

Thomas Jefferson's Transformative Presidency

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Thomas Jefferson created a public philosophy that created in essence his significance as not only a transformative president but as the founder who developed the rationale and enduring tradition for the United States political system. Above all, Jefferson is transformative alone for having created democracy when he introduced his public philosophy, as stated in Charles E. Merriam and Carl Becker's analysis. Jefferson's election on March 4, 1801, began his two presidencies and created the Jeffersonian Democracy. Jefferson's definition of a public philosophy is defined by James W. Ceaser. A public philosophy as defined by James W. Ceaser who reviewed the concept that was first used by the journalist Walter Lippman, in his book *The Public Philosophy*, was concerned about competing philosophies with liberalism against its adversary such as Marxism. Political scientists Theodore Lowi and Samuel Beer defined a public philosophy "as a synonym for what social scientists in American politics called ideology". Lowi and Beer further defined how a public philosophy was a transforming idea governing public opinion by utilizing Roosevelt's New Deal to explain an example of a change in public philosophy, in which as federal government is strengthened, replacing the older idea of an inactive government. Further, Lowi described how a public philosophy is a way of understanding the significance of public policies, i.e., New Deal Policies on society. In addition, James W. Ceaser, described a public philosophy "as a core set of values embodied in long term opinion that influences public policy over a full era."

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Introduction

In Carl Becker's essay written in 1943, the writer described that Jefferson's formulation of the Declaration of Independence expresses, "the universal principles which, as he thought, could alone justify the authority of any government at any time," (Becker, 1943, pp. 201-210). The Declaration states, "we hold these truths to be self-evident... it is better to be governed by persuasion than by force." (Jefferson, 1776). Becker analyzed President Thomas Jefferson's public philosophy, essentially that he had earlier written in 1776 as the Declaration of Independence, which explains why the English colony of 13 states justified having a revolution to no longer be governed by the King of England and thus to separate. Jefferson states in the Declaration, that "all just governments derive their authority from the consent of the governed," (Jefferson, 1776). Becker's article also analyzed Jefferson's theory of Republicanism which he believed was the way of governing according to the will of the people.

Charles E. Merriam, Jr explained how Jefferson's philosophy, defined Democracy by explaining seven elements of his definition: (1) Equal and exact justice, (2) Ensuring elections by the people, (3) Providing the

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guarantee of civil liberty, (4) Freedom of the press so that laws and government actions were explained, (5) Ensuring habeas corpus and jury trial, (6) The subordination of the military to the civil authority, and (7) Economical administration. In addition, Jefferson explained his explanation of democratic government, having a chief executive, styled as the “administrator” to be elected annually by a bicameral legislature, “to be ineligible three years in four, to possess no veto power and to serve without salary.” (Merriam, 1902, pp. 24-45). Jefferson further explained that his democratic political system required “two hooks”: being an educational system and a system of local government.

I find that Merriam’s analysis of Jefferson’s public philosophy, in contrast to Becker’s, provides a more applicable method of understanding Jefferson’s presidencies in adhering to his public philosophy. Thomas Jefferson’s presidency began with the Contested Election of 1801, where two elections occurred, the first was led by the voters and the second was led by the House of Representatives. The elections between the votes for Jefferson and Aaron Burr were deadlocked, while on the second electoral vote, Jefferson with the help of Alexander Hamilton became the third president of the United States.

The following depicts Stephen Howard Browne’s analysis from his book, *Jefferson’s Call for Nationhood: The First Inaugural Address* on March 4, 1801 Jefferson delivered his first inaugural address as he was elected as president together with Aaron Burr as vice president. Jefferson began his first inaugural address as, “Friends and fellow-citizens, Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow-citizens which is here assembled to express my grateful thanks...” (Browne, 2003, p. xiii).

Jefferson’s lengthy inaugural address demonstrated the new President’s ability to analyse the political parties in his election, as the former president John Adams was a federalist and the now the president, Thomas Jefferson, is a republican. Stephen Browne’s book, the analysis of Jefferson’s first inaugural address, quotes one of the “powerful defense of a party of his time”, which was Edmund Burke’s published writings in 1770. Edmund Burke’s new view and definition of a party was, “a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed,” (Browne, 2003, p. 19). This new conception of a party was important to Jefferson’s inaugural, as he stated,

we have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all republicans, we are all federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it. (Browne, 2003, p. xiv)

This last sentence of Jefferson’s inaugural, emphasized his political philosophy of his belief in the republican government as well as his understanding of Burke’s definition and meaning of how political parties should interact in a conjoint effort rather than, “acting in isolation” (Browne, 2003). Browne has analyzed Jefferson’s Inaugural as a call for Nationhood and as a partisanship that expressed Jefferson’s political philosophy, “in speaking to a particular set of republican values.” Meanwhile, Hofstadter believed that, “the creators of the first American party system, on both sides, Federalists and Republicans, were men who looked upon parties as sores on the body politic.” (Browne, 2003, p. 24).

Furthermore, Jefferson’s inauguration words, “we are all republicans, we are all federalists,” are in great contrast with what he said later in life that his election was, “the revolution of 1800”. The cause for this thinking was believed to have come from Jefferson’s attraction to the French Revolution in 1800 as the, “central

importance to the thought and emotions of Thomas Jefferson, and also to his far-reaching calculations throughout his period of Secretary of State.” (O’Brien, C. C. 1996).

First Presidency: 1801

Thomas Jefferson’s first presidency began with a conciliatory inaugural that reiterated his public policy that was fully explained by Charles E. Merriam and Carl Becker, however it was opposed by Chief Justice John Marshall. Jefferson immediately announced that his election had ended John Adams’ federalist policies, particularly the Sedition Law and federalism. Appropriately, Stephen Skowronek said: “Jefferson brought to the presidency an unprecedented partisan mission, one that infused his leadership with intensely ideological purposes and politicized his involvement with virtually all aspects of governmental operations.” (Skowronek, 1997, p. 70). Jefferson’s cabinet with James Madison, Secretary of State and Secretary Economy, Albert Gallatin who would eliminate Hamiltonian federal internal taxation, included the land tax whiskey excise, but kept the duties to resume the federal debt caused by the federalists. Also, Jefferson minimised patronage replacements. In addition, Jefferson preserved the bank of the United States, by revising its charter.

President Adams concluded his presidency with the 1801 Judiciary Act passed by the Federalist congressional majority that reorganised the federal judiciary creating 16 new federal judgeships all strongly federalists appointed by Adams, in addition, reduced the size of the supreme court with chief justice John Marshall. Adams made the decision to make John Marshall the new Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, but before this “last-minute appointment”, otherwise known as midnight appointments or “midnight judges” of Federalists used to create new judges, and Jefferson resented this act (Jewell, 2007).

During *Marbury v. Madison*, the so-called “midnight appointments”, had not been commissioned due to Chief Justice Marshall’s forgetfulness, of which he, “seriously misquoted the relevant part of Article III of the Constitution,” (Rose, 2003, pp. 209-214). Due to this misquotation, President Jefferson was required to deliver the commissions, by having Secretary of State, Madison to deliver four of Adams’ appointees their commissions with their other twelve to be granted commissions. William Marbury, one of those excluded by Jefferson, petitioned the Supreme Court to receive his commission.

Congressional Republicans introduced a bill to repeal the Judiciary act in January 1802. After much back-and-forth discussion regarding ending the judiciary act was repealed. Supreme Court John Marshall issued his decision on William Marbury’s request to receive his judicial appointment from the Supreme Court, with the decision: *Marbury v. Madison*. The Supreme Court’s decision RE Madison resulted in an epical decision that allowed the judiciary to repeal legislative decisions including 1801 Judiciary Act, but denied Marbury receiving his commission, enacted by the Federalist Party then in control of both the House and Federalists while still holding the majority legislative power after losing the Presidency.

Policies 1: Louisiana Purchase

Concluded with Napoleon, needing funds for his nationalist aims. Jefferson hesitated to purchase because of his constructionist concerns, but utilised his executive privilege and nominated James Monroe to negotiate the purchase for 15 million. Prior to making the purchase, Jefferson had assigned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to explore the western territories of the Pacific. With settlers purchasing farmlands in the vast new territory, and new states Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio added, Jefferson enhanced his agrarian philosophy.

Thomas Jefferson requested Meriweather Lewis to investigate the feasibility of the Missouri River as a water and land route to the Pacific Ocean, in addition, utilizing Lewis' outdoor skills to survey the flora and fauna in the vast territory acquired by the Louisiana Purchase. In addition, Jefferson asked Lewis to investigate the susceptibility of the territory sustaining the agricultural requirements for a large population. As such, Lewis was asked to observe the soil fertility of the Missouri River watershed together with all the rivers acquired by the Louisiana Purchase. Politically, the historic policy of acquiring territory enhanced Jefferson's transformative Presidency (Stephen, 1996).

Policies 2: Wars Between England and France

The wars between England and France turned into war of the British attacking American shipping routes to impress American sailors. As a result, Jefferson imposed an embargo on European trade that infuriated the New England merchants. British ships during the Napoleonic wars, threatened to prevent trading with the Embargo Act and threatened to prevent trading, particularly with France and England: New England manufacturing opposed strongly. Jefferson, with the Embargo avoided war with England over the Chesapeake incident.

Jefferson in avoiding war concentrated on helping Madison, Secretary of State to become the fourth U.S. President. Jefferson declined to have a third presidential term, and although he has been given credit for creating democracy, he failed to enact progressive reforms. Jefferson has been criticized about his failure to end slavery, particularly for his ownership of slaves on his plantation and his, "refusal to confront the problem of slavery", although his written belief was that all men are created equal (Finkelman, 2014).

Jefferson's Second Presidency: Significant Policies Enacted

As a result of Napoleon's need for funds, and having secured control of Spanish territories, including New Orleans he offered to sell large western territory. Jefferson assigned James Monroe to negotiate the Louisiana Purchase, which would add the large territory to the continental United States, and in addition enable settlers to buy land for farms, enhancing Jefferson's agrarian philosophy once more. However, Jefferson initially hesitated to agree to the Louisiana Purchase because of the constitutional constraint. As a result of the Louisiana Purchase causing a population surge into the territory, new states including Kentucky and Tennessee depended on navigation of the Mississippi to enable the increasing population to enable trade.

Jefferson's second presidency continued from his first with his foreign policy involving Napoleon's war with France that heavily involved England. As a result, with New England continuing its industrialization and trading with English shipping goods across the Atlantic, it caused the English navy and merchant shipping to discover that they were losing their sailors. Suspecting that their sailors had possibly left to work with Americans abroad, the English engaged American ships to discover if their sailors were aboard. As a result, several incidents occurred, particularly when the HMS leopard caused casualties in searching for British sailors. When New England federalists were angered by the Leopard attack on American merchants, they demanded war, and President Jefferson refused an embargo bill to prohibit all trade on land and water. Since New England industrialists depended on trade, which led to an attack on Jefferson's attempt to avoid war, protests on the embargo policy caused Jefferson to decide not to seek a third term.

Slavery: Jefferson's Policies

Jefferson's occupation as a plantation owner, was a farmer in Monticello, with the property he inherited

from his father, Peter Jefferson, which included, “at least seventy-five hundred acres [of land] and over sixty slaves”, for farming by growing tobacco, cotton, wheat, and other products (Wood, 2018). The beginning as a member of the colonial legislature in Williamsburg, Jefferson proposed a document, that would abolish slavery throughout the plantations. As Secretary of State, President George Washington’s cabinet, Jefferson wrote the Ordinance of 1784, forbidding slavery, which shaped the expansion across the American continent (Wood, 2018.) Gordon S. Wood, explained in his book, how Jefferson, who wrote the Ordinance of 1784, established the principle that all new states in the west after 1800, would not have slavery, while the Ordinance initially affected states in the Old Northwest territory, it applied also to the territory in the Louisiana Purchase.

Further on the topic of Jefferson and slavery, after the Louisiana Purchase was bought in 1803, together with the Democratic Republican’s control of congee, a connection of interest in slavery was created. The event of closing the Atlantic slave trade also heightened an increased interest in slavery. In addition, southern plantation slavery had increased, and in turn, the southern interest in expanding slavery into the western territories had increased immensely (Wilentz, 2019).

New England’s opposition to the Louisiana Purchase expressed the concern with a bill to organise the lower portion of the Louisiana Territory, designated Orleans territory, came before the Senate, advanced by John Breckinridge of Kentucky, in close consultation with his ally and confident, President Thomas Jefferson. James Hillhouse of Connecticut, a conservative High Federalist with antislavery sentiments voted against the Louisiana Purchase, and defended Jefferson’s proposal of defusing the slave population in that it would somehow hasten emancipation had he joined in the New England secessionist plotting. Hillhouse proposed a ban on the introduction of slaves into Louisiana from foreign ports, and, “presented a notion that would have emancipated adult slaves to be taken to Louisiana, but it was defeated by a vote of eleven to seventeen,” (Rothman, 2007).

“President Jefferson’s overall record on slavery was at best contorted and self-serving, but his long-standing opposition to the Atlantic slave-trade was principled and effective,” (Rothman, 2007, p. 182).

The Affairs

Jefferson’s most important relationship with slavery involved his relationship with Sally Hemings, a slave who came to Monticello as part of the dowry through his marriage with Martha, the daughter of John Wayles. When Jefferson was requested to go to Paris to request financial assistance, he brought his daughter Patsy together with two slaves, sixteen-year old Sally Hemings, and her brother John, who would be educated in French cooking. As a result of bringing Sally with him, Jefferson has been accused of being racist, “there can be no question that Thomas Jefferson was deeply and profoundly racist,” the writer suggested however, “being attracted to or having affection for a member of a race does not mean that one has to love or respect members of that race... Thomas Jefferson’s racism was not extraordinary.” (Gordon-Reed, 1997). The story of the sixteen-year old slave is added to this discussion of slavery and Thomas Jefferson, in contrast to the writer, Annette Gordon Reed’s discussion of Jefferson’s relationship with Sally Hemings, since Reed accused Jefferson of being a racist as a result of Jefferson’s having children with Sally who was a, “prepubescent slave girl” (Gordon-Reed, 1997). Reed’s analysis of Jefferson’s relationship with Sally is contrasted with his affair with Maria Cosway, who was discussed by the historian Fawn Brodie. Maria Cosway had gone to Paris to visit Thomas Jefferson for almost four months, being his mistress although she had a husband. Jefferson had, “kept his copies of his own letters to Maria, and all of Maria Cosway’s letters to him,” (Brodie, 1974).

In 1802, James Thompson Callender published a “series of articles” in the *Richmond Recorder* that launched the most, “scurrilous expose”, in American history, one of which was about Sally Hemmings’ son having “striking” resemblance to Thomas Jefferson (Burg, 1986). Annette Gordon-Reed also analyzed Callender’s assertion of Jefferson’s miscegenation with his slave, Sally Hemmings as to whether, the writer of the 1802 *Richmond Recorder* had lied about the then president having children with Sally Hemmings. According to Reed, Jefferson was most definitely involved with Sally as his mistress, based on one of Sally’s sons’ recollections of Thomas Jefferson having six sons with his mother. The historian Fawn Brodie had an analysis of which Jefferson was psychologically inclined to have an affair with Sally Hemmings since after his wife passed away, Jefferson had sworn to never have another wife. According to Brodie, it was natural for a man, lonely for marital affection, to seek a relationship (Brodie, 1974). When Jefferson first married his wife, Martha Jefferson, and stated that Jefferson must never marry another woman, therefore on Martha’s death, Jefferson promised that he would never marry another woman. As she lay there dying with her husband at her side, Martha made her husband promise that her four children would never have a stepmother. All of the slaves, including Sally Hemmings, witnessed her death and the promise that Martha made Jefferson take. Another reason is when Jefferson was in Paris, he fell in love with the beautiful artists Maria Cosway, whose relationship with Jefferson was described by Brodie, in a chapter devoted to Jefferson’s love affair called “My Head and My Heart” (Brodie, 1974, p. 199). The chapter described the beginning of the affair when Jefferson moved to Paris and met Maria Cosway. Cosway was married for already three years, to a miniaturist artist, named Richard Cosway who was having numerous affairs. Jefferson was in awe of Maria because she resembled his first wife Martha Wayles. Maria Cosway was “a fragile languorously feminine woman of twenty-seven, with luminous blue eyes, exquisite skin and a halo of golden curls.” (Brodie, 1974, p. 200).

Transformative Presidencies

Why is Thomas Jefferson a Transformative President? Each of the five presidents has similarly transformed the American Political System. Abraham Lincoln through his presidency utilized his political philosophy to create a political party that changed American politics by creating the Republican party. Franklin Delano Roosevelt demonstrated how a President believed it was possible to utilize his presidency in creating the New Deal to solve the greatest economic depression that changed the meaning of presidential powers, transforming the American presidency as the “Imperial Presidency”. Andrew Jackson transformed the American Political System similarly in the way that Abraham Lincoln did by creating the democratic party. All presidents have a political philosophy that uniquely changed the political system. Jackson initially followed Thomas Jefferson’s philosophy and transferred American politics away from Jefferson’s presidency based on an aristocratic presidency that was not Democratic according to Andrew Jackson’s political philosophy. I have included other Presidents, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump who are also transformative in American politics.

Conclusion/Abstract: Thomas Jefferson’s Transformative Presidency

Jefferson, following his public philosophy was the first president to establish the Republican government in 1801 by defeating President John Adams’ Federalist Party. Jefferson’s Republicanism established an egalitarian right of the people to be represented according to their beliefs resulted in Jefferson being the most transformative president.

Of the founder generation, Jefferson was the most significant in wishing to end slavery, as a proponent of an agrarian economy in contrast with Alexander Hamilton's incipient philosophy of an industrial economy, as supported by the Bank of the United States. Despite being a plantation owner in the southern states that fully supported slavery, Jefferson as a member of the House of Burgesses in Williamsburg proposed to end slavery. Jefferson's foreign policy of the Embargo Act alienated New England manufacturers who depended on trade through industrialism. The Embargo occurred during the Napoleon era engaging with England. Jefferson enacted a policy to prevent the war that occurred with President Madison. In conclusion, I include a statesman, Henry Clay who carried Jefferson's policies and public philosophy.

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