with secessionism.

A few studies have concentrated specifically on New England sectionalism. In 1915, Charles R. Brown asserted that the Hartford Convention had indeed been a separatist plot.¹² However, Samuel Eliot Morison, while reviewing Brown's book, severely criticized the author for the insufficient use of primary as well as secondary sources and denied his arguments.¹³

James Truslow Adams published his famous work in 1926. Although giving a good, detailed account of the development of New England separatism during the War of 1812 as well previously,¹⁴ Adams believed that the Hartford Convention itself had been moderate and did not aim at secession.¹⁵ In 1934, William E. Buckley published his small brochure about the convention. As the author himself confessed, he had made "extensive use... of Professor Morison's work in preparing this essay."¹⁶ This, no doubt, influenced his opinion substantially. Buckley thought that John Quincy Adams's insistence on the convention's secessionism was "a perversion of the spirit of the document prepared at

Deusen, The United States of America. A History, Vol. 1. (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 273-4; Helen R. Pinkney, Christopher Gore, Federalist of Massachusetts: 1758-1827, Waltham, Mass.: Gore Place Society, 1969); E. H. Roseboom, A History of Presidential Elections, (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 72-73; Clarence L. Ver Steeg and Richard Hofstadter, A People and a Nation, (New York, 1971), 173-4; C. M. Webster, Town Meeting Country, (New York: Duell, Sloan and Peace, 1945), 131; F. W. Wellborn, The Growth of American Nationality, 1492-1965, (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 451-52.

¹² Charles R. Brown, The Northern Confederacy According to the Plans of the "Essex Junto", 1796-1814, Princeton, N.J., 1915.

¹³ See: American Historical Review [hereafter -- AHR] 21 (April, 1916), 634.

¹⁴ James T. Adams, New England in the Republic: 1776-1850, (Boston, 1926), 281-301.

¹⁵ Ibid., 298-99.

¹⁶ William E. Buckley, The Hartford Convention, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), 29.

Hartford”; “the contention of Otis that the Convention wished to silence the secession clamor is at least as logical as the theory which Adams advanced.”¹⁷

David H. Fischer contributed substantially to our subject by publishing his heralded book in 1965. Fischer touched upon the question of secessionism and disunionism and, in frames of the old "Morison line" concluded that "with few exceptions, disunion was never the object of young Federalist leaders in New England," nor of the Hartford Convention.¹⁸

Several valuable books appeared in the 1970s. James M. Banner, Jr. published his excellent study of Massachusetts Federalism in 1970.¹⁹ In a broad analysis of the Hartford Convention he strongly denied that it had aimed at the severance of the Union. "There is no evidence to sustain this judgment," -- Banner writes.²⁰ His opinion was based on the fact that most of the Convention delegates were moderate and, more than that, "at bottom... profoundly attached to the Union." "No Convention member, nor for that matter any reflecting Federalist, ever seriously contemplated disunion as an alternative in 1814," -- Banner asserts.²¹

Although Banner's study seemed to have offered a definitive word in the discussion, it only stirred further debate. In 1972 there appeared a doctoral dissertation by Anthony F. Eastman specially devoted to the question of New England secessionism in 1796-1815. In this broad context, the author regarded the Hartford Convention as an

¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸ David H. Fischer, The Revolution of American Conservatism. The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 177.

¹⁹ James M. Banner Jr., To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815, (New York: Knopf), 1970.

²⁰ Ibid., 331.

²¹ Ibid., 344.

inherently secessionist forum whose primary concern had been the future dissolution of the Union. "The report of the delegates," Eastman wrote, "is clear... The report prepared a way to justify secession... The convention intended to prepare public opinion for another convention which would formulate an ordinance of secession."²² Eastman insists that the entire report of the Hartford Convention was imbued with this secessionist idea. Thus, the "Adams line" was revived -- perhaps, in its most radical shape. However, in the same year Donald R. Hickey, the author of another doctoral dissertation, put forward an opposite statement. "The report of the Hartford Convention was by and large a moderate document," Hickey said.²³ More than that; he comes to the conclusion that the Convention had not aimed even at any major acts of opposition to the Federal government. "It was called, rather, to deal with more immediate problems, namely the defense of New England and other issues related to the war."²⁴ Thus, the "Morison line," or, better to say, the initial line of the Federalists of 1815, was revived as well. Thus, the same year witnessed two contrary opinions about the same phenomenon. Historians were apparently brought to bay, and such is the condition in which the debate exists now, since no major studies of the subject have appeared since that time. An article by James M. Banner was published in the History Today magazine in 1988. It is interesting that Banner, although he reconfirms his former statement about the non-separatist character of the Convention, apparently acknowledges this time that separatism had been implied, if not stated in its report, and that the Hartford Convention had created the soil on which

²² Anthony F. Eastman, "Federalist Ideology and Secession, 1796-1815," Ph.D. diss. University of Southern Mississippi, 1972, 262.

²³ Donald R. Hickey, "The Federalists and the War of 1812," Ph.D. diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1972, 325.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

Southern secessionism developed later. The headline of the article also stressed the secessionist aspect of the problem.²⁵

Finally, we should mention a 1996 essay by Peter Onuf on the origins of American sectionalism.²⁶ Onuf does not deal precisely with the War of 1812; in fact, he concentrates on the 1780s and 1790s. However, this work offers a valuable general rationale for sectional sentiment in the early republic. To put it briefly, Onuf, in his analysis, regards nationalism and sectionalism as inseparable phenomena, writing about “the dialectical relationship between union and section,”²⁷ inherent in the very construction of the American federation since the adoption of the Constitution. Both unionism and sectionalism were equally strong and vivid in the minds of early American politicians, whether Federalists or Republicans. I discovered Onuf’s work while in process of writing this thesis. To my content, many of his conclusions have proved similar to those to which I came during my research.

²⁵ James M. Banner, “A Shadow of Secession? The Hartford Convention, 1814,” In History Today 38 (September 1988): 24-30.

²⁶ Peter S. Onuf, “Federalism, Republicanism, and the Origins of American Sectionalism,” In Edward L. Ayers, Patricia N. Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum, Peter S. Onuf, All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions, (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, ©1996), 11-37.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

CHAPTER 1

FROM THE JEFFERSONIAN REVOLUTION TO “MR. MADISON’S WAR”

1.1. The Surge of 1801

On March 4, 1801, Thomas Jefferson became President of the United States of America. Federalists, already fractional and discordant, were stunned -- to the point that most of them kept silence during the first couple of weeks. Then the more energetic recovered. Among them was Fisher Ames (1758-1808), one of the most farsighted Federalist leaders. On March 19, 1801, he wrote to Theodore Dwight:

I conceive that the Virginia politics are violent, according to the temper of her Taylors,²⁸ Monroes, and Gileses,²⁹ and I may add Jeffersons. They are vindictive, because that State owes much, and the commercial States have gained, and now possess, much; and this newly accumulated moneyed interest, so corrupt and corrupting, is considered a rival interest, that baffles Virginia in her claim of ruling the public counsels. The great State has the ambition to be the great nation... By pointing out the utter ruin of the commercial States by a Virginia or democratic system, may we not consolidate the federalists, and check the licentiousness of the jacobin administration?... It will be too late to alarm after the contagious principles of Jacobinism have made New England as rotten as Pennsylvania. [emphasis in text]³⁰

What strikes one in the passage cited above is an inseparable connection that the author draws between political belief and geographical situation. Ames obviously identified Republicans as a Virginian, a Southern party, whereas the Northeast was for him a rampart of Federalism, and as such he suggested to use it. Ames’s thoughts on this

²⁸ Taylor, John (1753-1824), U. S. senator from Virginia (1792-94; 1803; 1822-24); author of An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States (1814).

²⁹ Giles, William Branch (1762-1830), member, U. S. House of Representatives (1790-98; 1801-03); U. S. senator (1804-15).

³⁰ Ames to Theodore Dwight, 19 March 1801, Works of Fisher Ames, With a Selection from His Speeches and Correspondence, 2 vols., ed. Seth Ames (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1854), 1: 292-94.

subject took final shape -- to the point of cynicism -- by the end of 1802, in his letter to Christopher Gore (1758-1827):

The federalists must entrench themselves in the State governments, and endeavor to make State justice and State power a shelter of the wise, and good, and rich, from the wild destroying rage of the southern Jacobins. Such a post will be a high one, from which to combine in our favor the honest sentiments of New England at least.³¹

Ames himself started the practical realization of his own schemes. In February 1801, he published a series of four pamphlets under the general title, "Falkland," in the *New England Palladium*. The subtitle read: "To New England Men."³² A denunciation of Jeffersonian ideology (and of Jefferson himself), *Falkland* was full of grave predictions about the future of New England in the nation ruled by the archenemy of commerce. One could not deny Ames the gift of political prevision:

There is evidence enough, that the party expected to rule is not friendly to the commerce of any of the States, and especially to the fisheries and navigation of the Eastern States. We do not want, they argue, an expensive navy for the sake of these; nor these for the sake of the navy. Navies breed wars, and wars augment navies, and both augment expenses, and this brings forth funding systems, banks, and corrupt influence. These few words contain the system of our new politicians, which it is probable they will be in future, as in times past, complaisant enough to call philosophy.³³

"Expect commercial regulations, which will profess to cramp British commerce, and will cramp our own. First revenue, wealth, and credit will take flight; then peace," -- Ames wrote in 1801, thus exactly predicting the embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812.³⁴

³¹ Ames to Christopher Gore, 13 December 1802, *ibid.*, 310.

³² *Ibid.*, 2: 128-144.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

Falkland marked the earliest considerable Federalist reaction to Jefferson's victory. It takes no great flight of imagination to see that this reaction was sectionally biased. Besides the fact that the articles had a special addressee, "the men of New England," Ames made the regional message explicit, not only emphasizing the material and moral superiority of New England over other regions of the United States, but speaking about New England as a separate nation:

New England now contains a million and a half of inhabitants, of all the colonies ever founded, the largest, the most assimilated, and, to use the modern jargon, nationalized, the most respectable and prosperous, the most truly interesting to America and to humanity, more unlike and more superior to other people (the English excepted,) than the old Roman race to their neighbors and competitors. This people, whose spirit is as lofty as their destiny, is settled on an extensive coast, and by situation and character, has a greater proportion of its inhabitants engaged in navigation and maritime affairs than France or England, perhaps than even Holland. In spirit and enterprise no nation exceeds them.³⁵ [emphasis added].

It is not by chance that I pay so much attention to Ames. Extraordinarily bright, strikingly predictive and remarkably energetic, he presented an exception to the general rule of Federalist sluggishness and inertia in 1801. David H. Fischer calls him, along with several others, a "transitional" figure in Federalist politics -- "too young to find old-school doctrines acceptable, too old to acquiesce in new realities."³⁶ But if we use Fischer's own definition of young Federalists -- those who "responded to the Jeffersonian movement with energy, flexibility, and effect" -- Ames ought to belong here. A proponent of active Federalist opposition, an early supporter of partisanship, and a creator of the *New England Palladium*, Ames was one of those Federalists who continued

³⁵ Ibid., 134.

³⁶ David H. Fischer, The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 21.

the struggle and looked for new ways of carrying it out. By this standard, he was among the young. This is why his emphasis on sectional ideology was important -- he looked not in the past, but in the future.

Sectionalist ideas similar to those of Ames seem to have emerged simultaneously and independently among Federalists in different corners of New England. In January -- February 1801, *The Hampshire Gazette*, organ of the staunchly Federalist Connecticut River Valley in Massachusetts, started to publish articles of an entirely new character. A struggle for presidency was still going on between Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr -- both Republicans -- and for the want of any better option, the *Gazette's* correspondents were choosing between the two evils. A Hartford contributor to the *Gazette* obviously preferred the latter:

There are many reasons why Col. Burr is preferable to Mr. Jefferson -- He is of *New England Extract* -- his father was a very pious, and worthy clergyman -- he is not beloved by the Democrats -- but above all if he is President,... he will set up a rigid government for his myrmidons, and like the Chief Consul Bonaparte... govern them with an iron sceptre." The author concluded his article this way: "...If we must have a democratic President, let it be BURR. Virginia will find that the northern states do not intend yet to bow to her sceptre."³⁷ [emphasis in text]

Nothing of the kind had ever appeared in the *Gazette* during the previous year, 1800.

Quite apart from the merits of Aaron Burr's venerable father and the "benefits" of being ruled with a Bonaparte-like iron scepter, the message of the article was clear enough, even without italicizing: Burr was preferable because he was *le sien* -- "of New England Extract," as opposed to the consummate Southerner Jefferson. One is left only to amaze at how swiftly this transition to sectionalism occurred. No definitive strategy, no new

³⁷ *Hampshire Gazette* (hereafter *HG*), 14 January 1801.

political tactics, no reorganization had yet taken shape among Federalist leaders reeling from defeat. Their reaction was spontaneous, and thereby the more interesting -- this showed that defensive sectionalism came from their own minds and hearts.

Reading the same *Hampshire Gazette* closely, one can observe growing anti-Southernism during 1801. Almost every issue contained at least one article attacking the South, especially Virginia. On January 21, the anonymous author of the article entitled, "Who would be President?" transparently hinted at the injustice of the 3/5 clause in the Constitution that favored the South at elections, throwing "the weight of about half a million of *black cattle*" into their scale.³⁸ The infamous clause had quickly become an obsession for New England Federalists who now blamed their electoral defeat on the unjust distribution of electoral rights. On February 4, 1801 the *Gazette* reprinted a correspondence from the Boston *New England Palladium*, under the title, "A Plain Fact." Its author, concealed under the pseudonym, "A Federalist," demonstrated that it was the silent 3/5 of the slaves who had brought victory to their masters. Had the votes of free Southerners only been counted, he argued, John Adams would have become President again.³⁹ Another article in the *Gazette*, marked February 12 but published on March 11, together with the news of Jefferson's election, discussed the prospect of Republicans using force to secure national power, and ensuing civil war:

If the tumultuous meetings of a set of factious foreigners in Pennsylvania, or a few *fighting* bacchanals of Virginia, mean the *people*, and are to dictate to the Congress of the United States whom to elect as President -- if the constitutional rights of this body are so soon to become the prey to anarchy and faction -- if we have already arrived at that disastrous period in the life of nations, 'when liberty consists in no loner reverencing either the law or the authorities' -- if, in short, the

³⁸ HG, 21 January 1801.

³⁹ "A Plain Fact," HG, 4 February 1801.

scenes which sadden the history of the elective monarchies of Europe are so soon to be reacted in America, it would be prudent to prepare at once for the contest...⁴⁰
[emphasis in text]

The punctual author did not hesitate to explain what kind of a contest this would be:

With the militia of Massachusetts, consisting of... 70,000 (*regulars let us call them*) in arms -- with those of N. Hampshire and Connecticut, united almost to a man, with half the number at least of the citizens of eleven other states, ranged under the federal banner in support of the constitution, what could Pennsylvania, aided by Virginia -- the militia of the latter untrained and farcically the manual exercise with *cornstalks*... -- what may be it asked, would be the issue of the struggle?⁴¹ [emphasis in text]

Although party was suggested as the foundation of this potential civil war, state alignment did play a role: the article demonized Virginia while opposing it to New England as the main base of Federalism -- in this case, in pure military terms. Clearly, Federalists more and more envisioned New England as their last bastion. A few weeks later, *Gazette* editor William Butler reprinted another piece from the *Columbian Centinel*, entitled, "The Principles of the Northern Confederacy Examined!!" The term "Northern Confederacy" pertained here not to New England or Northeastern states in general, although such an impression might arise from a superficial reading of the article. The words "Northern Confederacy" referred to a possible alliance of North European commercial powers, joined by the United States, against the depredations of France. Two things deserve attention. First of all, the term "Northern Confederacy" still anticipated what Timothy Pickering would suggest two years later, in 1803, when he proposed the secession of New England and New York from the United States. Secondly, the article

⁴⁰ *HG*, 11 March 1801 (italics in the text).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (italics in the text).

presented a clear parallel -- European powers detested the ruinous policies of France regarding international commerce; and there existed the possibility of a similar clash between the American federal government controlled by anti-commercial Southerners, and New England states heavily invested in sea trade:

If by the narrow, the local prejudices of any of her sister States, the Navigation of New England shall be jeopardized or destroyed, we must bid adieu to our importance, our prosperity, and our wealth. ... Let them [Southerners] raise their luxuriant crops of Wheat, Indigo, Tobacco, Cotton and Rice,... but let New England which nature has deprived of these advantages, *only* have the advantage of carrying their produce to market. ... But let *not* that power which was invested in the General Government for the *general* welfare and to provide for the common good, be perverted from the aggrandizement of one part of the Union and to the destruction of the other.⁴²

Throughout 1801, scattered articles in the *Hampshire Gazette* bore sectionalist hues of varying intensity. In the heat of June, 1801, an anonymous local poet burst out with a song named "To the Yeomen of Hampshire":

I.

To the shades of our ancestors loud is the praise,
That descends with their deeds, and inspires by reaction:
To the heirs of their glory the paeon we raise,
"The Yeomen of Hampshire," the Victors of Faction;
Be theirs the proud tale,
That though *Anarch* Assail,
Each plowman still sings to the *Stream of his Vale*.

CHORUS:

*Roll on, lov'd Connecticut, long hast thou run;
Giving blossoms to Nature and morals to the Man.*

II.

Where'er thy rich waters' erratic display
Thy deluge of plenty, like *Nile*, overflowing;
The *Mind* and the *Reason* thy impulse obey,
And Patriot virtue and String are in budding;
While each leaf, as it shoots,
With its promise of fruits,

⁴² "The Principles of the Northern Confederacy Examined!!" *HG*, 6 May 1801.

Proclaims the thrift moisture that cultures its roots.

CHORUS:

*Roll on, lov'd Connecticut, long hast thou run;
Giving blossoms to Nature and morals to the Man.*

III.

Through the vallies of *Hampshire*, bright Order's abode,
Thou lov'st in gay circles to range and to wander;
While pleas'd with thy empire, to lengthen the road,
Thou giv'st to thy channel, another meander;
And when on the way,
Near Northampton you stray,
How slow moves thy current its homage to pay:

CHORUS:

*Roll on, lov'd Connecticut, ... etc., etc.*⁴³

In July -- August, 1801, the Gazette reprinted another series of articles by Fisher Ames from the *Palladium*. This time it was a complete eulogy of New England -- its "schools, colleges, towns and parishes, its close population, its learned clergy,... its light and knowledge, its arts and commerce, and spirit of enterprize," etc., etc. Ames asserted not less than the following: "New England has a very distinct and well defined national character; the only part of the United States that has yet any pretensions to it."⁴⁴

The clergy was also on the alert. On December 22, 1801, Reverend John Allyn delivered an anniversary sermon at Plymouth, Massachusetts, "commemorative of the pious ancestors who first immigrated to that place, 1620." Closing an hour-long eulogy of the first New England colonists, the pastor allowed himself to expatiate on the present and future of the United States as a nation:

When we contemplate the present importance of the United States in connexion with a period short of 200 years, we have a comment on the prophetic expression, "A nation born at once." In the course of two centuries and our sons will be

⁴³ HG, 10 June 1801 (emphasis in text).

⁴⁴ "From the *Palladium*," HG, 29 July 1801.

planted on the banks of the Mississippi, and the wilderness beyond “shall blossom as a rose.” But, alas, a retrospect of past events begets the unpleasant anticipation of wars and fightings. We see in future prospect the Kings of the *South*, begotten of luxury, pride, licentiousness and impiety, invading the hardy inhabitants of the North. We see the armies of the East and West encountering each other at some narrow pass in the mountains, like the armies of Europe and Asia at the streights of Thermopylae. We see thrones and sceptres, bastiles and fetters, the punishment of heaven on guilty men, who no longer deserve liberty, or are capable of enjoying her.⁴⁵

The pastor’s apocalyptic view of what awaited the union of American states epitomized the general feelings of New England Federalists in 1801. Many of them viewed the defeat of their party and Republican victory as the downfall of New England and triumph of the South. Close identification of conflicting parties and interests with regions led to the regionalization of political opposition. Having lost on the national level, these Federalists turned to struggle on the regional one. This does not appear to have been a result of coordinated or centralized initiative, but rather a spontaneous phenomenon. The Federalist leadership had not yet elaborated any strategy; their party organization was very imperfect and simply could not react to events quickly, as sectional feeling spread to different corners of New England. The very fact that national power had passed into the hands of a party potentially hostile to New England interest and alien to New England cultural tradition was enough for the opposition to start speaking in sectionalist terms. Cultural antagonism between New England and the South is another important phenomenon, but its history transcends the chronological and conceptual frames of this work. Although a complete history of nationalism and sectionalism in the United States

⁴⁵ John Allyn, A Sermon, Delivered at Plimouth, December 22, 1801, Commemorative of the Pious Ancestors, Who First Imigrated [sic] to That Place, 1620, (Boston, 1802), 31.

cannot but discuss this subject, my task here is more narrow -- to present the attitude of early 19th-century New England politicians towards the Union and the relations between New England and the rest of the new republic. Nevertheless, my further research should and will deal more with cultural subject-matter.

The fact that Federalists started to speak in sectional terms did not mean that they had no national feelings. In April 1801, one anonymous correspondent to the same *Hampshire Gazette* observed: "Fellow-Citizens, we are all one Family, and whatever is advantageous to one part of the community, is likewise to the other,... let us forbear to cast ungenerous reflections, let us act worthy of the character of AMERICANS. ... Let us by steadiness, by firmness and good agreement, make known to the world, that we not only have bled to establish a republic, but are determined by true republican principles, to hold fast, each to the other, and contend for nothing but *UNITY*."⁴⁶ And on July 4, 1801, toasts raised at the tables in the Hampshire County in Massachusetts were still very much in the nationalist spirit. Among the multitude of toasts, only one was distinctly sectional. "A Selected Party of Young Men" assembled at Mrs. Lyman's Inn, drank to "The New England States," wishing that they may "never submit to Virginia Politics." Otherwise, the inhabitants of Northampton, Granby, Easthampton, Worthington, Chesterfield and other cities of the Hampshire County still drank to the "Union and harmony" of the American people, to American Independence, the Federal Constitution, and even to President Jefferson, albeit with a clearly visible reservation -- "May he emulate the Virtues of his Predecessors, and be as fortunate in saving his country from the miseries of

⁴⁶ "For the Hampshire Gazette," *HG*, 22 April 1801.

War.”⁴⁷ The *Gazette* squarely denied Republican accusations of a Federalist secessionist conspiracy.⁴⁸ It seems that, even though New England regional consciousness was awakened by Jefferson’s electoral victory, it had still a long way to go before it would present serious threat to the integrity of the Union. Besides, in the course of 1801 sectional propaganda in New England Federalist press slowly diminished in frequency, length, and rhetorical fervor. The reason, perhaps, was that the new national administration had not so far taken any measures ruinous to New England benefit, which “Ames & C.” had predicted. Jefferson’s famous “We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists” obviously had a calming effect on New England. In 1802, a few regionalist articles that did appear were clearly exceptional. Writers occasionally mentioned New England as “La Vendée of America”⁴⁹ or referred to Virginia’s hostility toward New England. By Christmas, however, passions had calmed, and the storm caused by Jefferson’s victory had abated.

Among the Federalist leadership, not many responded to the appeals and predictions of Fisher Ames. During the first three years of Jefferson’s administration, despite a few efforts to revitalize the opposition, like the transformation of the *New England Palladium* into a Federalist electioneering paper in 1800-1801 (a yearly subscription provided every clergyman in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont with this newspaper⁵⁰), Federalists remained dormant, preferring contemplation to action. In February 1803, desperate Ames exclaimed:

⁴⁷ “American Independence,” *HG*, 8 July 1801.

⁴⁸ “Albany, Nov. 6,” *HG*, 11 November 1801.

⁴⁹ “To the Editor,” *HG*, 5 May 1802.

⁵⁰ David H. Fischer, *Revolution*, 136; R. E. Lee, “Timothy Dwight and the Boston *Palladium*,” in *New England Quarterly* 35 (June 1962): 229-239.

I have, over and over again, made the offer to almost every considerable man in Connecticut and New Hampshire, as well as Massachusetts, to form a phalanx to write, etc. My offers have produced some ridicule, more disgust, no cooperation. Wear and disgusted myself, despairing, as well I may, of any good effect from my single efforts, I now claim the quiet repose that, like a fool, I have so long refused to enjoy, and that I have so fruitlessly offered to renounce. I have done... Let the federalists who are made for slaves, although their driver will be at great charge for whips, reap where they have sown; their harvest is ripening, and it will be all tares.⁵¹

1.2. The Evil Purchase, or the Surge of 1803-04

However, something else was ripening beside the tares. In May 1803, the federal government purchased Louisiana from France for eighty million francs or 15,000,000 dollars. New England Federalists were less than enthusiastic about the purchase. Benefits, they believed, would accrue exclusively on the Western and Southern states, whereas the burden of payment would lie chiefly on the Northeast. Besides, the availability of new and cheap lands would prompt westward migration, leaving vast areas in the Atlantic states uncultivated. And, finally and principally, new states would sooner or later emerge in the newly acquired territories, thereby diminishing the relative power of the older Eastern states in the national councils. The sectional feelings of New England Federalists were anti-Western as well as anti-Southern, as Westerners were allegedly wild, savage, and united with the South in everything hostile to the Northeast.⁵² In territorial terms, the West became the largest region of the United States. Its delegates would, in the course of

⁵¹ Ames, *Works*, 1: 319.

⁵² See, e. g., John Lowell, *Thoughts, in a Series of Letters, in Answer to a Question Respecting the Division of the States. By a Massachusetts Farmer*, (n.p., 1813); Elijah H. Mills, *An Oration Pronounced at Northampton, at the Request of the Washington Benevolent Society of the County of Hampshire on the Thirty Seventh Anniversary of American Independence: 1813*, (Northampton, 1813), 17, 23; *Southern Oppression. An Address to the People of the Eastern States*, (New York, 1813), 11-16; Kiah Bayley, *War a Calamity to Be Dreaded. The Substance of Two Discourses Delivered at Newcastle (Maine), July 23d, 1812*, (Hallowell, Me., 1812), 19.

time, join the Senate and the House, where, as most Federalists were convinced, they would oppose the interests of New England. In that case, as a contemporary observer hidden under the pseudonym "Calculator," caustically remarked, "the men of the East, while they would inevitably experience the diminution and almost total loss of their political weight and consequence, might still, perhaps, console themselves by recounting the valorous deeds of their fathers, in achieving our national independence."⁵³

Ratification of the treaty with France in November 1803 alerted Federalists all over New England to the full scope of danger. Besides, in December 1803, a great battle took place in Congress over the 12th Amendment which provided for each presidential elector to vote separately for President and vice-president. Federalists opposed the amendment because it would disadvantage a candidate from a small state (into which category all New England states fell). Nevertheless, the amendment passed on December 9, 1803. Moreover, exasperated by the February, 1803, John Marshall's decision in *Marbury v. Madison*, Jefferson launched an attack on Federalist judiciary. The impeachment of John Pickering, district judge of New Hampshire, and Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase, was initiated. Though both efforts did not take place until March 1804, Federalists grew apprehensive long before.

As a result of all this -- the annexation of Louisiana, adoption of the 12th Amendment, and impending attack on the judiciary -- an eruption of sectional

⁵³ "A Comparative View of the Disadvantages and Benefits, Which Would Probably Accrue to the United States, from an Enlargement of Their Territorial Limits by the Purchase of Either Louisiana or the Floridas," no. V, HG, 28 September 1803.

propaganda broke out among Federalists in late 1803-1804. It was at this time that the first known scheme of New England secession appeared.

The authorship belonged to Colonel Timothy Pickering (1745-1829), once the adjutant general (1777-78) and quartermaster general (1780-83) of the Continental army, then U. S. postmaster general (1791-95), secretary of war (1795) and finally secretary of state (1795-1800), from which post he was dismissed by President Adams. In 1803 Pickering was elected U. S. Senator from Massachusetts and retained this position through 1811. In 1813 he became member of the U. S. House of Representatives and held this last official seat of his until 1817. In late 1803, the newly elected Senator Pickering, then residing in Washington, D. C., noted his famous scheme of New England separation from the Union.

On December 24, 1803, Pickering sent a short letter to Richard Peters (1744-1828), a judge of the U. S. district court of Pennsylvania, whom he knew from the times of the Revolutionary War, when Peters had been secretary of the Continental Board of War (1776-81). The letter read:

My Dear Friend,

--Although the end of our Revolutionary labors and expectations is disappointment, and our fond hopes of republican happiness are vanity, and the real patriots of '76 are overwhelmed by the modern pretenders to that character, I will not despair: I will rather anticipate a new confederacy, exempt from the corrupt and corrupting influence and oppression of the aristocratic Democrats of the South. There will be -- and our children at farthest will see it -- a separation. The white and black population mark the boundary. The British Provinces, even with the assent of Britain, will become members of the Northern confederacy. A continued tyranny of the present ruling sect will precipitate that event. The patience of good citizens is now nearly exhausted. By open violations and pretended amendments they are shattering our political bark, which, with a few more similar repairs, must founder. Efforts, however, and laudable ones, are and

will continue to be made to keep the timbers together. The most distinguished you will find in the speech of Mr. Tracy, which I enclose...⁵⁴

This letter is well known to historians, since it is the first and the most succinct rendition of Pickering's secessionist scheme. One aspect immediately draws attention: Pickering did not crave for secession. He expressly called efforts to preserve the Union "laudable" and portrayed separation of New England as a forced measure, made necessary by the "aristocratic Democrats of the South" who, with their oppressive policies, distorted the original design of the confederacy. While entertaining secession, Pickering realized that it was an evil. The North was *forced* to secede because of the South. This was a formula that would be present afterwards in almost every Federalist discourse that mentioned disunion.

In early 1804, Pickering wrote similar letters to George Cabot, Theodore Lyman, and Rufus King, specifying his design of the Northern Confederacy.⁵⁵ As becomes clear from this correspondence, the occasion that prompted him to suggest separation, was the dismissal of Federalist judges. "When such grounds are taken ... to destroy the rights of the judges, whose rights can be safe?" -- he wrote in his letter to Cabot, which chronologically preceded the two others.⁵⁶ Later, in his letter to King, Pickering stated other reasons -- slave representation, the acquisition of Louisiana, and alteration of the

⁵⁴ Pickering to Richard Peters, 24 December 1803, in Henry Adams, ed., Documents Relating to New England Federalism, 1800-1815 [hereafter DRNEF] (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1877), 338.

⁵⁵ Pickering to George Cabot, 29 January 1804, DRNEF, 338-342; Pickering to Theodore Lyman, 11 February 1804, *ibid.*, 343-346; Pickering to Rufus King, 4 March 1804, *ibid.*, 351-353.

⁵⁶ Pickering to Cabot, 29 January 1804, *ibid.*, 340.

Constitution.⁵⁷ But all these were, so to say, features of a larger, all-embracing cause for separation, which, in Pickering's interpretation, was of a moral character:

I have more than once asked myself, For what are we struggling? Our lands yield their increase, our commerce flourishes, we are building houses, 'are marrying and given in marriage,' yet we are dissatisfied: not because we envy the men in office, -- to most of us a private life is most desirable. The Federalists are dissatisfied, because they see the public morals debased by the corrupt and corrupting system of our rulers. Men are tempted to become apostates, not to Federalism merely, but to virtue and to religion and to good government. Apostasy and original depravity are the qualifications for official horrors and emoluments, while men of sterling worth are displaced and held up to popular contempt and scorn. And shall we sit still, until this system shall universally triumph? until even in the Eastern States the principles of genuine Federalism shall be overwhelmed?⁵⁸

Pickering also speculated about the practical way to implement secession, albeit not quite clearly. The main say would apparently belong to state legislatures;⁵⁹ but "a bold but safe step by members of Congress" ought to give the states a signal.⁶⁰ According to Pickering's plan, Massachusetts would take the lead; Connecticut would "instantly join" her, as well as New Hampshire; Rhode Island would "follow, of necessity"; and after that, it would not be too difficult to bring in Vermont. Interestingly, Pickering suggested not Massachusetts but New York as the center of the would-be confederacy. "...It can hardly be supposed," --he wrote, -- "that she would refuse her consent. New Jersey would assuredly become an associate; and it is to be wished that Pennsylvania, at least east of the Susquehannah, might be induced to come into the confederation."⁶¹ He then reiterated his point about the British Provinces joining the confederacy. Britain, he thought, would

⁵⁷ Pickering to King, 4 March 1804, *ibid.*, 352.

⁵⁸ Pickering to Cabot, 29 January 1804, *ibid.*, 339.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁶¹ Pickering to Lyman, 11 February 1804, *ibid.*, 345.

not object, for in case they became independent, she would continue to derive from them all extant commercial advantages without the expense of governing and defending them. In the letter to Theodore Lyman, Pickering also considered a more narrow version of the confederacy confined to New England states: "If even the New England States alone are agreed in the first instance, would there be any difficulty in making frank and open proposition for a separation?"⁶² After disunion, relations with the South and West would remain good and friendly. Pickering wished "no ill to the Southern States and those naturally connected with them" [the West?] -- he suggested to apportion public debts equitably "between the new confederacies" and favored the continuance of "friendly and commercial intercourse" between the North and the South.⁶³

Pickering was not alone. According to Henry Adams, four of the six Federalist senators from the Eastern States -- William Plumer (1759-1850) of New Hampshire, Uriah Tracy (1755-1807) and James Hillhouse (1754-1832) of Connecticut, and Pickering himself -- took part in the plot. Among Federalist members of the House, Adams names Roger Griswold (1768-1812) and Calvin Goddard (1768-1842) of Connecticut and Samuel Hunt of New Hampshire.⁶⁴ Indeed, there are some hints at that in Pickering's letters -- for example, speaking about New England resistance to the Republican administration, he mentions that "the most intelligent of the Federalists here [in Washington] have been reflecting on this subject with the deepest concern."⁶⁵ Henry Adams also discovered a letter from Tapping Reeve (1744-1823), a Connecticut lawyer

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Henry Adams, History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 2 vols. (New York: The Library of America, ©1986) 1: 409.

⁶⁵ Pickering to Lyman, 11 February 1804, DRNEF, 345.

married to the sister of Aaron Burr, to Uriah Tracy, in which Reeve spoke favorably about separation and suggested the same scheme as Pickering's: first, a group of New England Federalists in Congress would "come out with a bold address to... [their] constituents;" then, state legislatures would follow "by such declarations as may have the strongest tendency to secure the object aimed at."⁶⁶ Roger Griswold, too, asserted that there could be "no safety to the Northern States without a separation from the confederacy."⁶⁷

It is not surprising that the secessionist scheme was born at Washington. Congress was the only place where the spokesmen of New England state Federalist elites coexisted for long periods of time and were able to discuss politics every day in live conversations rather than in correspondence; it was also the front line of political warfare, where New Englanders and Virginians saw and heard each other every day and collided directly in heated rhetorical battles. Nowhere was the atmosphere of party hostility so readily complemented by the sense of defending the interests of one's state or region.

The down side of it was that living for several months at Washington left one guessing about the state of public opinion at home. Most Federalists in New England and New York to whom Pickering wrote, rejected his plan of separation or gave him evasive answers. Among them were George Cabot, Theodore Lyman, Rufus King, Stephen Higginson, Theophilus Parsons, and Fisher Ames.⁶⁸ "Some of our mutual friends," --

⁶⁶ Tapping Reeve to Uriah Tracy, 7 February 1804, *ibid.*, 343.

⁶⁷ Roger Griswold to Oliver Wolcott, 11 March 1804, *ibid.*, 356 (emphasis in the text).

⁶⁸ George Cabot to Pickering, 14 February 1804, *ibid.*, 346-349; Theodore Lyman to Pickering, 29 February 1804, *ibid.*, 350; Rufus King to Pickering, 9 March 1804, *ibid.*, 353; Pickering to Theodore Lyman, 14 March 1804, *ibid.*, 358; Stephen Higginson to Pickering, 17 March 1804, *ibid.*, 361; Fisher Ames to Pickering, 28 April 1804, *ibid.*, 365.

wrote Ames, -- “say all is lost, -- nothing can be done. Nothing is to be done rashly; but mature counsels and united efforts are necessary in the most forlorn case.”⁶⁹ The rest of them reacted similarly.

Remarkable, however, was that none of them repudiated secession *in principle*. None referred to the treachery and baseness of such a scheme from the standpoint of noble patriotic sentiment. On the contrary, many spoke openly in favor of separation, but only questioned its timing. For example, Stephen Higginson (1743-1828) wrote to Pickering:

I have seen your letters to Mr. Cabot and Mr. Lyman on the question of separation, which is a very delicate and important one, considered in the abstract. We all agree there is no doubt of its being desirable; but of the expediency of attempting it, or discussing it now at this moment, we all very much doubt. ... It would indeed be very unpopular to suggest the idea of its being either expedient or necessary. ... As, in the present state of things, it would be imprudent even to discuss the question, we must wait the effects of still greater outrage and insult from those in power before we prepare for the only measure which can save the New England States from the snares of Virginia.⁷⁰

George Cabot, who was at times considered “the wisest head in his party,”⁷¹ expressed similar ideas:

I am convinced we cannot do what is wished; but we can do much, if we work with nature (or the course of things), and not against her. A separation is now impracticable, because we do not feel the necessity or utility of it. The same separation then will be unavoidable, when our loyalty to the Union is generally perceived to be the instrument of debasement and impoverishment. ... I have said that a separation now is not desirable, because we should not remedy the evil, but

⁶⁹ Fisher Ames to Timothy Pickering, 28 April 1804, *ibid.*, 365.

⁷⁰ Stephen Higginson to Pickering, 17 March 1804, *ibid.*, 361.

⁷¹ Henry Adams, *History* 1: 413.

should bring it home and aggravate it by cherishing and giving new sanctions to the causes which produce it. But, if a separation should by and by be produced by suffering, I think it might be accompanied by important amelioration of our theories.⁷²

In other words, no one appeared to really condemn Pickering for his secessionist propositions. Federalist leaders saw nothing criminal or even reproachable in disunion, and spoke in a matter-of-fact way about its being inexpedient at that particular moment, for the want of popular support. The majority of New-Englanders had yet to feel the full effect of Republican policies, and for that one had to wait until the Jeffersonians would commit some gross blunder. A bunch of Federalist congressmen concerned about the danger for New England was not enough.

Besides, even in Congress, only a few Northern senators and representatives were in favor of separation and willing to undertake “a bold but safe step.” To speak authoritatively on behalf of their region, Northerners had to be united. Meanwhile, if we believe Henry Adams, Federalist senators John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts and Mills Olcott of New Hampshire did not support the idea of separation.⁷³ Besides, there were some Northern Republicans, who, interestingly enough, became sectionally minded as well. But they also lacked unity and resolution. Roger Griswold wrote angrily in

March 1804:

...Many of the Democratic members of Congress from the Northern States have become sensible of the overbearing influence of Virginia. A few of them appear disposed to attempt some union which shall create a Northern interest, and array it in opposition to Virginia; but this disposition is by no means universal. The difficulty arises from the want of character and talents in those who have been

⁷² Cabot to Pickering, 14 February 1804, DRNEF, 349.

⁷³ Henry Adams, History 1: 409.

sent to Congress. ...Many of the others grumble about Virginia, but go every length in their votes. ...The formation therefore, of a Northern interest must commence at home.⁷⁴

As “the head of the Northern interest,” Griswold suggested to consider vice-president Aaron Burr (1756-1836). Most Federalists distrusted Burr and disliked him personally. They considered him to be dangerously adventurous, ambitious and unprincipled. Besides, he was a Democrat. On the other hand, there must have been something in that man, that enabled him to challenge Thomas Jefferson in the presidential election of 1800 much more successfully than President John Adams did. Burr above all was a man of action, which was his tremendous advantage over numerous Federalist theoreticians good at rhetoric and prognostication but hardly capable of fighting a serious political battle against Republicans.

The congressional Republican caucus that met on February 24, 1804, announced George Clinton to be Jefferson’s prospective running mate in the presidential elections. Having thus abandoned any hope of retaining the vice-presidency, Burr weighed into the New York state gubernatorial campaign. To have a Jefferson’s opponent of such scope at such a post would have been a great trump for the Federalists. Besides, Timothy Pickering suggested making New York the center of the Northern Confederacy in late January 1804, that is, approximately when Burr learned with certainty that he had few chances for vice-presidency. We do not know if there was any connection between the two facts -- if Pickering made his proposal about New York as the center while bearing

⁷⁴ Roger Griswold to Oliver Wolcott, 11 March 1804, DRNEF, 354.

Burr in mind or not. In any case, Burr's victory in New York would have nicely dovetailed into Pickering's scheme.

The problem, again, was to ascertain, "whether the advantage gained in this manner will not be more than counterbalanced by fixing on the Northern States a man in whom the most eminent of our friends will not repose confidence."⁷⁵ Having conferred with Rufus King, Roger Griswold himself visited Burr on April 4, 1804, shortly before the New York election, to get an idea about the vice-president's political stance. To his apparent relief, Griswold learned that Burr would "administer the Government in a manner satisfactory to the Federalists." More than that -- Burr said that "the northern States must be governed by Virginia, or govern Virginia -- and that there was no middle mode."⁷⁶ Though Burr may have been the right man to lead a secessionist drive, as his subsequent career proved, his defeat in the New York gubernatorial election and deadly duel with Alexander Hamilton on July 11, 1804, once and for all brought an end to his cooperation with Federalists.

The secessionist scheme of 1804 evidently became familiar to Hamilton as well. It was the subject of his very last political thought the day before his death.

"Dismemberment of our Empire," -- he wrote to Theodore Sedgwick (1746-1813) of Massachusetts, -- "will be a clear sacrifice of great positive advantages, without any counterbalancing good; administering no relief to our real Disease; which is

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Rufus King, "Memorandum of a Conversation between Burr and Roger Griswold, April 5, 1804," In Mary-Jo Kline, ed., Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr, 2 vols. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, ©1983), 2: 862-63.

DEMOCRACY, the poison of which by a subdivision will only be the more concentrated in each part, and consequently the more virulent.”⁷⁷

One of New England regions where sectionalism especially prospered was the Connecticut River Valley. Though David H. Fischer does not observe secessionist feelings in the Valley until the embargo years,⁷⁸ such sentiment flourished already in 1803-1804. Anti-Southern and anti-Western articles followed one another in almost every issue of the *Hampshire Gazette*. This time, unlike in 1801, the Connecticut Valley was gaining a real sense of its importance in New England and national politics. A certain “Detector” observed, specially for the *Gazette*: “The County of Hampshire may be considered an important section of Massachusetts, which is the most important state in New England, and New England is the only remaining *barrier* to withstand the desolation of democracy and the madness of innovation.”⁷⁹ In his next piece, protesting against the Republican dismissal of Federalist officers from national posts, Detector squarely declared that this policy might lead to the dissolution of the Union:

Let the prevailing “sect” pause and consider seriously -- whether the persecutions against the multitude of meritorious officers in the U. States, connected with their general principles and measures; will not eventually lead to the same unhappy consequences -- the *dissolution* of the Republic!... The progress to our *dissolution* may be *slow*, but it is not the less *sure*. A poison may be administered that will be hardly perceptible in its operation; but the effect is inevitable death.⁸⁰

In the same issue of the *Gazette*, “Nestor” -- again a local author -- submitted his transparent “Observations” to “the candid consideration of the Citizens of New England”:

⁷⁷ Alexander Hamilton to Theodore Sedgwick, 10 July 1804, in Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 26: 309.

⁷⁸ David H. Fischer, *Revolution*, 176.

⁷⁹ “Detector # V,” *HG*, 7 March 1804.

⁸⁰ “Detector # VI,” *HG* 21 March 1804.

It rests with the well informed, well principled farmers, mechanics and merchants of New England to confound the baneful purpose and secure safety & freedom of their respective States. Watchful activity, my countrymen, will break the serpent's head. Careless indifference and slothful apathy will forge for us chains which it will not be in our power to break. Whether we are to be free, or by the demolition of our constitutional barriers, under the mock pretence of more liberty, to become the slaves of the lordly planters and negro drivers of the South is the question. This question is in your power to answer which way you please. At present we are our own masters.⁸¹

The “lordly planters and negro drivers of the South” or “full-blooded Virginia whiskey boys” typified the epithets that New England Federalists poured on their Republican opponents in 1804. Party rhetoric was sharper and more dangerous, verging on invective, compared to the earlier boom of sectionalism in 1801. In addition, sectional propaganda in 1803-04 did not derive exclusively from such centers of political life as Boston or Hartford, but came from more diffuse sources.

On June 27, 1804, the *Hampshire Gazette* informed its readers of a “Highly Important Notion” made by “Mr. Ely, of Springfield” in the Legislature of Massachusetts. In essence, William Ely suggested Massachusetts Senators in the national Congress to try to obtain a repeal of the “3/5 Clause” by the means of a constitutional amendment, “so that the Representatives be appointed among the several States according to the number of their Free Inhabitants respectively.”⁸² The Massachusetts legislature did recommend such an amendment to other states in 1804, although unsuccessfully. What is important, though, is the logic with which Ely, himself from Connecticut Valley, supported his motion. “A Union of the States,” -- he said, -- “...cannot, harmoniously, exist for a long

⁸¹ “Observations submitted to the candid consideration of the Citizens of New England,” *HG*, 21 March 1804.

⁸² “Highly Important Motion,” *HG* 27 June 1804.

period, unless it be founded on principles, which shall secure to all free citizens, equal political rights and privileges in the government...”⁸³ Again, a threat of disunion was introduced to give additional strength to a political maneuver.

The question of disunion was addressed in detail in an article from the *Balance*, reprinted in the *Gazette* on July 4, 1804. Remarkable was the author’s logic. “A Federalist” started with denying any relationship between the Federalists and the idea of dismembering the union of American states. Just the opposite, he said; it was Republicans who contemplated such a base and treacherous act, in case they met with staunch opposition to their despotism. Then, the author asserted, the Republican idea was to implement disunion and to blame it upon the Federalists, for which purpose they started the whole campaign of accusations beforehand, to prepare the public opinion for such a course of events. Here an interesting evolution happened to the author’s rationale. He enumerated instances of Virginia’s despotism over the last few years, adding such imaginary ones as a pending constitutional amendment that would forever secure Presidency for a Virginian. Then he inquired angrily:

What, I ask, is to be the consequence of these things? Will the northern states view them with indifference? Will they submit cheerfully and without murmuring to these unequal measures?

To which he answered readily:

...In all probability, the northern states will not cheerfully submit. They will complain -- they will remonstrate. -- Judging from the spirit now manifested by the anti-federalists, we may suppose that these complaints will be treated with coolness and neglect, if not with insolence. Hence the resentment of New England will be enkindled. Animosities and contentions may follow. Open hostility and a dissolution of the union, we fear, may be the dreadful consequence!⁸⁴

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ HG, 4 July 1804.

In late 1803, Timothy Pickering argued similarly to justify the separation of New England in letters to his Federalist colleagues. The task for the one who envisioned disunion was simply to blame the opposing political party for creating a situation in which further coexistence of Northern and Southern states in the Union was impossible. Since the fault now lay exclusively on the Republicans, Federalists ensured themselves a *carte-blanche* with which, theoretically speaking, they would be able to go very far.

In practice, of course, they did not. The Louisiana Purchase, persecution of judges and even amendments of the Constitution were simply not enough to create secessionist movement in New England; most Federalists realized that. As for radicals and extremists like Pickering, the Burr-Hamilton duel seems to have produced a cooling effect even on them. On July 25, 1804, the same *Hampshire Gazette* came out in mourning frames, notifying its readers of Hamilton's death. The tone of obituaries did not leave room for doubt about the authors' nationalist allegiances. After Hamilton's death, whatever sectional and secessionist fervor existed among New England Federalists, gradually subsided. Through early 1805 they continued to cast aspersions at Virginian tyrants and Western backwoodsmen, but these occasions became infrequent and finally almost totally disappeared.

The second outburst of regionalism was much stronger than the first one. Whereas in 1801 sectional rhetoric was relatively mild, in 1803-04 it became harsh and militant. For the first time an actual scheme of Northern secession emerged among key Federalist leaders. The party press printed a surprisingly large number of articles that pushed a hard

sectionalist line, sometimes verging on secessionism. Such articles now appeared not only in major political centers, but also in the borderlands. Local authors, such as “Nestor” and “Detector,” actively participated in political discussions. The overall intensity and vividness of sectional propaganda was much more forceful in 1804 than in 1801. However, the second surge subsided exactly as the first one. In 1804-05, a pattern similar to that of late 1801 -- early 1802 repeated -- a flow of sectional feeling was followed by its total ebb.

1.3. The Third Surge: Embargo

The third wave came in 1808. During 1805, 1806, and 1807, practically no traces of once militant sectional resentment were noticeable in New England. Federalism was breaking in the region. The party was in crisis and under heavy Republican pressure. In April, 1807, after eight years of consecutive Federalist victories, Caleb Strong lost Massachusetts gubernatorial elections to William Sullivan; for the first time the governor's chair in Massachusetts was occupied by a Republican. The once aggressively regionalist newspapers like the *Hampshire Gazette* seemed to have despaired of their party's ability to gain the upper hand over Republicans. Federalist periodicals devoted most of their attention to the war in Europe, keeping grave silence about the situation at home. Some of the more pessimistic already started to lose all hope, when news from Washington breathed new life into the party. In January 1808, newspapers notified their readers about the December 22, 1807, congressional decision to impose an embargo on

the foreign sea trade of the United States of America in retaliation against the commercial depredations of England and France.

The result was predictable. To cut out the principal asset of New England economy unavoidably meant giving a badly needed trump to the Federalist opposition. The party rose from its slumbers. On January 6, 1808, the *Hampshire Gazette* proclaimed:

All the letters from Washington announce a war with Great Britain as nearly inevitable. The Embargo was carried by the influence of a spirit hostile to Great Britain, and of course not very independent of France. If the people of New England quietly submit to the system of attaching our fate to that of France, our independence is at an end.⁸⁵

This time, unlike before, a real blow was inflicted upon the vital interests of New England, even though its inner regions, like the Connecticut Valley, were perhaps less affected by the embargo than the great commercial centers of the New England seacoast. Nevertheless, the hinterland awakened as well. On March 23, 1808, the *Hampshire Gazette* published a memorial of the inhabitants of Northampton, Massachusetts, to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States. The document prepared by the town selectmen drew a frightening picture of total chaos and distress that the embargo caused in New England:

...Commercial enterprize... are palsied --... a numerous class of individuals, heretofore employed in navigation, are deprived of the only means by which they obtained bread for themselves and their families,... many of them are thrown back upon the interior, in a state of wretchedness which no description can equal... Bankruptcies are continually occurring in our great towns, which spread their effects and produce bankruptcies in the country, which again branch out and extend their disastrous consequences to the door of almost every citizen. The farmer is unable to find a market for his surplus produce... His hopes of an

⁸⁵ HG, 6 January 1808.

honorable and needful reward for the toils of the last reason are defeated, his spirits depressed, and his laborious industry checked by the gloomy prospects of the future. From these discouraging and ruinous effects of the laws above mentioned, your memorialists pray that relief may be granted.⁸⁶

The standard Federalist charges against the Jeffersonian administration during the Embargo were partiality to France and a conspiratorial design to ruin Northern commerce. William Ely, who four years before had suggested a constitutional amendment repealing the 3/5 clause, wrote in the *Gazette*:

...A more satisfactory explanation of this business [the embargo]... is, that it is an experiment, which I apprehend has been long contemplated, and which is now to be made, to prostrate the navigating interests of the United States; to adopt what the Virginians call the *Terrapin policy*;... to change the whole country, and especially the Commercialists at the Northward, into Agriculturalists and Manufacturers, and like the Chinese, to suffer foreign Nations to come and take off our surplus produce.⁸⁷

On April 22, 1808, another town meeting of Northampton reiterated Ely's opinion. It was stated that the embargo bore "the semblance of a permanent arrangement, which will annihilate the prosperity of New England, and subject the inhabitants to multiform and dreadful calamities."⁸⁸ The meeting, chaired by Asahel Pomeroy, resolved to send a full representation to the next General Court of Massachusetts, "composed of men, who with a single eye to their country's good, shall labour to redress our grievances, and restore to our national councils the ancient and proper influence of New England."⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *HG*, 23 March 1808.

⁸⁷ *HG Extra*, 23 March 1808.

⁸⁸ *HG*, 27 April 1808.

⁸⁹ *HG*, 27 April 1808.

The same happened in other parts of the region. This time the situation was becoming truly critical. Federalist theoreticians once harmlessly speculating about disunion now received powerful reinforcement from popular opinion that already placed itself in opposition to the national government and was beginning to imbibe the threatening idea of New England unity. The necessary conditions of separation, about which Federalist leaders wrote to Pickering in 1804, had materialized.

The all-too familiar subject of disunion revived in the fall. On September 28, 1808, the *Hampshire Gazette* reprinted from the *Columbian Centinel* an article entitled, "A Separation of the States; and Its Consequences to New England." Justice requires me to say that the article squarely rejected the idea of separation as "disastrous." However, in striking resemblance to the piece written by "A Federalist" in 1804 (see above), this one, signed "Falkland," blamed all the national and New England calamities on Virginia. Besides, again, like Pickering or "A Federalist" four years before, "Falkland" did not exclude the possibility of disunion, saying -- exactly like his predecessors had said -- that if disunion occurred, it would be caused and implemented by the South unwilling to coexist with New England in one nation:

...From the great revolution in political sentiment which has already taken place in New England, we confidently believe the old order of things under which we grew and flourished will be restored. ... In that event we shall again be threatened with a dissolution of the union. Much as this is to be deprecated, it cannot be expected that Virginia, proud and aspiring as she has always been, and accustomed for eight years to govern, will be contented to be governed by the constitution. If then Virginia, with the states south of the Potomac withdraw from the confederacy, New England will be compelled to maintain herself as an independent State.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "A Separation of the States; and Its Consequences to New England," HG, 28 September 1808.

New Englanders were swiftly running out of patience. On Thursday, January 12, 1809, “a very numerous and respectable meeting of the inhabitants of the different towns in the County of Hampshire” declared openly that the prolongation of the embargo tended “to produce a most calamitous event -- a *Dissolution of the Union*.”⁹¹ To the dismay and fury of thousands of people in the Northeast, they learned that on January 9, Thomas Jefferson approved another statute enforcing the embargo. The *Hampshire Gazette* published it in mourning frames, in an obituary-like form, mockingly announcing the funeral of American liberty.⁹² A tempest of fury rolled through New England. On January 23, 1809, a Boston town meeting proclaimed this government act unconstitutional and refused to comply.⁹³ Republican governor Levi Lincoln warned the General Court against secessionist projects. The Federalist-controlled General Court angrily denied any such designs, and Senate and the House pledged their allegiance to the integrity of the Union. However, this union being “a confederation of equal and independent states with limited powers,” the delegates declared that it was legally possible and necessary at all times for states to dispute the constitutionality of a federal government act, no matter how critical the situation was:

We cannot agree with your Honor that in a free country there is any stage at which the constitutionality of an act may no longer be open to discussion and debate; at least it is only upon the high road to despotism that such stages can be found.⁹⁴

⁹¹ “Hampshire County Meeting,” *HG*, 18 January 1809 (italics in the text).

⁹² “Died, at Washington...,” *HG*, 25 January 1809.

⁹³ *Boston Town Records, 1796 to 1813*, (Boston, 1905), 245.

⁹⁴ “Extracts from the Answer of the House,” in H. V. Ames, ed., *State Documents on Federal Relations. The States and the United States* (1906, reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 30.

The House remarked that the embargo had “borne most heavily and unequally on the northern and commercial States.” The enforcement act was said to violate “the first principles of civil liberty, and the fundamental provisions of the Constitution.”⁹⁵ In January -- February 1809, special town meetings convened all over Massachusetts, from Boston to the Berkshires. All of them proclaimed the new embargo measures unconstitutional and squarely refused to comply.⁹⁶ Petitions from towns poured in torrents into the General Court, where they were considered by a joint committee of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The committee made its report with resolutions on the enforcement act on February 1, 1809, whereupon the Senate adopted this document on February 11 by a vote of 19 to 18. The House concurred on February 15, by a vote of 205 to 139. The first resolution proclaimed the act of the federal government “in many respects, unjust, oppressive, and unconstitutional, and not legally binding on the citizens of this state.” The General Court expressed a willingness to “zealously co-operate with any other states... for procuring... amendments to the constitution of the United States... to obtain protection and defence for commerce, and to give to commercial states their fair and just consideration in the government of the Union.” In conclusion, the committee gravely wished “to rescue our common country from impending ruin, and to preserve inviolate the union of the states,” -- implying that the union might very well disintegrate in the nearest future.⁹⁷ In Federalist-controlled Connecticut, Governor

⁹⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁹⁶ HG, 25 January, 1, 8, 15, 22 February 1809.

⁹⁷ State Documents on Federal Relations, 34-36.

Jonathan Trumbull (1740-1809) convened the General Assembly to a special session in February 1809. Addressing the delegates, Trumbull firmly advocated the doctrine of state interposition:

Whenever our national legislature is led to overleap the prescribed bounds of their constitutional powers, on the State legislatures, in great emergencies, devolves the arduous task -- it is their right -- it becomes their duty, to interpose their protecting shield between the right and liberty of the people, and the assumed power of the General Government.⁹⁸

The Assembly confirmed the unconstitutionality of the embargo enforcement act and agreed with their Massachusetts colleagues “that it is expedient to effect certain alterations in the constitution of the United States.”⁹⁹

Meanwhile, the political climate was swiftly deteriorating. On February 22, 1809, another Hampshire County meeting was held in Northampton, Massachusetts, “for the purpose of taking into consideration the alarming and ruinous situation of our national affairs.” The participants grimly observed that they would “use all lawful exertions for maintaining the integrity of the Union, and the Constitution of the United States” -- a statement with a considerable flavor of pessimism about the probability of maintaining those benefits.¹⁰⁰ One could judge how serious the situation was by the fact that reporting about the meeting, the *Hampshire Gazette* published an article entitled, “Spirit of ‘76” in the same issue.¹⁰¹ Bearing in mind that similar meetings were held almost everywhere in

⁹⁸ “Speech of Governor Jonathan Trumbull at the Opening of the Special Session of the Legislature, February 23, 1809,” *ibid.*, 40.

⁹⁹ “Resolutions of the General Assembly,” *ibid.*, 40-42.

¹⁰⁰ “Hampshire County Meeting,” *HG*, 1 March 1809.

¹⁰¹ *HG*, 1 March 1809.

New England, it was clear that the conflict between the region and the national government had significantly intensified.

It is not altogether clear why, but the Federalists who had in 1804 spoken about the desirability of secession, remained surprisingly passive during the entire embargo crisis. Seemingly, what they desired so much -- a popular resentment against the federal government -- at last emerged in New England. And still, despite a huge wave of mass anti-government protest, no discussion about separation was generated in the top Federalist circles in 1808-09, no matter how close they came to it. Some of the more militant party leaders noticed and deplored this lack of energy. Christopher Gore (1758-1827) wrote to Timothy Pickering in December 1808:

Notwithstanding the remarks from some of your chaste orators and supple courtiers, the mass of the people of this State [Massachusetts] are much more daring in their means and measures of opposition to the imbecile and profligate men who have disgraced our councils, and degraded our nation, the last eight years, than the persons whom they please to style their leaders.¹⁰²

One cannot say, though, that their activities were entirely fruitless. It was during the embargo period that the idea of a large-scale Federalist convention emerged. The authorship probably belonged to Harrison Gray Otis (1765-1848), a bright and urbane young Boston Federalist whose energy, eloquence and guile early propelled him to the top of politics -- he became member of the U. S. House of Representatives in 1797, at the age of thirty-two. In 1808, amidst the havoc produced by the embargo, Otis suggested a national Federalist convention for the purpose of nominating a candidate for the upcoming presidential elections. While discussing this measure, some members of the

¹⁰² Christopher Gore to Pickering, 20 December 1808, *DRNEF*, 375.

party did so in clearly sectional terms. Egbert Benson (1746-1833), a prominent New York lawyer and Federalist of the Old School, wrote to Otis on July 13, 1808:

As to the time of the Meeting I suppose about the 20th of Sept. will be as convenient as any, and I think it will be a great Print to have Philadelphians come to Boston as the Head Quarters of the northern Combination - This Combination We shall sooner or later have to avow, not only as requisite to promote and preserve our Commerce, but the Representation enjoyed by the Slave States, beyond their fit Proportion, has rendered it indispensable to maintain a due Northern Preponderance in the Administrations of the Government - The Distinction between the northern, or commercial, and the southern, States, exists in Nature, has from the Beginning influenced the measures of the Government, unfortunately too favorable for the latter, and there is no Alternative left but openly to meet and resist the Influence, in short I promise myself much Good from the proposed Meeting, and trust I shall never grudge the time I have given to effect it.¹⁰³

The nominating convention did take place in 1808, and the relative success of this measure must have persuaded Otis to employ it in future for other Federalist purposes, the foremost of which was relief from the embargo. On December 15, 1808, he wrote Josiah Quincy (1772-1864), a Bostonian and member of the U. S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts, to ask if it was possible "to propose... the appointment of delegates, to meet those from the other commercial States in convention at Hartford or elsewhere, for the purpose of providing some mode of relief that may not be *inconsistent with the union of these States*, to which we should adhere as long as possible."¹⁰⁴ These words exactly -- to the point that even the same place was suggested -- predicted the arrangement of the future Hartford Convention of 1814-1815, which was to a considerable extent initiated by Otis.

¹⁰³ Egbert Benson to Harrison Gray Otis, 13 July 1808, in Harrison Gray Otis. Papers, 1691-1870, Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1979, microfilm, roll 6 (1806-1810).

¹⁰⁴ Otis to Josiah Quincy, 15 December 1808, DRNEF, 374-375 (emphasis in the text)

In general, though, despite the extremely favorable conditions, Federalist leaders remained amazingly sluggish and slow to coordinate any sectional resistance -- let alone secessionist initiative -- throughout the embargo months. Even such radicals as Timothy Pickering did not put forward any such program. All Pickering did was enter into a remarkably friendly and amiable correspondence with G. H. Rose, British minister at Washington. The two kept up correspondence for several months, and Pickering notably frequently spoke in favor of the Anglo-American rapprochement. New England disunion was not mentioned, though.¹⁰⁵

In general, Britain paid considerable attention to affairs in New England states during the embargo. In 1808-09, there were at least two considerable British agents operating in New England, one of them the notorious John Henry whose reports State Secretary James Monroe later bought, and President Madison presented to Congress in 1812 as a proof of a separatist conspiracy among New England Federalists. Madison was unable to prove anything, though, for Henry did not mention a single name in his letters. However, the agent did not deny the possibility of New England secession in future, stating that the majority of the population regarded government commercial policy in highly negative terms.¹⁰⁶ The other, less famous but possibly more useful agent was John Howe (1754-1835), a Boston loyalist printer who fled to Halifax at the time of the general evacuation on March 17, 1776, then took part in the war on the British side and later became postmaster-general of the Maritime Provinces in Canada. During the embargo,

¹⁰⁵ Pickering to G. H. Rose, 13, 22 March 1808; G. H. Rose to Pickering, 18, 23 March, 5 May, 7 August 1808, *DRNEF*, 367-68, 370-73.

¹⁰⁶ See: *Annals of the Congress of the United States, 1789-1824*, 12th Cong., 1st sess, November 4, 1811 -- July 6, 1812, Washington, D. C., 1853, 1162-1178.

Howe made two trips to the United States, in April -- September, 1808, and in November 1808 --January 1809.¹⁰⁷ Before his second trip, Howe received explicit instructions from Sir George Prevost, lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia and future invader of the Champlain Valley in 1814. Item 17 of the instructions read:

No. 17. Ascertain in which proportion each State has suffered in consequence of the General Embargo, and how each state is disposed as to the propriety of continuing that Measure, also whether there is any probability if the Embargo should be persevered in by the General Congress of the Country, that it would be openly resisted by any and which of the States, enquire whether it is apprehended that a resistance to the Embargo would probably lead to a separation of the United States, whether a separation is wished by any political [party], or by any State in particular, whether a separation is considered as an event very injurious to the Country at large.¹⁰⁸

Howe's answer (most probably written in January 1809) mentioned "Mr. Quincy, Mr. Pickering, Mr. Hillhouse, Mr. White and Mr. Lloyd¹⁰⁹," as the foremost spokesmen for the suffering states. As on the embargo, he wrote:

The pressure of this ill judged measure has been felt severely in every part of the Union; however the Eastern States which have been so largely concerned in Shipping, and had by their enterprize obtained the largest proportion of the carrying trade, are the severest sufferers: And if our Government should not be disposed to let them out of their own Trap, and the Government of America should continue the present system, not a doubt can be entertained, but that a separation of the Eastern States will ensue.¹¹⁰

It was fortunate perhaps for the integrity of the Union, that the national administration at last realized the danger. On March 1, 1809, shortly before leaving the presidency,

¹⁰⁷ "Secret Reports of John Howe, 1808," American Historical Review (hereafter AHR) 17 (October 1911): 70-102; 17 (January 1912): 332-354.

¹⁰⁸ "Queries and Instructions for Howe," AHR 17 (January 1912), 336.

¹⁰⁹ Probably James Lloyd (1745-1820), a Maryland Federalist, lawyer and a "gentleman farmer."

¹¹⁰ Howe to Prevost or Cooke, "Secret Reports...," AHR 17 (January 1912), 349.

Thomas Jefferson signed the act repealing the embargo and replacing it with a much milder Non-Intercourse Act. The nightmare for New England ended.

During the embargo crisis, the Federalists in New England displayed considerable cohesion at the lower level of party activities. Numerous town and county meetings, as well as multiple publications railed against the policies of the federal government, and for the first time showed the party as a relatively well-organized and effective political force conscious of its own power. Sectional, and at times secessionist rhetoric frequently appeared in local newspapers and pamphlets. The reason for this efficiency of the lower party level was probably not so much the result of Federalist party reorganization as popular resentment against governmental commercial restrictions.

One should not overestimate the threat of secession, of course. Newspaper and pamphlet rhetoric, as well as the language of town meetings, point to the fact that Federalists still preferred political solutions to the problem of Southern power. Nevertheless, the embargo marked a new step in the development of New England regionalism. Having severely hit the New England economy, it provoked an active grass-roots sectional movement, which for the first time presented a certain potential danger to the Union. This popular movement was not matched by a corresponding activity of the Federalist leaders. For the reasons which are yet to be clarified, leading New England Federalists of 1808-1809 did not produce any secessionist scheme -- not even a discussion about the possibility of disunion -- similar to that of 1803-1804. Indeed, the picture reversed itself -- in 1804 there were secessionist leaders without popular support. In 1808-09 such a support was there, but not Federalists willing to use it. It is hard to say

how events would have developed had the embargo not been repealed. One fact is obvious: the outburst of resistance to the embargo demonstrated to the Federalists how strong the New England sectional cause could be, and how their party could capitalize on it.

1.4. The Fourth Surge: War of 1812

One cannot call the time between the repeal of the embargo and the beginning of the war against Great Britain (March 1809 -- June 1812), quiet years in national politics. Trade restrictions were still operative for the most part of this period, and Federalist-Republican struggle in Massachusetts was in full force. Still, little sectional rhetoric appeared in those years in the Federalist press. The fourth wave of sectionalism did not come until the eve of the war.

On April 4, 1812, Congress laid another embargo on the sea trade of the United States -- this time for a limited period of ninety days. Federalists in the North invariably interpreted this measure as preparation for war. Party organization and coordination had improved immensely during the last twelve years, especially during the embargo, and everyone seems to have known what to do. In May 1812, newspapers reprinted an "Address to the People of the Eastern States" from the *New York Herald*. The author, under the pseudonym "Cassandra," foretold war against Great Britain and predicted grave consequences for America. The war, he said, would be conducted in actual alliance with France and would end in the enslavement of the United States by that power. The only

way out was, predictably, Northern opposition to the Virginian tyranny that was pushing the country into an aggressive and ruinous war:

People of the Northern States!... You hold the destinies of our country. But a moment more is allowed you to lift your voice against these destructive measures. But a moment more and the reign of terror is begun.. -- Will you be governed by the ruinous policy of Virginia? Shall the suffrages of a nation of slaves strip you naked, cover you with infamy, nay, plunge you deep in everlasting perdition?¹¹¹

On the very eve of the war, the *Hampshire Gazette* published a series of letters “To the Citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts” by Timothy Pickering. Nine years after his first plan of disunion, he came back to the idea:

Massachusetts is the most commercial state in the Union. COMMERCE... is our life. We cannot exist, but in misery, without COMMERCE. To establish COMMERCE, to give it SECURITY; and obtain from it a bountiful REVENUE, were primary objects in forming a national government. COMMERCE with its revenue was looked up to as the greatest cement of the union of the States. Let the national government destroy COMMERCE, and the UNION will be DISSOLVED.¹¹²

With such sentiments New England entered the Anglo-American war that started two weeks later. We do not intend a complete political history of New England during the War of 1812 here; this has been performed by others. Ours is the more modest objective of sketching the development of sectional feelings in the region.

Very soon after the war had started, a wave of town meetings rolled again through New England. One of the strongest anti-war movements was observed in the Connecticut Valley. On July 15, 1812, a Hampshire County convention of 56 towns firmly

¹¹¹ HG, 20 May 1812.

¹¹² HG, 3 June 1812 (capitalization in the text).

condemned the war, wished its speedy termination, and gravely intimated at the hapless perspectives that the war presented to American national unity:

A supposed common interest is, in the apprehension of your Memorialists, the basis of the Federal Union; and if, in consequence of the proceedings of the government, any particular section of our country should be induced to consider its own interests as sacrificed to aid the ambition or appease the jealousy of other sections, it cannot and it ought not to be concealed, that by the habitual indulgence of such feelings, which measures partial in their effects cannot fail to produce, the Union itself would eventually be endangered.¹¹³

Practically every issue of the *Hampshire Gazette* throughout 1812-1814 contained anti-war materials that almost always bore a sectional tint. “Why should we engage in a war, in which we have every thing to lose, and nothing to gain; a war which is unnecessary and unjust, and which must inevitably terminate in the destruction of the commerce and the prosperity of the New England States?” -- a reprint from the *Connecticut Courant* asked.¹¹⁴ The idea of a Southern-French conspiracy also proved to be vivid. The

Hampshire Gazette declared:

Away then with the idle and wicked pretence that the war is prosecuted for the protection of commerce. No fellow-citizens, it is prosecuted to break down the ardor of New England enterprize, to dry up the sources of her prosperity, to humble the lofty spirit of her independence, to destroy her influence in the national confederacy, to annihilate commerce, and to make us parties in the continental system of Napoleon.¹¹⁵

Starting in early 1813, secession talk intensified. It followed the same rhetorical pattern as in previous cases: the South was *pushing* the otherwise nationalist and patriotic New

¹¹³ “To the President of the United States,” *HG*, 22 July 1812.

¹¹⁴ *HG*, 5 August 1812.

¹¹⁵ *HG*, 2 September 1812.

England toward splitting the Union; therefore it was *the South* who was truly responsible for a would-be disunion. “We must no longer be deafened by senseless clamors about a Separation of the States,” -- the author of an article in the *Centinel* exclaimed. “It is an event we do not desire... BUT THE STATES ARE SEPARATED IN FACT, when one section assumes an *imposing Attitude*, and with a high hand, perseveres in measures fatal to the interests and repugnant to the opinion of another section... If this Separation in fact takes place, *it will be the work of the present Cabinet.*”¹¹⁶

Such feeling grew stronger and stronger. As it gradually became clear that the war was to be neither quick nor successful, New England Federalists became increasingly resentful of the national government. In January, 1814, Northampton and Hatfield, Massachusetts, held town meetings that once more remonstrated against the war, the embargo, the admission of new states into the Union, and so on. This time, however, petitions were sent not to Congress but to the General Court of Massachusetts, -- symbolic perhaps of a remarkable loss of trust in the national authority. The language of the petitioners testified that their patience was wearing out:

Convinced as we are, that the present state of things proceeds from a disposition, hostile to Commerce, or a criminal indifference to the interests of New England, and probably from both causes united, we cannot forbear to look to the Legislature of this Commonwealth for redress. From Congress we do not expect, nor will we ask relief. Our repeated petitions to that body have been disregarded, and our grievances seem to have been multiplied in proportion to our complaints.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ “Imposing Attitude,” *HG*, 20 January 1813 (italics and capitalization in the text).

¹¹⁷ *HG*, 2 February 1814.

In order to preserve the Union (and intimating that this would be the only way of doing it), the petitioners suggested amending those parts of the Constitution that disadvantaged the Northeast and favored the South. The amendments were to be elaborated and then suggested to Congress “by a convention of delegates from the Northern and Commercial States, to be appointed by their respective Legislatures.”¹¹⁸ Thus the idea of what a few months later became the Hartford Convention, came to light. This does not mean that the project originated from the Hampshire County. Federalist leaders expressed the idea of a such convention several years before, and almost literal coincidence of ideas expressed in Northampton and Hadley petitions (the idea of a convention as well) suggest previous coordination “from above.”

This was a time when blue lights were burned along the coasts of Connecticut to warn the British squadron that the *Stephen Decatur* was trying to break through the blockade. Henry Edward Napier, a lieutenant in H. M. S. *Nymphe* that took part in the 1814 blockade of the Massachusetts coast, wrote scornfully in his diary about New Englanders:

9 June. ... Received vegetables and stock of all kinds from Boston, green peas for the first time. Newspapers and in short anything we choose to send for, is brought by these rascals. No occasion to use force, a hint quite sufficient and frequently even that is not wanting.¹¹⁹

As for the Federalist leaders, old and young, they gradually started to regard disunion as a real possibility. Pickering wrote -- eagerly, perhaps -- in July 1812:

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Napier, Henry E., New England Blockaded in 1814. The Journal of Henry Edward Napier, Lieutenant in H. M. S. *Nymphe* (Salem: Peabody Museum, 1939), 23.

I would preserve the Union of the States, if possible.... But I would not be deluded by a word. To my ears there is no magic in the sound of Union. If the great objects of union are utterly abandoned, -- much more, if they are wantonly, corruptly, and treacherously sacrificed by the Southern and Western States, -- let the Union be severed.¹²⁰

This time, though, Pickering stepped forward with a new version of secession. The North could secede from the rest of the country, he said, but the rupture would be permanent only with the new, Western states, whereas the South would later eagerly rejoin the confederacy. This idea was supported by John Lowell (1769-1840), perhaps the most prolific Federalist writer in New England and the author of the most popular anti-war pamphlet, *Mr. Madison's War* (1812). Lowell even devoted a special pamphlet to the scheme of Western separation.¹²¹ This idea perhaps made more sense than one could imagine, since there was evidence from Louisiana that a considerable portion of the French and Spanish population of that region, which obviously prevailed over the American element, was in favored separation from the United States.¹²²

There were others, like the extravagant Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816) who started to speak about "a Star in the East."¹²³ Samuel Fessenden, Timothy Bigelow, Francis Blake, Charles Prentiss and other radicals started to propose secession more or less openly.¹²⁴ For the purposes of this work, however, it is more interesting to consider

¹²⁰ Pickering to Edward Pennington 12 July 1812, *DRNEF*, 389 (emphasis in text).

¹²¹ [John Lowell], *Thoughts in a Series of Letters, in Answer to a Question Respecting the Division of the States. By a Massachusetts Farmer*, (n.p., 1813).

¹²² See, e. g., John C. M. Windship's "Letters from Louisiana, 1813-1814," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11 (March 1925), 570-79.

¹²³ Gouverneur Morris to Timothy Pickering, 22 December 1814, *DRNEF*, 419. See also: Gouverneur Morris, *An Oration, Delivered on Wednesday, June 29, 1814, at the Request of a Number of Citizens of New York, In Celebration of the Recent Deliverance of Europe From the Yoke of Military Despotism*, (Salem, 1814).

¹²⁴ See, e. g., Elijah Mills, *An Oration, Pronounced at Northampton* (Northampton, 1813), 23; Charles Prentiss, *A Poem Delivered at Brookfield, July 5th, 1813, Before the Washington Benevolent Societies of*

the main, governing body of New England Federalists and their attitude to the idea of the Union. To do so, it is imperative to analyze the central event in the development of New England regionalism of the early 1800s -- the Hartford Convention.

That and Adjacent Towns (Brookfield, 1813), 10; John Lowell, Thoughts in a Series of Letters, in Answer to a Question Respecting the Division of the States. By a Massachusetts Farmer (n. p., 1813): 10, 14-16, 18, 22; Charles Prentiss, New England Freedom: A Poem Delivered Before the Washington Benevolent Society, in Brimfield, February 22d, 1813 (Brookfield, 1813): 14, 27-28; Inquiry into the Object and Tendency of the Present War Addressed to the Citizens of New Hampshire (Portsmouth, 1814), 12; John S. J. Gardiner, A Discourse Delivered at Trinity Church, Boston, July 23, 1812 (Boston, 1812), 19; [John Lowell], Perpetual War, the Policy of Mr. Madison (Boston, 1812), 89.

CHAPTER 2

THE HARTFORD CONVENTION AND CALEB STRONG'S INITIATIVE

The Hartford Convention is arguably one of the most mysterious events in American history. Rarely has a political forum caused such diametrically opposite opinions about its very purpose or aroused so much suspicion, accusation, and gossip. The problem is that right after the Convention, in February 1815, came the news of the Treaty of Ghent with Great Britain. This unexpected "happy end" radically changed the political situation in the United States, unleashing a burst of nationalist feeling. Many Americans now started to think of the "most unpopular American war," as Samuel Eliot Morison has called the War of 1812, as a glorious national struggle. The Federalist party, just weeks before on the rise due to its anti-war rhetoric, now fell into disrepute, to which their Republican opponents were more than eager to add a flavor of treason. The Hartford Convention played a key role in this propaganda scheme.

The Convention was organized at the end of 1814 by New England Federalists in response to the exigencies of the moment. Madison's latest embargo (December 17, 1813 -- April 14, 1814) and the British naval blockade (since April 25, 1814) had seriously impaired the economy of New England. In July 1814, Lieutenant-Colonel Pilkington and six hundred British soldiers landed at Eastport, Maine. In August, Lieutenant-General Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, the Governor of Nova Scotia at the head of two thousand Britons, captured Penobscot and soon took possession of Bangor without much resistance. All Maine east of the Penobscot river was in British hands. Male citizens were required to take an oath of allegiance to George III, which they did, showing "no

unwillingness to remain permanently British subjects.”¹²⁵ War came to New England.

With only about six hundred regular American troops in Massachusetts, defense of the region fell to state militia.

Never before (and maybe, never after) had the federal government been so weak.

On August 24-25, 1814 the British army captured and burned Washington. Military failures, financial bankruptcy, clashes with the states -- all contributed to the increasing instability of the Madison administration of James Madison. Government countermeasures, such as the Fall 1814 militia draft projects and the authorization of the enlistment of minors without parental or guardian's consent, caused mass resentment and indignation in New England. Federalists, in their turn, gladly exploited popular exasperation to their own purposes.

On October 17, 1814 the General Court of Massachusetts suggested to other New England state legislatures to send spokesmen to a common convention. The aim of this measure was stated as follows:

To meet and confer with Delegates from the other states of New England, or any of them upon the subjects of their public grievances and concerns, and upon the best means of preserving our resources and of defence against the enemy, and to devise and suggest for adoption by those respective states, such measures as they may deem expedient; and also to take measures, if they shall think proper, for procuring a convention of Delegates from all the United States, in order to revise the constitution thereof, and more effectually to secure the support and attachment of all the people, by placing all upon the basis of fair representation.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Henry Adams, History of the United States of America during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 2 vols. (The Library of America, 1986), 2: 975.

¹²⁶ “Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Committee to Whom Was Referred the Message of His Excellency, with the Documents Accompanying the Same...” Harrison Gray Otis. Papers, 1691-1870, roll 5, 1811-1815 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1979. Microfilm).

The principal Republican indictment against the Federalists after the war was that the Hartford Convention intended to dissolve the Union. The Federalists asserted the contrary -- that the Convention had in mind the benefit of the Union. The great dispute over whether the Hartford Convention had been separatist or not had some important political implications in 1814-15: in the course of time, however, it became a matter of pure scholarly interest. Today most historians tend to deny the separatist character of the Convention. One of my goals is to challenge this prevalent opinion.

The Convention met at the State House in Hartford, Connecticut, during the three weeks from December 15, 1814, to January 5, 1815. Massachusetts sent twelve delegates;¹²⁷ Connecticut dispatched seven;¹²⁸ and Rhode-Island was represented by four men.¹²⁹ New Hampshire and Vermont did not send official delegations. In New Hampshire, the Federalist-controlled legislature was not in session, and Governor John Taylor Gilman, although a Federalist too, faced a Republican council that opposed such a regional assembly. Many leading Federalists in the state, Daniel Webster among them, also opposed the idea. All this prevented New Hampshire from participation in the Hartford Convention.¹³⁰ As to Vermont, its legislature, including both Republicans and Federalists -- perhaps under the impression of the British invasion into Champlain Valley -- refused to participate in the forum. Yet the two latter states were represented thanks to the work of unofficial assemblies. A "conventional meeting of twenty towns in the

¹²⁷ George Cabot (elected president of the Convention), William Prescott, Harrison Gray Otis, Timothy Bigelow, Stephen Longfellow, Daniel Waldo, George Bliss, Nathan Dane, Hodijah Baylies, Joshua Thomas, Joseph Lyman, and Samuel Sumner Wilde.

¹²⁸ Chauncey Goodrich, James Hillhouse, John Treadwell, Zephaniah Swift, Calvin Goddard, Nathaniel Smith, and Roger Minot Sherman.

¹²⁹ Daniel Lyman, Samuel Ward, Benjamin Hazard, and Edward Manton.

¹³⁰ James Banner, To the Hartford Convention, 328.

county of Cheshire, in the State of New-Hampshire” elected Benjamin West delegate of the Convention. Another New Hampshire meeting, “from most of the towns in the county of Grafton, and from the town of Lancaster, in the county of Coos” elected Mills Olcott.¹³¹ Later, on December 28, the last delegate, William Hall, Jr., elected from the county of Windham, Vermont, joined the sessions.

Thus, twenty-six New England Federalists became delegates of the Hartford Convention. Theodore Dwight from Connecticut, later the first historian of this assembly, became its non-voting secretary. For him this was not to be an altogether safe business. Soon after the Convention started, Dwight received an anonymous letter from Boston which read as follows:

Boston Dec 15 -- 1814

Sir if in your present Convention you should attack the Union of the States, We the friends of that Union will feel ourselves justified in repelling the attack by any means which God and Nature has placed within our reach, and depend upon it Sir that in the consequent Anarchy your body would soon disfigure a Lamp Post.
Union.¹³²

Obviously, contemporaries took the possibility of disunion as a result of the Hartford Convention much more seriously than many present-day historians. The assembly brought the region to the brink of a civil war.

All the delegates were eminent men -- renowned lawyers (21 of 26) and merchants. Most had been delegates of the national Congress or state legislatures before and, consequently, were well aware of the nature and urgent needs of Federalist politics.

¹³¹ “Secret Journal of the Hartford Convention,” in Theodore Dwight, History of the Hartford Convention. With a Review of the Policy of the United States Government which Led to the War of 1812, (1833; reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 384.

¹³² Dwight Family Papers, New York Public Library.

Most of them had a political reputation of moderates. On the eve of the Convention, John Lowell, one of the most radical New England Federalists, wrote a letter to Timothy Pickering. This document, noted as confidential, has often been cited by historians as a proof of the Convention's harmlessness. Lowell discussed the characters of the significant members of the Massachusetts delegation -- George Cabot, Harrison Gray Otis, Timothy Bigelow, William Prescott, Nathan Dane, and Samuel Sumner Wilde. Of them, he considered only Bigelow to be capable of resolute action:

Bigelow is really bold on the present question, has a just confidence in the power of Massachusetts, sneers as he ought to (and as I am sure I do) at all the threats of vengeance of the other states; and, if he was well supported, I have no doubt that measures of dignity and real relief would be adopted.¹³³

Others, Lowell thought, were wise and reasonable but hopelessly irresolute. His opinion of Harrison Gray Otis has been quoted by almost every historian of the Hartford Convention: "Mr. Otis is naturally timid, and frequently wavering -- to-day bold and to-morrow like a hare trembling at every breeze."¹³⁴ Lowell was of similar opinion about the rest of the Massachusetts and Connecticut delegations -- wise, intelligent but timid and unable to act. "It is to be regretted that we have not chosen two or three such persons as Daniel Sargent, William Sullivan, and Colonel Thorndike," -- he wrote meaning the radicals who had not been sent to Hartford.

Lowell was not alone in such an appraisal of the delegates, and there are reasons to believe that he was right. Indeed, for the most part they were moderates. However,

¹³³ John Lowell to Timothy Pickering, 3 December 1814, in Henry C. Lodge, Life and Letters of George Cabot, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1878), 547.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

even though this might have been true, their political moderation is not a definitive argument denying *a priori* the separatism of the Hartford Convention. On the contrary, it is precisely the moderation of the delegates that makes this assembly so extraordinary. Radicals were not at the steering wheel of New England politics even in 1814, and it meant little if they favored disunion or not. Political power in New England was in the hands of moderate Federalists. Behind those who assembled at Hartford stood the governors and legislatures of three most important New England states, and it was on them that the future of the region -- in particular its official attitude to the Union and the war -- depended.

From the first session the delegates imposed an injunction of utmost secrecy on the proceedings. The resulting lack of sources directly related to the Hartford Convention explains why this forum has ever since been shrouded in the veil of mystery. The journal of the convention had been kept in secret until 1819, when George Cabot submitted it to the office of the State Secretary of Massachusetts, for public display. The document, however, turned to be disappointing for sensation-hunters. It was just a record of meetings and adjournments, with brief references to questions discussed -- a report, an agenda, appointments, credentials, etc., -- but no record of what was said. There were neither texts of speeches, nor voting results, nor information about the form of ballot, nor any lists of votes *pro* and *contra*.¹³⁵ The only informative official document that remains,

¹³⁵ "Secret Journal of the Hartford Convention," in Theodore Dwight, History of the Hartford Convention, 383-98.

therefore, is the final report of the Hartford Convention published in January 1815, right upon the conclusion of the forum. This text will be crucial to us.¹³⁶

A concise document of twenty-five pages of text and twelve pages of supportive statistics and notes, the report can be subdivided into several logical parts. A six-page preamble describes the reasons for the convention. The goal of the assembly, the report read, lay in “devising the means of defence against dangers, and of relief from oppressions proceeding from the acts of their own Government, without violating constitutional principles, or disappointing the hopes of a suffering and injured people.”¹³⁷ The situation was so serious that “no summary means of relief [could] be applied without recourse to direct and open resistance.” However, in the usual Federalist manner of distrusting the people, the delegates announced that this resistance would inevitably be painful and dangerous: “Precedents of resistance to the worst administration, are eagerly seized by those who are naturally hostile to the best.”¹³⁸ Therefore, the delegates saw their immediate task in “reconciling all to a course of moderation and firmness, which may save them from the regret incident to sudden decisions, probably avert the evil, or at least insure consolation and success in the last resort.”¹³⁹

The text abounds in national rhetoric. The delegates gave due praise to the Constitution of the United States, although with clear reservations:

¹³⁶ The Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates, from the States of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode-Island; the Counties of Cheshire and Grafton, in the State of New-Hampshire; and the County of Windham, in the State of Vermont; -- Convened at Hartford, in the State of Connecticut, December 15th, 1814, (Hartford: Printed by Charles Hosmer, 1815). Despite its misleading title, this publication contained no proceedings of the Convention.

¹³⁷ Proceedings of a Convention, 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

The Constitution of the United States, under the auspices of a wise and virtuous Administration, proved itself competent to all the objects of national prosperity, comprehended in the views of its framers. No parallel can be found in history, of a transition so rapid as that of the United States from the lowest depression to the highest felicity -- from the condition of weak and disjointed republics, to that of a great, united, and prosperous nation.¹⁴⁰

But the Constitution, however good, was but a paper, insufficient in itself to provide national happiness. Another indispensable ingredient, delegates asserted, was “a wise and virtuous Administration.” A wrong administration could always abuse even the best constitution. This was precisely what happened in the United States, the report contended, for, delegates argued, “this state of public happiness has undergone a miserable and afflicting reverse, through the prevalence of a weak and profligate policy” - - the policy of the Republicans.

Apparently, a good administration was one that would cater to Federalist political and economic interests or, in regional terms, to the interests of the Northeast. The report warned the public of “the Southern Atlantic States” against ignoring the North:

They [the public in the South] will have felt, that the Eastern States cannot be made exclusively the victims of a capricious and impassioned policy. -- They will have seen that the great and essential interests interests of the people, are common to the South and to the East. They will realize the fatal errors of a system, which seeks revenge for commercial injuries in the sacrifice of commerce, and aggravates by needless wars, to an immeasurable extent, the injuries it professes to redress. They may discard the influence of visionary theorists, and recognize the benefits of a practical policy.¹⁴¹

The main part of the document described in detail the situation in which New England states had found themselves by the end of 1814. First of all, referring to the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 5.

Constitution, the delegates renounced the federal jurisdiction over New England state militias: “Unless the laws shall be opposed, or an insurrection shall exist, or an invasion shall be made, Congress, and of consequence the President as their organ, has no more power over the militia than over the armies of a foreign nation.”¹⁴² The report also attacked government proposals of conscription and the enlistment of minors. It was the federal government also, it said, that had engaged in an offensive, aggressive war but abandoned the defense of the states, especially New England that were particularly vulnerable to attack from the sea. The government did not intend, and was actually unable, to defend the Eastern states. The latter, therefore, were “left to adopt measures for their own defence.”¹⁴³

The delegates continued that it would be impossible for New England economy ruined by war to pay national taxes together with defraying expenses of self-defense. Therefore, the report proposed that “these States might be allowed to assume their own defence, by the militia or other troops. A reasonable portion... of the taxes raised in each state might be... appropriated to the defence of such state.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, New England would withhold its payments from the federal government.

The report then proceeded from concrete and immediate measures of relief to a more general discourse about the reasons of the present calamitous situation. The Washington and Adams administrations were presented as a true paradise:

¹⁴² Ibid., 8.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 15.

The arts flourished -- the sciences were cultivated -- the comforts and conveniences of life were universally diffused -- and nothing remained for succeeding administrations, but to reap the advantages, and cherish the resources, flowing from the policy of their predecessors.¹⁴⁵

This idyllic prosperity, the report continued, had ended when Jefferson assumed presidential power. The two successive Republican administrations had brought the nation to the point that “while Europe reposes from the convulsions that had shaken down her ancient institutions, she beholds with amazement this remote country, once so happy and so envied, involved in a ruinous war, and excluded from intercourse with the rest of the world.”¹⁴⁶ The authors of the report enumerated particularly deplorable aspects of Republican policy. The first of them read as follows:

...A deliberate and extensive system for effecting a combination among certain States, by exciting local jealousies and ambition, so as to secure to popular leaders in one section of the Union, the control of public affairs in perpetual succession.¹⁴⁷

Other grievances included expulsion of Federalists from official posts; unconstitutional dismissal of Federalist judges; the abolition of taxes in order to gain “popular favor”; patronage in the distribution of offices; admission of new states into the Union that “destroyed the balance of power which existed among the original States”; admittance of foreigners to “places of trust, honour, or profit”; erroneous foreign policy (the error being “hostility to Great Britain and partiality to France”; and, “lastly but

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

principally -- A visionary and superficial theory in regard to commerce, accompanied by a real hatred but a feigned regard to its interests, and a ruinous perseverance to render it an instrument of coercion and war.”¹⁴⁸

Then the delegates contradicted their own previous compliments to the Constitution of the United States by asserting that all this could have been avoided, “unless favored by defects in Constitution.” They proposed several constitutional amendments, as “to strengthen, and if possible to perpetuate, the Union of the States, by removing the ground of existing jealousies, and providing for a fair and equal representation and a limitation of powers, which have been misused.”¹⁴⁹ This later served as a good trump for Harrison Gray Otis and other proponents of the non-separatist character of the convention -- they often quoted this passage to support their assertion that the convention presented no threat to the Union.

The delegates proposed the following seven amendments to the federal Constitution:

1. The apportionment of both representatives and direct taxes in the states within the Union according to their respective numbers of free people, “including those bound to serve for a term of years and excluding Indians not taxed and all other persons”, i.e. the abolition of the “3/5 clause;”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 18-19.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 19.

2. Further admission of new states into the Union only upon the concurrence of two-thirds of both houses of Congress;
3. The limitation of any future embargo imposed by Congress to sixty days;
4. Such an embargo can be imposed by Congress only upon the concurrence of two-thirds of both houses;
5. The same provision for any declaration of war or any “acts of hostility against any foreign nation.” The only exception was made for an actual invasion;
6. An interdiction for naturalized citizens to occupy any civil offices “under the authority of the United States;”
7. Persons from the same state could not be elected President of the United States for two terms in succession. Besides, one person could not occupy the presidential post for more than one term.

The delegates admonished the state legislatures of New England to “protect the citizens of said States from the operation and enforcement of all acts which have been or may be passed by the Congress of the United States, which shall contain provisions, subjecting the militia or other citizens to forcible drafts, conscriptions, or impressments, not authorized by the Constitution of the United States.”¹⁵⁰ In addition, the convention urged state legislatures to pass laws authorizing governors or commanders-in-chief of the militia to form special volunteer detachments to be used upon the request of governors of the other New

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 25.

England states “in assisting the State, making such request to repel any invasion thereof which shall be made or attempted by the public enemy.”¹⁵¹ Finally, in case of prolonged war in which the Federal government ignored the amendments proposed at Hartford and disregard the defense of New England, the delegates resolved to summon another convention at Boston “with such powers and instructions as the exigency of a crisis so momentous may require.”¹⁵²

Thus, no open and direct call for a separation was made. Here we must agree with the Federalists and those historians who later sided with their interpretation. Indeed, the text contained several passages of exemplary patriotic, nationalist rhetoric, which Federalists would later use to justify the convention and prove its high patriotic spirit. Yet we must look at the text of the report more attentively.

At the end of the “preamble,” the following phrase -- right after the allusion to the common interest of the North and the South -- immediately draws the reader’s attention:

Finally, if the Union be destined to dissolution, by reason of the multiplied abuses of bad administrations, it should, if possible, be the work of peaceable times and deliberate consent.¹⁵³

Aside from the very fact that disunion is mentioned as an option, the words “if possible” are remarkable here. It followed, that “if impossible,”

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid, 26.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 6.

separation might not be a result of “peaceable times and deliberate consent,” that is, that secession might take place during the war, right then and there.

A few words after that:

Events may prove that the causes of our calamities are deep and permanent. They may be found to proceed, not merely from the blindness of prejudice, pride of opinion, violence of party spirit, or the confusion of the times; but they may be traced to implacable combinations of individuals, or of States, to monopolize power and office, and to trample without remorse upon the rights and interests of commercial sections of the Union. Whenever it shall appear that these causes are radical and permanent, a separation by equitable arrangement, will be preferable to an alliance by constraint, among nominal friends, but real enemies, inflamed by mutual hatred and jealousy, and inviting by intestine divisions, contempt, and aggression from abroad.¹⁵⁴ (emphasis added)

Thus, separation was preferable under certain conditions. The text, though, goes on to read that “a severance of the Union by one or more States, against the will of the rest, and especially in a time of the war, can be justified only by absolute necessity.”¹⁵⁵ This argument was even called “conclusive.”¹⁵⁶ But the moment when this absolute necessity would come, could be defined very liberally. And moreover -- if the reasons against separation were indeed so conclusive, why was this “absolute necessity” mentioned at all? Why not say that in wartime any attempt of secession was simply impossible; more than that - criminal? Why such a reservation?

From the preamble let us turn to the conclusion of the report. The very last phrase of the document (followed only by resolutions) read:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

"Our nation may yet be great, our union durable. But should this prospect be utterly hopeless, the time will not have been lost, which shall have ripened a general sentiment of the necessity of more mighty efforts to rescue from ruin, at least some portion of our beloved country"¹⁵⁷
(emphasis added).

It is hard to deny that in these words the possibility of secession was stated clearly and expressly, and more than that, approved. The fact that this phrase was at the very end of the document, made it still more menacing. This was part of a pattern. Passages of the report which either stated or implied the potentiality of secession, were located in the key parts of the text -- either in the preamble or in the conclusion. Therefore, in spite of all the reverences to the Union and Constitution, the authors of the report seriously considered secession and found that perspective not only plausible but, under certain circumstances, even desirable.

Going further, the amendments which the convention proposed, had few chances to pass the Congress. The first one meant the abolition of the 3/5 clause, to which the South would have never consented. The second through fifth amendments would have limited congressional powers. The sixth amendment (a ban for naturalized citizens to occupy official posts) would have also hardly been accepted by the national legislature. As for the seventh amendment, it was clearly directed against the notorious "Virginia dynasty" and, like the first one, the Congress would have obviously repudiated it. Thus, all the amendments were oriented squarely towards the benefit of the North, particularly New England, and

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

against the South. By their very nature, they substantially undermined the national element in the United States and reinforced sectionalism. Despite their pro-New England character, the amendments presented a universal sectionalist program, which, as James Banner justly observes, could be -- and this proved to be correct in 45 years -- used by any region determined to secede from the Union.¹⁵⁸

So radically sectionalist they were that one questions if it was a real legislative initiative or a mere declaration. Most of the delegates were experienced politicians and could not but realize that their amendments had few chances to succeed in Congress. Despite the peculiarities of Federalist psychology, they were rational enough to understand the extremism and impossibility of their proposals.

Sectionalism prevailed not only in the amendments. The alleged main purpose of the Convention was the defense of New England against a "common enemy." How did the conventioners resolve this problem? First of all, they urged the New England states to withhold tax payments from the federal government. No matter how such funds would have been used, this would have certainly undermined the general war effort and weakened the national government. Secondly, the delegates rejected government war measures, such as conscription and the enlistment of minors. As for militia, the federal government was not supposed to use it either -- the militia ought to limit its operations to New England only. This would have effectively blocked the mobilization efforts of Madison's administration. Bearing in mind that New England played a crucial role in the

¹⁵⁸ James M. Banner Jr., "A Shadow of Secession? The Hartford Convention, 1814," History Today 38 (September 1988): 24-30.

national revenues and military resources, it is clear that withdrawal of both from the disposal of the federal government would have seriously hampered the entire nation's military performance.

On the whole, the essence of the resolution of the defense problem which the Convention suggested was disunion -- the separation of the previously more or less coordinated action of all states in favor of separate, regional defense projects. Significant here was the rhetoric of the delegates: "Even at this late hour, let the government leave to New England the remnant of her resources, and she is ready and able to defend her territory, and to resign the glories and advantages of the border war, to those who are determined to persist in its prosecution."¹⁵⁹ This was a truly separatist, regionalist approach that meant separation from the national war effort and admittedly, in perspective, from the Union itself.

One can object to this and say that having withdrawn from the war effort, New England would have still continued to fight on the regional level, to defend itself against the British. Maybe this is what the conventioners meant. To answer this question, the report of the Hartford Convention will not be enough. Let us consider another remarkable historic document of those days.

In November 1814, about a month before the Convention, Governor Caleb Strong of Massachusetts sent an envoy to Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, the lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia and the commander of the British forces which had just captured Castine, Maine. Although the documents related to this

¹⁵⁹ Proceedings, 11.

mission were published as early as 1938,¹⁶⁰ historians have never given them attention, with the exception of Samuel Eliot Morison.¹⁶¹ He, however, did not consider these papers in connection with the Hartford Convention. This has to be done.

The name of the envoy has remained unknown upon his own request (Morison suggests that it was Thomas Adams from Castine). He was “a most respectable Inhabitant of the Country lying between the Penobscot and the Boundary Line of New Brunswick” and was “personally known”¹⁶² both by Admiral Griffith and Sherbrooke. Upon returning from Boston to Castine, he informed the British that he had some important information to convey. Sherbrooke learned that this man had been “Commissioned by the Executive of Massachusetts”¹⁶³ (i.e. Caleb Strong) to explore the possibility of a separate agreement between Great Britain and New England states, by which New England would withdraw from the war. Sherbrooke asked the envoy to state his proposals on paper and enclosed them with his own message to Earl Bathurst, the British Secretary for War and the Colonies. Sherbrooke also asked Bathurst to send an experienced diplomat to Canada to deal with the proposal of Massachusetts chief executive.

¹⁶⁰ The archival documents of the negotiations between this envoy and the British command were published by J. S. Martell in the *American Historical Review* in 1938. See: “A Side Light on Federalist Strategy During the War of 1812,” *AHR* 43 (October 1937 to July 1938): 553-66.

¹⁶¹ Samuel E. Morison et al., *Dissent in Three American Wars*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 18.

¹⁶² Sherbrooke to Bathurst, 20 November 1814, in J. S. Martell, ed., “A Side Light on Federalist Strategy...,” *AHR* 43 (October 1937 to July 1938): 559.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

The fact that neither General Sherbrooke, nor Admiral Griffith, despite being the key figures in the British administration in Canada felt themselves entitled to deal with this person, suggests that for them this was a serious diplomatic affair, even though the envoy had not presented any written credentials from Strong, thinking it imprudent to carry such papers.¹⁶⁴ Apparently, there were reasons - “the respectable Character of this Person & other Circumstances”¹⁶⁵ - that convinced the British of the authenticity of the proposal. Both Griffith and Sherbrooke themselves knew the envoy, which probably influenced their opinion about his mission.

The agent indeed put Strong’s suggestions on paper. They are worth reproducing at length:

The State of Massachusetts has been actuated by strong desire not only to prevent the declaration of War by the united [sic] States against great Britain, but since that declaration has been made to embrace the earliest opportunity to bring the war to a close: Such circumstances have hitherto existed as have rendered inexpedient, a direct & decisive effort to accomplish that desirable object: If however the British Government [sic] does in fact entertain such Sentiments and Views, as the Governments [sic] of New England have attributed to it, the period is now probably near, when the War may be brought to a Conclusion, - mutually advantageous to Great Britain, and to those who may concur in producing that Event.¹⁶⁶

And right after that:

With a view to meet the occasion, the Government [sic] of Massachusetts at its late session, has appointed delegates to assemble at Hartford, in Connecticut, on the 15th of December 1814, And there to meet such Delegates from the other New England States, as may be by then

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.: 561.

appointed for the purpose contemplated in the appointment of those by Massachusetts...¹⁶⁷ (emphasis added).

Since this was a diplomatic document, its language was supposed to be especially precise. One should ask, which “occasion” did Governor Strong and his colleagues have in mind when they summoned the Hartford Convention? From the text it follows that it was the occasion to conclude a certain agreement between Great Britain and New England states which would withdraw New England from the war. The language of the letter is quite ambiguous. A possible interpretation is that when Caleb Strong, Harrison Gray Otis and other “moderate” Federalists initiated the summons of the Hartford Convention, they were, as this document suggests, contemplating a separate armistice between New England and Great Britain, which the decisions of the Convention were to prepare the soil for.

The envoy then described the “ostensible”¹⁶⁸ (this word is also remarkable -- what were the real ones?) objectives of the Convention -- New England defense measures which the federal government neglected to provide. The agent also mentioned that the delegates intended to withdraw the payments of New England States from the national treasury in order to appropriate this money to local defense. Then another remarkable phrase ensued:

It will require no great degree of prescience, to foresee [sic] that this measure [the withdrawal of payment] forced upon those States by the conduct of the general Government, and the law of self preservation, will necessarily lead to collision between that Government, and these States, and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

also that the credit of that Government already greatly impaired, and always founded principally on the basis of Northern revenue, must entirely fail.¹⁶⁹

This was probably as clear to the delegates of the Hartford Convention as to Caleb Strong and his envoy. If so, they should have prepared for the “collision” between the Federal government and New England, of which the envoy spoke. In fact, they really did. In his message the agent said it was possible that a separate government would be created “in due time... for the States present, and such as may accede afterwards, calculated to insure the pursuit of such regular and legitimate policy, as may afford security to foreign as well as domestic relations...”¹⁷⁰ The wish of a region to establish its own government independent of the national cannot be called otherwise than separatism.

Understanding that a clash with the central government loomed, the legislature of Massachusetts, the agent further said, “has authorized his Excellency the Governor to levy an Army of 10,000 regular Troops, and probably a similar measure will be adopted by the other States acceding to the Convention, according to their ability.”¹⁷¹ It was an important part of the agent's mission to explore a possibility of getting British aid to New England states in their resistance to the Federal government:

It is not to be concealed, that possibly, though not probably, the democracy of some one, perhaps more of the state Governments, influenced and countenanced, by the Executive of the United States, may overcome in an Election, the best exertions of well disposed people. It will be necessary to know whether in an event of that kind, any competent

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.: 561-62.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: 562.

Military force, can be certainly relied on, to be provided by Great Britain, in aid of the present authorities of the States, or of such Government as may grow out of measures now in operation¹⁷² (emphasis added).

This was not simply separatism ("such Government as may grow out of measures now in operation"). It was separatism conscious of its possible consequences up to and including civil war. And not simply a civil war, but the one in alliance with foreign military forces.

Now let us return for a moment to the Report of the Hartford Convention. Resolution #2 urged New England state legislatures to pass laws authorizing their governors or commanders-in-chief of state militia to organize special military units, "well armed, equipped and disciplined, and in readiness for service" which were to be used "upon the request of the Governour of either of the other States... in assisting the State, making such request to repel an invasion thereof which shall be made or attempted by the public enemy."¹⁷³ Which "enemy" were these troops to repel, in the light of what we have just read in the letter of Governor Strong's agent? The British? Possibly. The letter, however, suggests something different.

In the concluding passages, the agent asked the British officials not to allow any further depredations on New England coast and, if possible, to compensate for the damage already inflicted. "If indeed the preservation of good feelings of the people of this and the adjoining states towards Great Britain be thought an object of any importance, depredation must cease on our Shore."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Proceedings of a Convention, 25.

¹⁷⁴ 'The Proposal of the American Agent...', in "A Side Light...", AHR 43: 563.

This was followed by another important phrase: "If that mode of Warfare [depredations] be thought advisable, it must operate altogether on the South.

Punishment will then be brought Home to the Doors of the guilty. In that Country the British Government and people have no affections to lose."¹⁷⁵

The letter ends with an expression of assurance that the alliance between the New England states and Great Britain will be mutually beneficial, and with a reaffirmation of separatist statement:

There is, it is believed little room to doubt, that if these States be left unmolested, they will soon be able to establish a system of order and power, that will paralyze the Authority of the United States, and crush the baneful Democracy of the Country. The measures now ripening by the means of the Convention, will soon afford a more decisive and important view of the ultimate measures proper to be taken by the British Government.¹⁷⁶ (emphasis added).

Upon reading the letters from Sherbrooke and the Massachusetts agent, Earl Bathurst laid them "before His Royal Highness The Prince Regent"¹⁷⁷ and on the same day - December 13, 1814 - directed four dispatches to his inferior. Although peace talks at Ghent were close to conclusion, "in the Event of the War being unhappily protracted..., -- he wrote to Sherbrooke, -- you have received authority (and this instruction hereby conveying it) to sign such Armistice on the part of the State of Massachusetts, and of any other States referred to in your dispatch..."¹⁷⁸

In the event of military clash between New England and the central government,

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ III. Bathurst to Sherbrooke, December 13, 1814, *ibid.*: 563.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 564.

Bathurst promised New England to “furnish arms, accoutrements, ammunition, Clothing, and naval Cooperation, on receiving application to that Effect.”¹⁷⁹

Secretary Bathurst also urged Sherbrooke “to concert measures with the military Commanders... to mitigate in every possible manner the pressure of War, in favor of all such States as shall have satisfactorily shewn a disposition to conclude an Armistice with His Majesty...”¹⁸⁰

We do not know who knew about Strong’s initiative. After the report of the Hartford Convention had been published, quite a few Federalists criticized that document for evasiveness and indecision. However, Timothy Pickering, the most ardent leader of New England sectionalism, declared that the report bore “the high character of wisdom, firmness, and dignity.” The delegates, he said, “have explicitly pronounced sentence of condemnation upon a miserable administration... They have made a declaration of principles [emphasis in text], the landmarks by which legislatures and the people may direct their course. And they have... manifested a determination to apply those principles in corresponding measures, when the future conduct or neglects of the government shall require their application.”¹⁸¹ It is worth noticing that Pickering also viewed the measures proposed by the convention as a mere declaration. And of course, one should pay attention to the fact that “the chief separatist of New England” was contented with the results of the forum that many of his fellow partisans thought to be so indecisive.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ IV. Bathurst to Sherbrooke, December 13, 1814, *ibid.*: 565.

¹⁸¹ Timothy Pickering to John Lowell, 23 January 1815, *DRNEF*, 423-24.

Nobody knows how the situation would have developed if the war had continued. Perhaps, the second convention in Boston would have officially proclaimed the separation of New England states from the Union. Perhaps, an armistice between New England and Great Britain would have been signed, bringing about the probability of a civil war. But this is speculation. The fact is that peace was indeed at hand. On January 27, 1815, the General Court of Massachusetts appointed, upon hearing the results of the Hartford Convention, a delegation of three prominent Federalists -- Harrison Gray Otis, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, and William Sullivan -- to present the resolutions of the convention and the proposed amendments to Congress in Washington. However, soon after the "ambassadors" had arrived in the capital, news of the Ghent peace treaty with Britain reached America.

This was the end of New England separatism. The Federalist organizers of the convention now faced a miserable perspective -- to spend the rest of their days in self-justification. A full excuse, however, would never come, and a spot has remained on their names and deeds, low since.

Thus, the Hartford Convention did present a threat to the union of American states. The report of the convention contained several clearly separatist passages located in the key parts of the text. The entire set of constitutional amendments, as well as other measures proposed by the convention, reflected sectional extremism oriented exclusively to the benefit of New England. Such amendments were by themselves a threat to the Union, especially at the time of war. The method of resolving the defense problem actually implied financial as well as military withdrawal of New England from the war.

Therefore, the report, even if we take it at face value, did not contribute to the nationalist cause. Resistance to the national government and non-recognition of its authority came from a distinct section of the country. Therefore, the Hartford Convention was a separatist phenomenon, even if judged exclusively by its official documents.

Its separatist sentiment receives further significant confirmation, when considered in the context of the mission of Governor Strong's agent. Both events were initiated by the same politicians (to a great extent, by the same person -- Caleb Strong), and took place approximately at the same time. The forthcoming convention of New England delegates was mentioned many times in the letter by Strong's agent to Lord Bathurst.

More than that, the entire argument of the agent in favor of an alliance between Great Britain and the New England states was premised on the Convention itself. The agent stated that it would be summoned in order to meet the occasion to carry out that agreement between New England and Britain. From his letter it also follows that the leaders of Massachusetts Federalism who had initiated the Convention recognized the danger of the measures it was to propose. They realized the possible outcome of such measures -- an open clash between New England and the Federal government, that would have probably resulted in a civil war and/or secession of New England from the Union. They were ready for that. Through his plenipotentiary agent, Governor Strong actually offered the British a military alliance. And the Hartford Convention appears here to have

been the first but apparently not the last intended official step of New England Federalists on this way of resistance and opposition to the national government.

CHAPTER 3

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

THE ROOTS AND CHARACTER OF NEW ENGLAND SECTIONALISM

The phenomenon of early 19th-century New England sectionalism deserves historical explanation. On the one hand, recourse to states' rights was common for a political opposition in the early Republic. What Federalists did in the early 1800s was on their part, consciously or not, a repetition of the maneuver undertaken by their Republican opponents in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798-99 -- resorting to state power against the federal government controlled by an opposing party. It is most interesting to compare the 1799 reaction of New England state legislatures to Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, to the later behavior of Federalists. The legislators of Massachusetts, while answering to Virginia in February 1799, made it explicit that "they cannot admit the right of the state legislatures to denounce the administration of that government to which the people themselves, by a solemn compact, have exclusively committed their national concerns." "...This legislature," -- they went on, -- "are persuaded that the decision of all cases in law and equity arising under the Constitution of the United States, and the construction of all laws made in pursuance thereof, are exclusively vested by the people in the judicial courts of the United States. ...The people, in the solemn compact, ...have not constituted the state legislatures the judges of the acts or measures of the Federal Government..."¹⁸²

¹⁸² "Massachusetts to Virginia. In Senate, February 9, 1799," in H. V. Ames, ed., State Documents on Federal Relations. The States and the United States, (1906; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 18.

Ten years after, though, the General Court radically changed its mind. After January 9, 1809, when Congress adopted particularly Draconian measures of enforcing the embargo, Massachusetts legislators proclaimed themselves not only eligible but obligated to discuss the acts of the federal government and their constitutionality. The House of Representatives declared to Levi Lincoln, the Republican governor of the state:

We cannot agree with your Honour that in a free country there is any stage at which the constitutionality of an act may no longer be open to discussion and debate; at least it is only upon the high road to despotism that such stages can be found.¹⁸³

In pursuance of this principle, the legislature of Massachusetts proclaimed the January 9, 1809, act of Congress “in many respects, unjust, oppressive and unconstitutional, and not legally binding on the citizens of this state.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, in 1809 Massachusetts Federalists took the same step, the right to which they so expressly denied to their Virginia colleagues ten years before.

The point, of course, was that now the national government was in the hands of Republicans. To a certain extent, the contending political parties traded their doctrines of state-federal relationship after 1800: the authors of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions now supported strong central power, whereas the former proponents of the Sedition Act started to denounce the federal government and argue for states’ rights and interposition.

On the other hand, for the Federalists, defending states’ rights practically meant advocating their, or a sectional cause. Most of the states where Federalists could claim

¹⁸³ “Extracts from the Answer of the House,” *ibid.*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ “Resolutions of the Enforcement Act, February 15, 1809,” *ibid.*, 35.

political and ideological dominance were territorially grouped together in the Northeast -- in New England, with the possible addition of New York. As many leading Federalists of the time observed, this region was already amalgamated by a considerable cultural commonness that invited political unification and even enabled some of the more resentful to talk about separation. When shortly after 1810 Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) wrote about the prospects of the United States, he admitted that New England and New York could well exist without the rest of the nation:

Should these [political divisions] hereafter take place, New England and New York will, almost of course, be united in the same political body. The inhabitants are now substantially one people... Should they be separated from their sister states, there cannot be a doubt that their citizens will hereafter find in their local situation, soil, and climate; in their religious and political systems; in their arts, literature, and science; in their manners and morals; in their health, energy, and activity, ample, perhaps peculiar sources of national greatness and prosperity.¹⁸⁵

New England obviously played the main part in this tandem. Although Timothy Pickering at one point in 1803-04 envisioned New York as the center of the would-be Northern confederacy, he also supposed the signal for separation to come from Massachusetts, not New York. Being the place of nativity and abode of most Federalist chieftains, New England was more likely to take the lead. Also, New Englanders played a substantial role in New York Federalist policies, but not vice versa. Out of the 52 politicians whom David H. Fischer defines as leading New York Federalists, 13 -- a quarter -- were born in New England.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, of the entire multitude of New England Federalist leaders on Fischer's list -- 187 names -- but five (one of them

¹⁸⁵ Timothy Dwight, Travels in New England and New York, 4 vols, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1969), 4: 373.

¹⁸⁶ Calculation based on: David H. Fischer, Revolution, 300-21.

presumably) were born outside New England. Isaac Tichenor (1754-1838) was supposedly born in Newark, New Jersey, and served as a commissary in the Continental Army upon graduation from Princeton in 1775. At some point during the war he moved to Bennington, Vermont, where legal practice propelled him into the state Assembly (1781-84), Council (1787-92), Supreme Court (1790-96) and finally to the governor's chair (1797-1806, 1808).¹⁸⁷ Another outsider, Henry Van Schaack (c.1765-1845), was born in Kinderhook, New York. From there he moved to Pittsfield, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, around 1781 -- a migration of only about 24 miles to the East. He resided in Berkshire County long enough to become one of the most influential Federalists, second perhaps only to Theodore Sedgwick himself. In fact, after Sedgwick's retirement, Van Schaack became "the leading political manager of Berkshire."¹⁸⁸ Still another lawyer, David Howell (1747-1824) migrated from his native Morristown, New Jersey, through Princeton to Providence, Rhode Island, where he grew from tutor to professor and acting president of Brown. The already mentioned Aaron Burr's brother-in-law Tapping Reeve (1744-1823) was born in Brookhaven, Long Island, and thus was formally not a New Englander, although the demarcation line in this case was practically invisible. Reeve later crossed the Sound to become a jurist in Litchfield, Connecticut. The founder of the first law school in the United States (1784), he made his way into the cream of Litchfield society -- the so-called "Jockey Club" that united the wealthiest and mightiest

¹⁸⁷ Fischer, 241. Tichenor also occupied several other important posts, including the one of a U. S. senator in 1796-97 and 1815-21.

¹⁸⁸ Fischer, 276.

men in town, among them the famous U. S. senator Uriah Tracy (1755-1807). Finally, another native of Brookhaven, Benjamin Tallmadge (1754-1835), also ended up in Litchfield, Connecticut, but as a banker.

But even though these five men achieved considerable social eminence at their places of abode in New England and became instrumental in the Federalist leadership, they were clearly an exception to the rule. The other 182 of 187 leading New England Federalists listed by Fischer were of New England origin. The proportion is self-evident. Cases of outsiders penetrating into the region's conservative political elite were obviously anomalous.

Compared to the much larger and more diverse New York, New England states of the early 1800s could boast of relative cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Fisher Ames did not hesitate to ascribe to New England "a very distinct and well defined national character; the only part of the United States that has yet any pretensions to it."¹⁸⁹ Even in terms of distances, transportation, and infrastructure, New England was most conducive to creating a coordinated political opposition to the federal government. And although sharply disputed between the two contending parties, the region was also the only part of the United States where Federalists could claim political dominance. In fact, it would have been surprising, if New England had not played the key role in Federalist politics after 1800, or if sectional feeling had not arisen here after the "Jeffersonian Revolution." Such a distinct, cohesive region could not but come up with a political agenda of its own, and was, so to say, doomed to play the main part in any separatist scheme. "If even the

¹⁸⁹ "From the Palladium," HG, 29 July 1801.

New England States alone were agreed in the first instance,” -- Timothy Pickering wrote, -- “would there be any difficulty in making frank and open proposition for a separation...?”¹⁹⁰

Evidence from the press and correspondence of New England Federalists indicates that an outburst of sectional resentment among them immediately followed their loss of control over the presidency in late 1800. Prior to that, so long as their party dominated national politics, the Federalists favored strong central government, privileged the Union over states’ rights and downplayed political regionalism. It was in 1801 that their rhetoric considerably changed. A number of publications appeared criticizing the new Republican government and calling for the unification of New England citizenry in defence of the values that were presented as inherently peculiar to New England -- order, stability, good morals, religion, education, and so forth. What this meant in terms of sectional / national relations, was that there emerged a sectionally minded political opposition in New England that started -- quite tentatively so far -- to argue against the national government. Thereby, the region began to oppose the rest of the nation loyal to the Jeffersonians.

This opposition, however, did not stay the same throughout 1800-1815. The relationship between regionalism and nationalism in the Federalist politics and propaganda was somewhat more complicated than simply “nationalists before 1800 -- regionalists after 1800.” What immediately draws attention is the chronologically uneven distribution of sectional resentment in New England during those years. Sectionalism was

¹⁹⁰ Timothy Pickering to Theodore Lyman, 11 February 1804, *DRNEF*, 345.

not a constant, but rather developed by fits and starts. Between 1800 and 1815, I have noticed four major waves (surges) of regional protest -- in 1801, late 1803-1804, 1808-early 1809 and 1812- early 1815. Each time an outburst of sectional rhetoric was preceded by a new turn in national politics that Federalists perceived as unfavorable to their party and to New England as a region. In 1801, this was Republican electoral victory, with Thomas Jefferson occupying the presidential chair. In 1804, the rise of sectional spirit took place in response to the Louisiana Purchase, the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, and to the shuffle of judicial offices conducted by the Republican administration in 1803-04. In 1808-09, the cause was the embargo; and in 1812-15, obviously, the war against Great Britain and new trade restrictions connected to it. Each time the reaction of New England grew more and more formidable. But in all the four cases, sectional resentment in the region invariably subsided after the disappearance of an external cause. In 1801-02, the Federalists eventually saw that Jefferson's administration presented less danger than had been ascribed to it. In 1804, the utter impossibility to do anything about the Louisiana Purchase and the constitutional amendment, as well as the general collapse of the Federalist cause with the Burr-Hamilton duel, dictated the abatement of sectionalist passions. In 1809, the repeal of the embargo alleviated the stress on New England's economy; and in 1815, the unexpected news of the victory at New Orleans and the Ghent Treaty dealt a crushing blow to whatever schemes New England Federalists had had in mind.

Most interesting are the intermittent periods between surges of regionalism.

During those "intermissions" -- 1802-1803, 1805-1807, 1809-early 1812 -- there was

amazingly little sectional propaganda in New England. It looked like Federalists were perfectly content with advocating the national cause, or, to say better, advocating nothing. Their press seldom, if ever, touched upon the dangerous political subjects that could provoke a debate along sectional lines -- Virginian dominance in national politics, slavery, the "3/5 clause," etc. New England interests seemed nonexistent -- the very words "New England" seemed to have been almost ruled out from newspaper pages. To say more -- Federalist authors paid amazingly little attention to internal political events in the United States at all. Instead, they preferred to cram newspaper pages with lengthy reports on European politics and war that could boast of minuteness unmatched by present-day foreign policy surveys. However, as soon as there emerged any serious ground for anti-government propaganda -- the embargo, the war, etc. -- Federalist writers instantly became interested in domestic politics. A new wave of anti-government propaganda usually ensued at once, inevitably assuming New England-oriented, sectional character.

Thus, we can observe a recurrent pattern in the development of New England sectional resistance. In the course of the first fifteen years of the 19th century, it went through four "surges" of similar character and steadily growing force -- in 1801, late 1803-04, 1808- early 1809, and 1812- early 1815. Those "surges" alternated with three "intermissions" -- 1802-1803, 1805-1807, and 1809-early 1812 -- when sectionally biased Federalist criticism of the national government was restrained and, in terms of frequency, rather scanty, compared to the times of "surges." Roughly speaking, whereas during the "surges" New England Federalists were inclined towards sectionalism (and some of them

even towards separatism), during the “intermissions,” on the other hand, they were -- at least outwardly -- nationally minded and quite comfortable with the existing relations between states in the Union.

One may, of course, explain this phenomenon from the standpoint of pure interest. Indeed, New England Federalists presented a sectional opposition to the national government only when they perceived their own political, economic, or other interests under direct threat; and as soon as the threat was gone, they normally returned to benign nationalism. However, interest alone cannot account for this type of political behavior. What New England Federalists were doing in the early 1800s, essentially was making sectional or national preferences in politics. The very fact that those preferences were being made, and that this happened quite often, suggests that something in the Federalist mind enabled them to be so flexible in their attitude to national and sectional ideals.

A satisfactory explanation cannot bypass the question of national consciousness. My contention is that New England Federalists had a clear idea about belonging to their country, the United States, and that it did not differ very much from the present-day concept of patriotism. Raised at Harvard or Yale on the heroic examples of the ancient Greeks and Romans, Federalist leaders had learned early to appreciate patriotic sentiment as one of the greatest civic virtues. In fact, many of them and their offspring later engaged into artificial construction of American nationalism through numerous writings and volunteer associations -- the readiest example being Noah Webster (1758-1843) and his project of the “Association of American Patriots” (1808).¹⁹¹ We may say that in terms of

¹⁹¹ Noah Webster Papers, New York Public Library (Webster also published the project in the Connecticut Herald on May 17, 1808).

high-spirited rhetorical nationalism, the Federalists of the early 1800s would not be inferior to any subsequent generation of American politicians.

What was different from the present day, however, was that Federalists simultaneously preserved and, more significantly, developed, a full-scale sense of belonging to their region, that is, to New England. The important word here is “simultaneously.” Closer examination of Federalist rhetoric shows that whenever they turned from benign nationalism to regional opposition, they did not abandon their national allegiances but rather preserved them. And vice versa -- whenever a transition from sectionalism to nationalism happened, sectionalism was never totally suppressed, but rather latently survived in the depth of the Federalist mind, waiting for the appropriate moment to burst out. New England Federalists had worked out, subconsciously, perhaps, a characteristic symbiosis between national and sectional loyalties that could fascinate our contemporaries but which evidently presented no logical contradiction to them.

This becomes evident when one consults New England political pamphlets of the early 19th century. This actually required considerable selection and scrutiny, for the very definition of a political pamphlet is considerably blurred. I tried to select only those pamphlets where political content proved significant. Of course, I have not studied all the contemporary pamphlets; however, the ones presented here are numerous enough to form a good sample.

Chronologically, I included only pamphlets published from 1801 -- the first year when Federalists found themselves in opposition -- through 1814, the last full year of warfare with Great Britain. I did not include 1815 for fear of confusing matters by

introducing sources that reflect the new political mood attendant upon the close of the war. Geographically, only pamphlets published in New England were selected, though occasionally a New York pamphlet is considered, if directly pertinent to New England politics. In terms of content, only oppositional political pamphlets were reckoned; others whose attitude to the government policy might be described as neutral or sympathetic, were discarded.

As a result of selection, I got 67 New England oppositional political pamphlets of 1801-1814. The criterion selected for their analysis is the availability and prevalence of national or sectional rhetoric in the pamphlets. In other words, to which feelings and priorities of the people - to their national consciousness or to their purely local, regional New England affiliations - did the Federalist authors appeal?

I have chosen two categories of evaluation: 1) "national rhetoric"; 2) "sectional or local rhetoric". Each one has 2 sub-categories: a) this kind of rhetoric was present *clearly, expressly*, and played an important role in the content; b) such rhetoric was present in the text but only in passing.

For the 67 pamphlets, the results look as follows. National rhetoric prevails in 13 pamphlets¹⁹² and is visible in another 49. Local rhetoric prevails in 24 cases¹⁹³ and is

¹⁹² H. Moore, A Discourse, Delivered at Milford; J. Lathrop, The Present War Unexpected; H. Small, Ode, in J. Tufts, An Oration Pronounced before the Federal Republicans of Charlestown, Massachusetts, July 4, 1814, Being the Anniversary of American Independence, (Charlestown, 1814); Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates from the Counties of Hampshire, Franklin, and Hampden; S. Austin, A Sermon, Preached in Worcester; Mr. Gaston's Speech; W. Sullivan, An Oration; A. Haskell, Oration Pronounced at Fitchburg; An Address of the Members of the House of Representatives of the Congress of the United States, to Their Constituents, on the Subject of the War with Great Britain, (Alexandria, 1812); Timothy Pickering, Letters Addressed to the People of the United States of America, (London, 1811); Fisher Ames, "Phocion," no. 1, in Works of Fisher Ames, vol. 2. (Boston, 1854), 152; Moses Dow, A Sermon, Preached in Beverley; Isaac C. Bates, An Oration, Pronounced Before the Washington Benevolent Society of the County of Hampshire, on Their First Anniversary, 1812. In Commemoration of the Nativity of Washington, (Northampton: Printed by William Butler, 1812).

simply present in 28 others. Thus, national rhetoric is present in 62, and sectional -- in 52 out of 67 pamphlets. A good example of national rhetoric clearly and expressly stated is the following passage:

Washington had no foreign predilections; his education, habits, and feelings were all American. Hence, we find in his administration, he exhibited a strict impartiality towards foreign nations, and consulted only the best interests, welfare, and peace of the United States.¹⁹⁴

An example of clearly and expressly stated sectional rhetoric is this passage about the possibility of war with Great Britain:

But even the people of New England would come to a pause! <...> Thus oppressed, exhausted, and alarmed, detesting the causes of the war, and looking forward to the fatal termination of the alliance with France, would they not find themselves reduced to that state of extreme necessity which always provides for itself? *Would they not, in such a case, feel compelled to seek by the law of self-preservation, their safety by a separate peace, and to leave the southern states to prosecute a war, which they had most wantonly brought upon the country?*¹⁹⁵

Both examples are vivid and clear. What is interesting, however, is that they both come from the same pamphlet. The name is also characteristic -- "New England Patriot."

¹⁹³ An Address to the Citizens of Massachusetts; D. Osgood, A Solemn Protest; T. Andros, The Grand Era; Kiah Bayley, War a Calamity; Elijah Mills, An Oration Pronounced at Northampton; J. Lathrop, A Discourse on the Law of Retaliation, Delivered in the New Brick Church, February 6, 1814, (Boston, 1814); Timothy Bigelow, An Address, Delivered on the Third Anniversary; Charles Prentiss, A Poem Delivered at Brookfield; Idem., New England Freedom; [J. Lowell], Thoughts in a Series of Letters; Facts Are Stubborn Things; An Address to the Citizens of the County of Plymouth; Southern Oppression; Inquiry into the Object and Tendency of the Present War; A Defence of the Clergy of New England; [J. Lowell], Jefferson Against Madison's War; John S. J. Gardiner, A Discourse Delivered at Trinity Church; [J. Lowell], Mr. Madison's War; Ibid., Perpetual War, the Policy of Mr. Madison; Fisher Ames, "Falkland," no. 2, 4; "Phocion," no. 4, in Works of Fischer Ames, vol. 2, (Boston, 1854); Observations on the Rhode Island Coal, and Certificates With Regard to Its Qualities, Value, and Various Uses, [Boston, 1814]; A Defence of the Clergy of Massachusetts, (Boston, 1804).

¹⁹⁴ John Lowell, The New England Patriot. Being a Candid Comparison of the Principles and Conduct of the Washington and Jefferson Administrations. The Whole Founded Upon Indisputable Facts and Public Documents, to Which Reference Is Made in the Text and Notes, (Boston, 1810), 19.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 147-148 (italics added).

The author was John Lowell, one of the most prominent Federalist radicals and the creator of the strongest oppositional writings of the time, including the famous pamphlet, Mr. Madison's War (1812).¹⁹⁶ Scholars usually mention him as a radical secessionist given to rhetorical excesses. Lowell was indeed radical, and often went further than other Federalists did, at times directly speaking about the necessity of disunion. Sometimes he would favor the secession of New England from the United States, sometimes, of the West from the East. What is fascinating, however, is that his works were densely imbued with national rhetoric. Loudly sounds the motive of offended national dignity in the same New England Patriot:

The first, and one of the earliest proofs of the partiality and submission of our administration to France, and which has continued to the present day is the unexampled meanness of the language of our ministers, at the court of Bonaparte. Among the whole host of ambassadors from the new made, tributary, and vassal kings, who surround the throne of this monarch-making emperor, there is no single representative, who has exhibited a more humble, submissive temper, or adopted language of more fulsome adulation, than the American ministers in France, nor did ever the ambassadors from a conquered prince experience such marked and so frequently repeated insults and indignities, as have been received by our ministers at the imperial court.¹⁹⁷

In the New England Patriot alone the pronouns “we” and “our,” respecting the President, the U. S. government, American army and navy, U. S. citizens, single federal

¹⁹⁶ John Lowell, Mr. Madison's War. A Dispassionate Inquiry into the Reasons Alleged by Mr. Madison for Declaring an Offensive and Ruinous War Against Great Britain. By a New England Farmer, (Boston, 1812); Idem., Perpetual War, The Policy of Mr. Madison, (Boston, 1812); Idem., Jefferson Against Madison's War, [Boston?, 1812]; Idem., The New England Patriot: Being a Candid Comparison of the Principles and Conduct of the Washington and Jefferson Administrations, The Whole Founded Upon Indisputable Facts and Public Documents, to Which Reference Is Made in the Text and Notes, (Boston, 1810); Idem., The Road to Peace, Commerce, Wealth, and Happiness. By an Old Farmer, [Boston, 1813]. Idem., Thoughts in a Series of Letters, in Answer to a Question Respecting the Division of the States. By a Massachusetts Farmer, (n.p., 1813).

¹⁹⁷ John Lowell, The New-England Patriot, 47-48, italics added.

employees, the nation in general, appear not less than 450 times on 148 pages. One comes across such expressions as “the honor of our country” (p.12), “the honor and interest of the United States” (p. 26), “our honor and independence” (p. 96). In other words, close reading indicates that Lowell had a clear idea about the ideals of patriotism. Nevertheless, as we have seen, he readily encouraged New England states to conclude a separate armistice with a potential enemy and withdraw from the war effort of the United States.

In our sample of New England oppositional pamphlets, those with exclusively national or exclusively sectional rhetoric are clearly a minority. They constitute but 19 out of 67 imprints analyzed (28%).¹⁹⁸ In most pamphlets, *both types* of rhetoric are present. The figures given above also prove this: 62 cases of national and 52 of sectional rhetoric out of the overall 67 pamphlets indicate considerable overlap between the two groups.

Here is what Kiah Bayley, a minister in Newcastle, Maine, said in 1812:

I feel as an American, love the country of my nativity, and cannot endure to see the evils that are coming upon her, without raising my voice to avert them.¹⁹⁹

But, reading further:

I believe a very great proportion of the people in New England, New York and New Jersey, are totally dissatisfied with the war. ...All which should be dear to

¹⁹⁸ J. McKean, Sermon. The Question of War with Great Britain Examined Upon Moral and Christian Principles, (Boston, 1808); An Address to the Citizens of Massachusetts, on the Causes and Remedy of Our National Distresses. By a Fellow Sufferer, (Boston, 1808); William E. Channing, A Sermon Preached in Boston, July 23, 1812; John Cleveland, A Discourse Delivered on the Day of National Humiliation and Prayer, August 20, 1812, (Boston, 1812); Josiah Webster, A Sermon Delivered at Newburyport, November 26, 1812, on the Evening of Public Thanksgiving in Massachusetts, (Newburyport, 1812); D. Webster, Considerations on the Embargo Laws, (n. p., 1808); H. Small, Ode; Southern Oppression; Inquiry into the Object and Tendency; J. Truair, The Alarm Trumpet; Mr. Gaston's Speech; A. Haskell, Oration Pronounced at Fitchburg; An Address of the Members of the House of Representatives; Fischer Ames, “Falkland,” no. 4; “Phocion,” no. 1, 5, 6; Observations on the Rhode Island Coal, and Certificates with Regard to Its Qualities, Value, and Various Uses, [Boston, 1814?]; Moses Dow, A Sermon, Preached in Beverley.

¹⁹⁹ Kiah Bayley, War a Calamity, 2.

freemen, is put in jeopardy by the war, into which the nation has been plunged by an overbearing southern influence. Can a nation thus divided stand? ... Can you believe that a war driven on by the slave holders of the south and the back woodsmen of the west, is really undertaken for the defence of our seamen, and the protection of our commerce?²⁰⁰

In the first excerpt we have a vivid example of patriotism, whereas in the second one the same author speaks only about the interests of his section of the country and regards the South and the West in negative terms.

Many other vivid examples are available, which time does not allow me to give. But the idea is clear enough. The one did not exist without the other. Sectional and national rhetoric were closely intertwined in the texts of oppositional pamphlets.

Another example of this intermix of the sectional and the national is the so-called Washington Benevolent Society of Massachusetts. Founded on February 22, 1812, in Boston, this was a purely political organization designed to broaden and deepen the Federalist party's base. The official activities of the Society²⁰¹ mainly consisted of unlimited acclamation of the personality and political principles of the first President in whose good old days, the Federalists asserted, the United States had flourished in all respects. Following the usual Federalist logic, "the Washingtonians" then proceeded to criticize Jefferson and Madison for ruining that paradise by abandoning the principles of Washington's "bequest." In particular, they attacked the war. Elijah H. Mills, a prominent Federalist from Northampton, Massachusetts, exclaimed furiously:

War having been declared, we have been told from high authority, "that all opposition to it is a species of moral treason, and must cease;" and "that the voice of complaint must be silenced." Go preach this doctrine to slaves. The sons of

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 19.

²⁰¹ The Washington Benevolent Society of Massachusetts Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Massachusetts imbibed different principles, in the schools of their fathers. Rocked in the cradle of freedom, they were early instructed in their rights, and they have yet to learn the duty of quiet acquiescence, in ruinous measures, or silent submission, to wanton injustice and oppression.²⁰²

It was at the meetings of the various New England Washington Benevolent Societies that many secessionist declarations resounded.²⁰³

On the one hand, the Federalists had founded the Washington Benevolent Societies in order to criticize the policy of the Republican administration. Sometimes this assumed the form of sectional argumentation, but even if not, the anti-government propaganda of the Society's members undoubtedly helped undermine the authority of the central power. On the other hand, the Society also idolized George Washington as a national hero. This could not but contribute to the development of American national consciousness. To say more, during the War of 1812 the Massachusetts W. B. S. repeatedly sent congratulatory addresses to the captains of American ships victorious over the British and held public festivities in commemoration of those victories. This was in marked contrast with the general Federalist disapprobation of this war.²⁰⁴ Thus, with one hand, the Federalists undermined the national government, with the other one, they supported it.

²⁰² Elijah H. Mills, An Oration Pronounced at Northampton, 12-13.

²⁰³ Timothy Bigelow, An Address, 15; Elijah H. Mills, An Oration Pronounced at Northampton, 23; Charles Prentiss, A Poem Delivered at Brookfield, 10; Idem., New England Freedom, 14, 27-28.

²⁰⁴ For example, at the meeting on December 8, 1812, the Massachusetts Society decided to express its gratitude to Commodore Decatur, the officers and crew of the frigate *United States* "for the gallantry and skill they so eminently displayed in the late glorious action, which terminated in the capture of the British frigate, *Macedonian*." (The Washington Benevolent Society of Massachusetts, journals, 26-27, Massachusetts Historical Society). On February 22, 1813, the Society expressed its gratitude to Commodore Bainbridge, officers and crew of the frigate *Constitution* for the capture of the British frigate *Java* (ibid., 30).

It is also worth remembering how strongly the Federalist-controlled legislature of Massachusetts reacted to the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions in 1799. The legislature repudiated the Resolutions and solemnly proclaimed that a state did not have the right to discuss the decisions made by the federal government. Ten years after, however, during the embargo, the legislature declared (1809) that a state did have such a right and not only discussed but openly condemned the act of the federal government that strengthened embargo measures.²⁰⁵ In both cases Federalists took diametrically opposite stands in regard to the central government, depending on what was profitable to them at that particular moment. Republicans, remarkably, acted in the same way. The Virginia and Kentucky resolutions of 1798-1799 written mainly by Thomas Jefferson were a model piece of regionalism. Nevertheless, as soon as the Republicans gained power in 1800, they “switched” over to the doctrine of a strong national government.

The examples considered here testify of a close, integral coexistence of the national and the sectional in the rhetoric and behavior -- hence, in the state of mind, of New England Federalists. This leads me to certain conclusions.

Evidently, one may speak about the relativity of national consciousness -- a certain dualism that was present in the New England society in the early 1800s. National consciousness in its proper form, that is, as a sense of belonging to the life and fate of one country, one fatherland, one nation -- the United States -- had by the early 19th century taken shape among educated New Englanders. The Federalists spoke quite consciously and often of the United States as their country, and expressed patriotism as a *national*

²⁰⁵ H. V. Ames, ed., State Documents on Federal Relations, 30-35.

feeling, using such terms as “our nation,” “my country,” etc. On the other hand, local and sectional loyalties remained strong as well. Apparently, in the Federalist mind there existed a certain equilibrium, a balance between national and sectional ideals. Whichever would prevail at this or that time, depended on the general situation in the United States and in New England at a particular moment. At different circumstances, the same Federalists could profess either national or sectional ideals. Whenever they felt a threat from the federal government to their political, economic, moral, etc. interests and principles, their loyalties “switched” from the national to the sectional level. And vice versa - when the federal government was in the hands of those who expressed their interests - the representatives of their party (and often region and social group) - they supported it and therefore professed national ideals. The national government by itself presented little more than symbolic value. In practice it retained such value only as long as “the proper people” held the reins. National loyalty appears to have been a trade item to be put at stake as the last recourse in party warfare. To put it briefly, preference was given to the national over the sectional loyalty, when and where this was profitable. The behavior of the legislature of Massachusetts in 1799 and 1809 serves as an example here, as does the increase of sectional resentment in pamphlet rhetoric during the War of 1812.

However, not everything depended on interest. Evidently, the Federalists would “become” nationalists or regionalists depending not only on the concerns of practicality but also on their own psychological disposition at a particular moment. The overlap of national and sectional rhetoric in pamphlets, as well as the contradictory behavior of the Washington Benevolent Society, suggests that even in their activities purely oppositional

to the general government, the Federalists sometimes not undermined but reinforced this government -- perhaps, contrary to their own will.

It is possible that the existence of an unsteady balance in the people's minds, that could easily tilt to either national or sectional side, is characteristic of the initial period of the formation of American national consciousness. One may also suppose that any substantial deterioration of the political situation, like the War of 1812, could provoke secession of a region that felt disadvantaged. The war ended unexpectedly, and nobody knows what would have happened had the events developed otherwise. After all, it is worth remembering how the Southerners -- patriots and nationalists to the utmost during the War of 1812 -- acted less than fifty years later, when they perceived their regional interests under threat from the North; and what the outcome of such a Southern perception was for the United States.

The unshaped and unsteady condition of national consciousness in the minds of many New England Federalists in the early 1800s by no means precluded but rather, suggested that at critical moments they would be able to make critical steps. Bearing this in mind, an attempt of Northern secession in 1815 will not seem so improbable.

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