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inevitably, studies of early U.S. diplomatic history overlap with early American political history. Similarly, scholarship on the U.S. political world of the 1790s and the early republic revolves extensively around crucial issues of foreign policy. The link between the two is as unavoidable as it is revealing for they are at once intertwined and inextricable.

Jasper M. Trautsch’s book, *The Genesis of America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1793-1815*, illustrates this point nicely. In fact, the thesis of his work is that foreign policy orientations drove and shaped domestic politics in the early republic and vice versa. Specifically, he contends that foreign policy-makers promoted U.S. nationalism by sparking conflicts with Great Britain and France in order to disentangle the fledgling nation from its European points of reference.

Trautsch’s book is impressive and wide-ranging, a work in which Rhonda Barlow, Lindsay Chervinsky, Matthew Hale, and Peter S. Onuf, the reviewers in this roundtable, find strengths and achievements to praise. They note, for example, that Trautsch is good at emphasizing the significance of party ideological conflict for both Federalists and Republicans as they assessed perceived threats from Great Britain and France. Several observe that this is an ambitious work that will stimulate further thinking among scholars. Others praise the book’s solid integration of political correspondence with diplomatic sources and also saluted his astute and informative analysis of the era’s rich body of political cartoons. They hail the volume as a strongly developed study of the influence of European powers on American self-perception and also note its sensitive treatment of the ways in which political leaders pursued military and diplomatic goals with a close eye on their domestic audiences. And finally, several find the book to be very insightful on the effects of the Quasi-War and the Republicans’ later break with the French, just as they are also impressed by his portrayal of the logic of Republican policies during the run-up to the War of 1812 in ways that ultimately help us make better sense of actions such as the Embargo of 1807 that can seem illogical to modern historians and readers.

I have grouped together these strengths identified by reviewers because there seems to be a clear consensus on the major merits of *The Genesis of America*. The participants tend to agree about the book’s positive points and are also of like minds on the contributions Trautsch makes to the literature and the ways in which his book deepens our knowledge of the interplay between foreign policy and domestic politics.

But each reviewer raised a number of questions about the volume and took issue with some of its arguments and interpretations. Considering each review individually will illuminate particular critical responses while also suggesting the emergence of some consensus opinions on this work that offer starting points for further scholarship. The reviewers form a well-chosen, nicely varied set of critics who have enriched this roundtable with a range of provocative challenges to Trautsch. All engage fully and deeply with this work, taking it seriously and learning from it. Yet each finds different aspects of the volume’s thesis, its authorial judgments, and its conclusions open to some tough-minded critical commentary on a disparate set of points. Their individual reviews elaborate on these criticisms, while my introduction will set forth some of points that seem most salient in their commentaries.

Peter S. Onuf suggests that Trautsch downplays the earlier or previous examples of “othering” and “otherness” that gave rise to the American Revolution. Not only did the Americans turn the British into the “other,” they also did the same to Native Americans and enslaved blacks in order to create a unified white Patriot nation that was identified by racial solidarity. Onuf faults the book for skipping past the presence of such activity in the Revolutionary era and argues that by doing so, it misses the continuity between the 1770s and 1780s and the decades that followed. “If a popular, ‘democratic’ posture of belligerence is the predicate of national identity formation,” Onuf observes, “the Revolution is the obvious point of departure, not the wars that Americans subsequently...chose to fight.”

For Rhonda M. Barlow, the issue comes with Trautsch’s treatment of the differences within political parties. She finds that the book paints with too broad a brush, failing to distinguish between High Federalists (like Alexander Hamilton) and moderate Federalists (such as John Adams). Barlow also charges that Trautsch fails to grasp the security issue in the early republic and the fact that some partisans might have favored seeking a connection to Great Britain or France for reasons of...
national safety and security rather than identity. Because Trautsch tends to see the Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties as monoliths, Barlow believes that he does not always appreciate the multi-sidedness of the questions and issues with which the monograph grapples.

In much the same vein, Matthew Rainbow Hale finds that The Genesis of America, for all its strengths, lacks the nuance and subtlety needed to deal sensitively with its subject matter and tends to overstate or overdetermine its arguments and analysis. Hale also detects an implicit pro-Federalist (or anti-Republican) bias in the work, chiefly in the way evidence is read and interpretations are presented. Ultimately, Hale wonders if Trautsch may overlook the dominance of political partisanship and its ability to blind its followers. Although he sees the book as stimulating further thought, Hale does not find its arguments particularly persuasive.

Finally, Lindsay M. Chervinsky echoes some of the previous points while staking out her own original assessment. She, too, finds the book’s arguments and significance undercut by its tendency to overgeneralize issues that are complex and nuanced, and to overstate its case in making interpretive arguments. For example, Chervinsky notes that Trautsch may have read early national newspapers too uncritically, not accounting for their highly partisan perspectives which did not always reflect the nation and world as straightforwardly as they insisted to their readers. She also finds instances of the author misrepresenting or conflating key points, especially in the tendency to conflate “byproduct with causation.” Too often, Chervinsky laments, the book assumes a uniformity and a one-size-fits-all model regarding party positions which are overdrawn and overly broad.

It may be said that one of the hallmarks of a good book is that it stimulates thoughtful and deeply engaged responses from readers and critics, even—perhaps especially—when those critics find as much or more to question as they do to praise. By this standard, Jasper Trautsch’s book succeeds. As these reviews indicate, his book has given students of early American politics, foreign policy, and nationalism much to consider.

Participants:

Jasper M. Trautsch is a Senior Lecturer in Modern History at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Before taking up this post in 2019, he was a Lecturer in American History at the University of Regensburg. He holds a PhD in modern history from the Free University of Berlin and is the author of numerous articles on U.S. foreign policy and American nationalism and the editor of Civic Nationalisms in Global Perspective, published by Routledge in 2019. He has recently finished his second monograph, in which he reconstructs the conceptual history of the West.


Rhonda M. Barlow is a research associate for The Adams Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society. She is currently writing a book on John Adams and foreign policy.

Lindsay M. Chervinsky, Ph.D., is Scholar in Residence at the Institute for Thomas Paine Studies and Senior Fellow at the International Center for Jefferson Studies. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis. She is the author of the award-winning book, The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution, published by Harvard University Press in April 2020. Her work has also been published in articles in the Law and History Review, the Journal of the Early Republic, TIME, the Washington Post, USA Today, The Hill, and more.

Matthew Rainbow Hale, Associate Professor of History at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, is completing a manuscript tentatively titled “The French Revolution and the Forging of Modern American Democracy” (under contract, University of Virginia Press). 

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Peter S. Onuf. Thomas Jefferson Foundation Professor of History Emeritus, University of Virginia, is the author of many works on the history of the early American republic, including *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison: Madison House, 1993) and *Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War* (University of Virginia Press, 2006), both co-authored with his brother, international relations theorist Nicholas G. Onuf.
In *The Genesis of America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1793-1815*, Jasper M. Trautsch tells the familiar story of the emergence of America’s first party system and the disagreements over foreign policy that contributed to it. But this book is very different from Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick’s *The Age of Federalism.*

Rather than focusing on Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson as arch rivals, and their differing views on how best to secure American interests, Trautsch uses the framework of identity and the ‘Other.’ Although Trautsch acknowledges that a form of American identity and nationalism developed in the colonial period and during the War of Independence, he discounts this nationalism as not ‘potent’ and focuses on the period after the ratification of the Constitution (6-7). He further narrows his investigation by casting Great Britain, the mother country, and France, the sister republic, as the significant ‘Others’ from whom Americans needed to distinguish themselves. Although he argues that external enemies were key to developing American identity, conflicts with the Spanish Empire and the Barbary States are excluded because of the relative weakness of those powers (17-18). Similarly, Trautsch argues that Indians and Black slaves, America’s ‘internal enemies,’ though clearly ‘Others,’ could not be used to develop a distinct American identity separate from that of white Europeans (20-21).

To explain “how the American union... evolved into a nation,” Trautsch argues that Americans “were in need of external enemies and foreign threats,” and that “by provoking, declaring, and waging war, the federal government could unite the nation through the creation of a foreign threat” (7, 10). But the political divisions meant that “Republicans favored a confrontational foreign policy towards Great Britain, whereas Federalists advocated provoking tensions with France. In other words, attempts to promote American nationalism at first created more divisions than unity” (28). Trautsch begins by introducing readers to the political ideologies and struggle for neutrality in the Early American Republic. He next devotes two chapters to Federalists using the Quasi-War to ‘disentangle’ the Republicans from France, and follows with two chapters showcasing Republicans using the War of 1812 to ‘disentangle’ the Federalists from Great Britain. The conclusion looks to the Monroe Doctrine as evidence of the new American national identity.

There is much to like in *The Genesis of America.* One of the strengths of the book is the diverse array of sources and extensive bibliography. Trautsch seamlessly integrates diplomatic records found in sources such as *American State Papers* and the correspondence of presidents and congressmen with contemporary newspaper articles and a selection of political cartoons. The book is a model for how scholars can use the wide variety of sources available for the study of the Early American Republic. In particular, anyone bewildered by the complexity of the political cartoons of the era would find Trautsch’s analysis helpful. For scholars interested in race, culture, and gender, as well as identity, the relevance of foreign policy is clearly demonstrated. The thesis that national identity required ‘disentanglement’ from both France and Great Britain, and that the Quasi-War and War of 1812 were the catalysts for this disentanglement, echoes former president John Adams’s observation in 1812:

> When I was exerting every nerve to vindicate the honor, and demand a redress of the wrongs of the nation against the tyranny of France, the arm of the nation was palsied by one party. Now Mr. Madison is acting the same part, for the same ends, against Great Britain, the arm of the nation is palsied by the opposite party. And so it will always be while we feel like colonists, dependent for protection on France or England; while we have so little national public opinion, so little national principle, national feeling, national patriotism; while we have no sentiment of our own strength, power, and resources.

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A compact book that examines both the Quasi-War and the War of 1812, and focuses on the political divisions and struggle for Americans to escape their colonial mindset and form a national identity, is therefore welcome.

But unlike Adams, Trautsch does not write about Americans who were motivated by “dependence on protection.” Instead, they were motivated by their admiration of either British or French political structures, and by their identification with their favored nation. Americans refused to acknowledge that they were not the target of the great powers, although Trautsch softens his criticism with regards to the Republicans: The Federalists “deliberately instigated a foreign war and deceptively blamed France for it,” but the Republicans “felt forced,” to declare war, and he concedes that London bears “part of the blame” for the outbreak of the War of 1812 (172, 209).

Although it is true that the United States was caught in the crossfire between Great Britain and France, it does not follow that, in responding to the violation of the United States’ neutral rights, the Federalists become the aggressor, using the French attack on American shipping as “a pretext to escalate” the crisis with France (112, 119). John Adams advised President George Washington during the Nootka Sound crisis, “Nations are not obliged to declare War for every Injury or even Hostility,” but as president, Adams had both the right and the responsibility to defend American merchantmen. Additionally, the High Federalists should be distinguished from the Adams Federalists, with some of the former attempting to ‘escalate,’ rather than ‘provoke,’ both the Quasi-War with France and a quasi-alliance with Great Britain, and the latter supporting the president’s policy of a combination of force and diplomacy. The relegation of John Adams largely to a few pages at the end of chapter four means that the argument hinges on the “Adams administration...hoping” the diplomatic mission to France would fail, and that “the ultimate aim of the peace mission was... to obtain the justification of an outright war,” and that it was a “hoax” (114, 115, 126). Yet when Adams “sent Virginia Federalist John Marshall, South Carolinian Federalist Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Massachusetts Republican Elbridge Gerry to France in 1797, he sincerely wished that they would succeed in keeping peace between both nations” (158). As Trautsch correctly observes, Adams did not want to fight France because “he knew that it would drive the U. S. into the arms of England” (158). Despite his admittedly lethargic leadership, if Adams were better integrated into Trautsch’s analysis of the Quasi-War, the limitations of the High Federalists to dictate policy would become apparent, and a distinction would be drawn between manufacturing a crisis for domestic purposes and taking advantage of one. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine a Federalist, even a High Federalist like Alexander Hamilton, being ‘pro-British’ because he thought good relations with Great Britain were the best way to secure American interests, and not because he lacked an American identity.

Trautsch’s argument is more convincing when dealing with the Republican response to impressment, considering the high percentage of British seamen serving on American ships (194-195). Most historians agree that had James Madison received the news that Parliament had finally repealed the Orders-in-Council, the United States would not have declared war on 18 June 1812 (169). And Canadians do tend to view the American invasions as an unjustified attack that they proudly and successfully repelled. But none of this means that the Republicans should be held responsible for “an escalation of tensions” with Great Britain, or that commercial coercion was not a defensive measure (173, 195). As Adams wrote on 8 Oct. 1813, “A more necessary war was never undertaken. It is necessary against England; necessary to convince France that we are

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something: and above all necessary to convince ourselves, that we are not nothing.”5 In other words, the United States could justifiably defend itself, and promote its American identity at the same time.

If the disentanglement of Americans from Great Britain and France included an end to depending on the European powers to defend the former colonies, then the Spanish Empire, the Barbary States, and the Indian nations are relevant to the argument. That conflicts with Indians contributed to American national identity is part of Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis and more recently, Walter Hixon’s *American Settler Colonialism: A History*.6 With the loss of British passes for American merchantmen in the Mediterranean, an appeal to France for protection from the Barbary corsairs was included in the Model Treaty.7 As Robert J. Allison has shown, Americans did distinguish themselves from the Muslim Barbary corsairs, and the rise of a more egalitarian evangelical Protestantism, as distinct from hierarchical British Anglicanism and French and Spanish Roman Catholicism, as well as Deism and French revolutionary atheism, seems a vital part of the emerging American identity.8 Trautsch also acknowledges that active participation in the War of Independence created an American identity for veterans (15). Many Federalist leaders had served in the Continental Army. It would have been interesting to see an examination of the Society of the Cincinnati during the Quasi-War, as membership included both Federalists and Frenchmen.

It is also not clear that the ‘disentanglement’ from France and Great Britain resulted in a new American identity. Regional interests remained strong in the United States, and peace in Europe meant an end to the domestic political conflict over how best to secure neutral rights (253, 268). Perhaps the Quasi-War and the War of 1812 are more akin to the War of Independence and the Mexican War than Trautsch’s thesis allows (264-265). But *The Genesis of America* does make a strong case that the War of 1812 should be remembered as America’s Third War of Independence, with the Quasi-War having the honor of being the Second.

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5 John Adams to Richard Rush, 8 October 1813, Adams Family Papers, reel 95.


In The Lives of James Madison and James Monroe, Congressman and former president John Quincy Adams observed, “In the primitive principles of the parties, the Federalists were disposed to consider the first principle of Society to be the preservation of order; while their opponents viewed the benefit above all others in the enjoyment of liberty” (69). In The Genesis of America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1793-1815, Jasper M. Trautsch accepts Adams’s assessment of the early political parties and analyzes how they spent the first twenty-five years after the passage of the federal constitution sparring over national identity through the lens of foreign policy. Trautsch traces the rise and fall of both parties through three distinct phases: the Jay Treaty debates; the Quasi-War; and the long run-up to and conflict in the War of 1812.

Trautsch starts his story after the United States gained independence from Great Britain through the Treaty of Paris. By winning the war, however, the U.S. lost its foe, and thus its common ground around which the states could rally. Like many scholars before him, Trautsch demonstrates that the states had more in common with Britain than each other. He argues that the process of arguing over national identity—what it meant to be an American—actually formed a national identity (29). But not everyone agreed about what that identity should be. Federalists viewed American identity in opposition to the anarchy and democratic excesses of France, while Republicans positioned themselves against the monarchical oppression of Britain. Trautsch contends that both sides sought out wars with their foreign enemies to force their domestic rivals to fall in line, declare their loyalty to the American cause, and denounce their previous ties to either Britain or France (63). For example, Trautsch suggests that Federalists provoked a very real war with France in 1798 to discredit Republicans. Once public sentiment had sided with the administration, Federalists pressured Republicans to disentangle themselves from their pro-French ideology.

While each side had the opportunity to wage war and attack their domestic rivals, only the Republicans managed long-term political success. Federalists successfully drove a wedge between Republicans and France, but could not convince the American public to rally behind their conservative ideology (143). In response to French aggression, Republicans shifted gears. They no longer compared the French and American revolutions as sister republics. Instead, Republicans contended that their democratic-egalitarian values were not those of the violent, anarchic French; America was exceptional (146).

After the Treaty of Paris ended the Quasi-War and Republicans had rejected France, they could no longer question their rivals’ loyalty to the nation. Federalists also lost France as an international menace after Britain’s victory over Napoléon, and they lost their basis for national ideology, according to Trautsch’s interpretation. Republicans stepped into the breach and focused on the threat posed by Britain. They argued that monarchies were inherently belligerent—as opposed to peace-loving republics—and that Britain pursued a grand design to destroy the U.S. As one of the last remaining empires and the owner of the most powerful navy in the world, Britain loomed especially large in Republican imaginations (183). They began a self-fulfilling cycle where they perceived threat in British actions, refused to negotiate or pursue diplomacy, and thus were “proven right” once Britain responded with hostile measures (195). Trautsch argues that Republicans felt forced into war with Britain but justified the conflict as a defensive measure. Republicans’ claims about the British threat appeared to be validated once British forces actually invaded and British diplomats made demands for land during peace negotiations (172). They also used the same tactics employed by Federalists during the Quasi-War, obligating their domestic enemies to renounce all ties to Britain and declare their loyalty to the U.S. (247).

Trautsch concludes his story by quickly examining the decades after the War of 1812. National identity had solidified, but the lack of a foreign menace undermined national unity. While the Federalist Party had largely disappeared, sectional and

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ideological differences had not. Without a common war cause to rally behind, the partisan conflict and sectional division over the issue of slavery took center stage and slowly drove the nation toward civil war (268).

*The Genesis of America* makes several important contributions to the literature on the Early Republic and the broader scholarly conversation. First, it contributes to a growing body of work that positions the U.S. in an interconnected Atlantic community and considers how international developments shaped political and domestic events. Whereas many scholars, such as Eliga Gould, Daniel Hulsebosch, and Max Edling, have analyzed how American politicians engaged in state-building to achieve diplomatic goals or with an eye toward European audiences, Trautsch examines how politicians pursued diplomatic or war aims on the international stage with an eye toward American audiences. I found this perspective interesting and a helpful companion to the existing work.

Next, Trautsch’s section on the embargo and the lead-up to the War of 1812 changed the way I view the Jefferson and Madison administrations. Trautsch demonstrates how Republicans were consumed with American self-importance and overvalued their place in British consciousness. The cycle of assumption of British aggression—refusing to negotiate—then being proven correct when faced with further hostility is very perceptive and helps explain otherwise irrational behavior. I finished the book with a much better sense of why Republicans pursued actions, such as the embargo, that seemed logical to them, while utterly ridiculous to twenty-first century audiences (183-195).

Trautsch makes a few other specific points that really challenged my understanding of the Early Republic. While concluding his section on the Quasi-War, Trautsch argued that one of the long-term ramifications of this conflict was the Louisiana Purchase. In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans distrusted Napoleon and worried that he harbored a scheme for world domination. Given his recent victories in Europe, North America did not seem that outlandish for a next target. Jefferson’s administration pursued the Louisiana Purchase as a way to protect American access to the Mississippi River and broader American economic interests. The Quasi-War forced Republicans to renounce their connection to the French, thus making possible the distrust of Napoléon ten years later (165). While Trautsch included this argument as a throw-away line in the conclusion of the section on the Quasi-War, it is a really great point.

The role of loyalty and its relationship to national identity throughout the entire book is really interesting, but especially in context of Hartford Convention. Trautsch effectively demonstrates that Federalists organized the Hartford Convention to protest the southern power bloc in the federal government, and to protest Republican democratic-egalitarian policies. The interpretation that the Federalists organized the Convention to secede from the union was entirely a Republican invention and one that has shown impressive staying power (247-248).

Despite these contributions, I remain unconvinced about several aspects of Trautsch’s argument. First, for a book about diplomacy, Trautsch downplays critical diplomatic norms and international etiquette. For example, in the section on the Quasi-War, Trautsch suggests that Elbridge Gerry, or all of the American peace commissioners, should have just waited in Paris until France gave up its demands for money, thereby maintaining a channel of communication and allowing Adams to send a second peace commission (122). This suggestion would have required James Marshall, Elbridge Gerry, and Charles


Cotesworth Pinckney to ignore very real insults to national honor, accept terms specifically prohibited in their instructions, negotiate with unofficial envoys after they had been snubbed by French officials, and remain in the country after receiving explicit orders to leave. Marshall, Pinckney, and eventually Gerry all left because of these conditions, not because they were trying to provoke war with France.

Next, when Trautsch discusses political positions on both sides he eliminates or ignores moderate positions. Not all Federalists agreed on all policies, nor did Republicans speak with unanimity. When discussing the Neutrality Crisis in 1793, Trautsch argues that Republicans wanted to join the war in order to aide France and that Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson encouraged French Minister Edmond Charles Genet to arm privateers and undermine President George Washington’s proclamation of neutrality (59-76). I fundamentally disagree with this interpretation. While Jefferson preferred a pro-French neutrality, he was under no illusions that the U.S. was equipped to fight a war against Britain. He worked hard to defend the administration against Genet and to get the wily minister to cease his privateering operation. This example is one of many where the author paints a broad brush over the positions of the political parties and eliminates the possibility of nuance.

Additionally, Trautsch attributes too much power to party structures and organizing ability. Based on the evidence Trautsch provides, I am unconvinced that the Republican and Federalist parties in the Early Republic had the ability to churn out votes, sway public opinion, and enforce policies on the scale indicated by Trautsch. For example, as tensions escalated in 1811 between the U.S. and Britain, there was a significant turnover in Congress before the twelfth session. Trautsch argues that Republicans had been churning out pro-war sentiment in the newspapers and the massive elections triggered a national conversation about foreign policy. He suggests that contemporaries saw this election as a sign of voter approval for the looming war (203). I remain skeptical that the Republican Party employed such sophisticated newspaper and voter turnout campaigns around the issue of foreign policy, and that public opinion, whatever Trautsch means as such, would attribute that turnover to one issue.

Finally, my largest qualm with The Genesis of America is that Trautsch’s argument conflates by-product with causation. Trautsch supplies ample evidence through quotations from private letters and editorials that both Federalists and Republicans saw conflict as a political opportunity. But those quotations do not mean that officials pursued war to achieve political aims. For example, Trautsch cites quotations from Senator James Lloyd of Maryland and Senator Theodore Sedgwick of Massachusetts that expressed glee that a declaration of war would reveal “Jacobins” as un-American and encouraged the hanging of “traitors and exported Frenchmen” (133). While these are colorful quotations, Lloyd and Sedgwick offered these gems while the conflict was already taking place with France and after the peace commission had failed in a dramatic fashion. These statements are evidence of partisan tensions to be sure, but cannot be interpreted as intent for Federalist action a year or two prior.

Overall, Trautsch makes an excellent argument about the role of foreign policy in the creation of American nationalism and offers important nuance to many key moments in the Early Republic. But I found his overarching argument—that both parties sought out war to discredit their political rivals and form their version of national identity in opposition to a foreign nation—unpersuasive and unsubstantiated.

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4 For example, Trautsch gives many examples of newspaper articles on the war, but doesn’t provide any evidence for their reach, readership, or voter turnout. Given that newspapers were highly partisan and often linked to one party, their editorials were frequently propaganda. Just because the newspapers claimed the election results were a referendum on foreign policy, doesn’t make it so.
The Genesis of America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of American National Identity, 1793-1815 is a thoughtful, well researched, and rewarding study of how Americans in the early republic conceptualized and constructed their national identity vis-à-vis Great Britain and France. Deftly combining political-cultural and diplomatic history—or perhaps providing an example of the new, more expansive diplomatic history—Jasper Trautsch offers fresh perspectives on frequently discussed episodes in the quarter century after the Constitution’s implementation. Although not every idea put forth persuades, the book succeeds in stimulating further reflection.

After an initial chapter outlining how Great Britain and Revolutionary France served as general reference points for Americans seeking to define their nation, Trautsch digs into specific foreign policy controversies. In his coverage in chapter two of President George Washington’s Proclamation of Neutrality, Citizen Genet, and the Jay Treaty, the author emphasizes not only Federalists’ desire to distance the United States from the new French Republic, but also Democratic-Republicans’ unwillingness to accept any accord with the British. “Republicans,” Trautsch notes astutely, “came to conclude that the better the diplomatic terms of the treaty were, the worse it would be for the future of democratic egalitarianism in the U.S” (96). So insistently did Jeffersonian politicians in the House of Representatives reject Jay’s Treaty that they nearly succeeded in undermining it by voting to deny appropriate funding. Trautsch asserts that, in the end, “improved Anglo-American relations” meant that “Republican diatribes against Great Britain no longer seemed reasonable,” but the evidence he shares tells a more complicated story (106). In particular, that the funding vote in the House passed by a mere 3 votes (51 to 48) over half a year after President Washington signed the treaty into existence makes clear that “diatribes” against the United Kingdom continued to appear “reasonable” to plenty of people well after Anglo-American relations improved.

The author argues in chapter three that the war-provoking steps taken by late 1790s Federalists (other than President John Adams) were part of a concerted effort to “permanently undermine Francophile definitions of American identity, discredit democratic egalitarianism as a viable political ideology in America, and ensure Federalist dominance over the nation” (111-112). French marine attacks accordingly served as a “necessary pretext to escalate tensions with the French republic” (112). That Federalists hoped to take a more aggressive stance in relation to France and become the sole ruling coalition in the United States is undeniable. But Trautsch’s assessment of Federalist diplomacy in relation to France is more difficult to sustain in light of various scholars’ description of Alexander Hamilton as less cynical, less belligerent, and less partisan than is usually assumed.1

The response of Democratic-Republicans to the XYZ Affair occupies much of chapter four. According to Trautsch, the rupture in Franco-American relations made it “increasingly difficult for Republicans to define America by positive reference to France, without appearing un-American, as Federalist newspapers kept reminding them” (135). As the reference to Federalist newspapers suggests, some of the evidence for Democratic-Republicans’ XYZ Affair-induced discomfiture comes from conservative efforts to publicly pressure their opponents to recant their Francophilia. Yet Federalists also commented on Democratic-Republicans’ political difficulties in private letters to allies. Even more importantly, as Trautsch ably demonstrates, some Jeffersonians responded to the Franco-American diplomatic crisis by distancing themselves from France: many fewer wore the French revolutionary cockade, flew the French flag, or publicly sang tunes such as “Ca Ira” and “La Marseillaise”; select politicians curtailed their opposition to anti-French war preparation measures in Congress; and various groups took the dramatic step of publicly renouncing their former attachment to Revolutionary France. Taken together, these actions enabled Democratic-Republicans to argue that the American and French revolutions were distinct

phenomena and to claim the high ground of American exceptionalism. When some Federalists in the lead-up to the presidential election of 1800 broached a more brazen Anglophilia and a more intimate Anglo-American relationship, Jeffersonians were well positioned to depict themselves as the truest patriots and their opponents as disloyal.

The penultimate chapter shifts the reader’s focus to the origins of the War of 1812. Trautsch ingeniously suggests that Democratic-Republican ideas about the peaceful nature of republics ironically led Jeffersonians to wage war against Britain (196-214). Convinced that the United Kingdom, as a monarchy, was necessarily hostile to the United States, the Jefferson and Madison administrations pursued purportedly peaceful measures that were in fact non-accommodationist steps toward war. Even when the American republic proved itself the aggressor by issuing a declaration of war in 1812, it claimed that it had been forced to do so as a means of self-defense and laid the blame on Britain. Trautsch’s excellent analysis in this chapter would have been strengthened had he utilized David Bell’s pathbreaking argument that French revolutionary dreams of a war to end all wars produced a new culture of war based on the exceptionality of armed conflict, romantic identification with warfare, and apocalyptic rhetoric of annihilation.² Even so, Trautsch has significantly advanced our understanding of the War of 1812’s origins by placing it in the context of contemporaneous democratic peace theory.³

The final chapter of the book homes in on Democratic-Republicans’ endeavors to use the War of 1812 to discredit Federalists. As the author explains, Jeffersonians openly discussed employing the wartime environment to eliminate political opposition, and rioters in Baltimore took matters into their own hands by violently attacking anti-democratic partisans in their midst. Although numerous Federalists in the United States maintained a stridently oppositional stance throughout the conflict, others came around and supported the war effort. The acquiescence of many Federalists during the War of 1812 helped “set in motion” what Trautsch characterizes as “a wave of nationalism” (242). Although the author acknowledges that the “results” of the war were “...ambiguous,” he nonetheless pushes the idea that American national identity had been fundamentally transformed (251). In contrast with the period before 1815, “the invocation of British enmity in the antebellum period was situational and instrumental,” Trautsch writes; “the War of 1812 was successful in disentangling America from the former mother country and in discrediting definitions of American identity by positive reference to Great Britain” (254, 253).

Given studies of the vital role of anti-British sentiment in Jacksonian political culture and others emphasizing persistent Anglophilia, that last assessment is questionable.⁴ In fact, it brings into relief a tendency in the book to analyze and classify with less nuance than necessary. In his remarks about Democratic-Republican efforts to distance themselves from France in the wake of the XYZ Affair, Trautsch contends that “even the most Francophile Republicans eventually turned Francophobic” (140). The primary source quotations provided in support of that claim instead reveal only a diminished affection for France or a more skeptical view of the French Revolution; most Democratic-Republicans did not become


Francophobic simply because they ceased being Francophilic to the extent they had been in the mid-1790s. Along the same lines, Trautsch’s assertion, in a brief discussion of rising Anglo-Saxonism among late 1790s Federalists, that “Just as Republicans had celebrated the success of French arms in the early 1790s, [so] Federalist newspapers and local organizers now openly rejoiced at British victories” implicitly sets up an equivalence between mid-1790s Democratic-Republican and late 1790s Federalist responses to foreign warfare, when in fact the latter paled in comparison to the festivity that erupted in the wake of the republicanization and militarization of the French Revolution (152).

One can also criticize the discussion of the relationship between truthfulness and the cultural credibility of various ideological narratives. “The more material facts an ideology has to dispute and obfuscate . . . the less convincing it will be,” Trautsch argues, for “in a pluralistic public sphere, promoters of an ideology are at a profound disadvantage if they are compelled to ignore or even fabricate a sizeable body of empirical evidence” (156). In our modern world of internet conspiracies, disinformation campaigns, and extreme partisanship, that type of interpretive assumption cannot but strike us as in need of significant qualification. It overlooks group irrationality and the blinding power of partisanship; it minimizes humans’ ability to find a way to believe what they want to believe whether or not it is true. Elaborating on the aforementioned issue of the relative persuasive power of “Republican diatribes against Great Britain,” it might therefore be most accurate to say that they continued to appear “reasonable” (106) to many Jeffersonians because reason had nothing to do with it.

Criticisms aside, Trautsch’s work is the most well developed treatment of the centrality of Britain and France to American self-perceptions between 1793 and 1815. Students of early American diplomacy and political culture will learn much by reading this book, and a short review cannot do justice to the numerous, sparkling insights embedded in the big argument. (See, for instance, the illuminating discussion of the “war hawk” Congress on pages 201-206.) *The Genesis of America* will surely not be the final word on American nationalism’s career in the early republic, but it hopefully will serve as the genesis for a new round of debates on that critical subject.

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Review by Peter S. Onuf, University of Virginia

Americans only became aware of their collective identity as ‘Americans,’ Jasper Trautsch asserts in his ambitious new monograph, when foreign policy makers sought to make the U.S. an “active player in international relations” in the era of protracted warfare initiated by the French Revolution (11). Despite their pacific professions, successive administrations assumed belligerent postures in order to achieve partisan goals. In the Quasi-War with France, the Federalists’ primary objective was to demolish their Republican opponents, Jacobin fifth columnists whose egalitarian agenda threatened anarchy and disorder. When they had the chance, Trautsch writes, Republicans returned the favor. Rather than negotiating a diplomatic solution to British impressment of ‘American’ sailors and assaults on ‘neutral’ U.S. carriers, Republican Warhawks instead seized the opportunity to purge the country of ‘un-American,’ Anglophile Federalists in the War of 1812, a war of choice against their British patrons. Neither war was necessary. The two great European powers were reluctant to take on the upstart Americans, Trautsch persuasively argues, at times when their energies were absorbed in their epochal struggle with each other over the future of Western civilization. Why then, he asks, would Americans be so eager to risk the failure of their experiment in republican government and their independence as a people by entangling themselves in Europe’s wars? Trautsch is surely correct in emphasizing the critical importance of conflicting party ideologies in shaping perceptions of threat—and opportunity—in a protracted era of geopolitical instability. Federalists and Republicans saw the world differently, and those worldviews framed distinctive visions of American national identity. From their divergent partisan perspectives, it made sense to align with one power or the other and to identify domestic opponents with foreign enemies.¹

Trautsch offers compelling interpretations of sometime puzzling moments in the early history of early American foreign policy-making. He is less successful, however, in explaining the ‘genesis’ of American national identity. Nations do not exist in a vacuum. The very idea of a nation—or people—is predicated on the existence of, and differentiation from, other nations. By recognizing each other, the recognized nations of the world play an essential role in nation-making. The promise of the Declaration of Independence was therefore fulfilled in Paris in 1783, when the ‘powers of the earth’ (more or less reluctantly) recognized the capacity of the U.S. to negotiate and enforce a peace treaty and so emerge from a ‘state of war.’ It follows for Trautsch that “American nationalism” was “not an introspective phenomenon,” but instead depended on a “process of external demarcation.” Yet if “the American nation needed external enemies,” as he claims, it also needed friends (9). Ratification of the federal Constitution, creating a more perfect union—and preempting a state of war among the American states—made it possible to negotiate foreign treaties. But the French revolutionary wars demolished the ‘classical’ balance of power and forced would-be neutral, secondary powers to ally with or seek protection (or ‘friendship’) from either Britain or France. Party polarization in the U.S. reflected that existential threat, a threat compounded by the fragility of the union and the problematic capacity of the recently established federal fiscal-military state.

For Trautsch, however, partisanship in the 1790s was driven by conflicting domestic agendas, not by conflicting perceptions of threat in the deepening ‘fog’ of war in the Atlantic world. “Fundamentally new ideologies formed” under the new constitutional regime that justified “opposing positions on whether the elites or the common people should hold the reigns [sic] of power” (45). With the “rise of popular politics,” he argues, the ideological consensus of the Revolutionary era could no longer be sustained: “classical republicanism was on the wane” and partisan ideologies filled the vacuum (48). Republicans adopted the language of “democratic egalitarianism,” giving voice to a broader political public; in response, the Federalists “elitist conservatism” betrayed heightened class anxieties. Both parties sought to occupy the patriotic high ground, claiming to articulate “the only true form of Americanism” (70).

Before the great debate between Republicans and Federalists, Trautsch suggests, popular attachment to the nation—“national consciousness,” nationalism, or “Americanism”—was poorly developed. If “by the time of the revolution” such sentiment existed at all, “most scholars today concur” that “it was rudimentary and limited at best” (3). Nor did the campaign to strengthen “the institutional framework of the union” reflect a “burgeoning American nationalism” (5). After

all, the relatively small numbers of voters in the ratifying conventions endorsed the Constitution by the barest of margins. It was only when partisans in the 1790s, taking their cues from “European events,” began to debate “the nature of their national identity” that the ‘nation’ mattered and nationalism—or, rather, apparently incommensurate nationalisms—took deep root (60). Trautsch thus offers a neat dialectical formulation: “by arguing over U.S. national identity,” partisan ideologues in the 1790s “created it in the first place” (29). The failed diplomacy and wars of choice that Trautsch chronicles in his history of partisan policy-making produced this ultimate synthesis. “By 1815,” he concludes, “the process of demarcating the American nation had reached a peak, as a consensus had emerged that America was defined by her otherness from Europe at large” (37).

Did this process only begin in the 1790s, under the new Constitutional regime? The “emergence of an American nationalism,” Trautsch argues, depended on the simultaneous development of “the ideology legitimizing, mobilizing, and integrating the American nation and the political movement promoting this ideology” (7). Yet this formulation seems apt for earlier periods as well. Most scholars would emphasize ideological continuities and similar organizational imperatives from the imperial crisis onward. Anglo-American patriots launched a “political movement” and ideological offensive dedicated to securing national independence that provided a template for latter-day Republicans. Federalists also saw themselves as saviors of the Revolution, as did champions of a more perfect union during the just-concluded ‘great national discussion’ over the ratification of the Constitution. Americans (as they understood themselves) divided over fundamental political and constitutional questions from the very beginning of their brief national history despite—or, perhaps, because of—their broadly shared ideological commitments. They did so in the context of profound geopolitical instability, a ‘state of war’ with domestic and ‘internal’ as well as foreign enemies, that fostered ambient anxieties about the Revolution’s success and survival. Not surprisingly, collective insecurity provided the impetus for constitutional reform during the ‘critical period,’ when the ‘imbecile’ Confederation threatened to implode despite the absence of an immediate foreign threat. The new regime did not change everything, or much of anything. In the years before the French Revolution threatened to turn the world upside down, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton’s campaign to create an energetic fiscal-military state raised the specter of metropolitan ‘consolidation’ that energized the emerging Republican opposition. Controversial foreign policy questions would resonate so powerfully in the years of Trautsch’s study because the ideological ground had been so well cultivated.2 Loudly professing their own patriotism, partisans reflexively demonized partisan foes, characterizing them as un-American ‘enemies of the people.’ Of course, they all protested (and projected) too much. No one could know if the nation-making union would survive. But if it did not, they knew who to blame.

A notion of “demarcation”—or defining the nation against the “Other”—is central to Trautsch’s analysis. He acknowledges that distinguishing creole provincials from “their internal Others—above all Native Americans and African Americans”—was “another fundamental aspect of the demarcation process characterizing early American nationalism” (19). If this is true, then U.S. identity formation cannot be traced solely, or even primarily, to debates over foreign policy from 1793 onward. The American national narrative suggests that all “Others” are not created equal, and some have proven more critical and enduring—and perhaps even essential—to collective identity than others. Wartime enmities against ‘civilized’ European nations, beginning with the revolution, have proven highly contingent: Anglophobia and Francophobia had their moments, as Trautsch shows, but sooner or later subsided—and generally remained focused on hostile regimes, not foreign nationals. “Racial Others” have had much greater staying power than “foreign Others” (269). Trautsch largely confines his analysis to the foreigners, but tellingly notes the success Republicans enjoyed in the War of 1812 when they appealed to Federalists “racial solidarity . . . by linking the British to the blacks and Indians who took up arms against white Americans” (231).

A state of war expresses and requires animosity toward “Others.” It is a form of popular political mobilization that the political parties successively and successfully deployed in the midst of the first American foreign policy crises. But Americans and their Anglo-American predecessors had a long history of demonizing their enemies. When they declared independence and metaphorically killed their king, Americans launched a nation-making “process” of “demarcation,”

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drawing a bright and bloody boundary between themselves and their former countrymen. Not coincidentally, dangerous racial others also populated the new national imaginary—and remained there into the far distant future. If a popular, ‘democratic’ posture of belligerence is the predicate of national identity formation, the Revolution is the obvious point of departure, not the wars that Americans subsequently—and perhaps, as Trautsch suggests, foolishly—chose to fight.

Jasper Trautsch gives us a fresh perspective on the history of early American foreign policy making. Controversial policies certainly contributed importantly to party formation and the democratization of national politics. But the contours of the nation that Americans imagined were already well defined before the struggles Trautsch recounts. Americans created but did not perfect a union that would—at least for a few decades—preserve the Pax Americana and deflect their enmities and expansive energies on to “Others.” The post-1815 “consensus” that marks the ascendancy of American nationalism for Trautsch proved ephemeral, as “Good Feelings” soon gave way to bad feelings. Turning inward and “concentrating on themselves,” Trautsch concludes, patriotic Americans set off on “the road to disunion” (264). The national identity that emerged in the American Revolution and survived the upheavals of the French Revolutionary era could not preserve the American peace. No longer finding “an external outlet for their divisions” and no longer “united by an external threat,” northerners and southerners “were set on a path of escalating tensions” that patriotic sentiments exacerbated (268). Sectional “others” with their ultimately incompatible versions of American nationalism displaced preceding others and an increasingly tenuous union collapsed.

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6 Benjamin E. Park argues that nationalism was always inflected by sectionalism in American Nationalisms: Imagining Union in the Age of Revolutions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
Response by Jasper M. Trautsch, Humboldt University of Berlin

I would like to start by thanking Thomas Maddox for organizing this roundtable on my monograph, thereby allowing a broader audience to become acquainted with my interpretation of how U.S. foreign policy contributed to the formation of an American national identity, and the reviewers for carefully engaging with my claims, thereby giving me the chance to enter into a dialogue with them over the arguments I make in The Genesis of America.

Rather than dealing with each review individually, I would like to discuss in some depth the five major issues that the reviewers bring up in their discussions of my book, since I believe that they do not merely concern The Genesis of America, but are of general relevance to scholars of the early republic: the origins of American nationalism, the role of external and internal Others for the formation of American national identity, the question of who was responsible for the Quasi-War and the War of 1812, the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy, and the influence of America’s first parties.

With regards to the emergence of American nationalism, it is apparent why the question of when exactly it emerged is contentious. We have no hard data from opinion polls about how Americans identified themselves in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and most ordinary Americans did not leave sources that could help us reconstruct their allegiances. Quantitative analyses of the relative strength of Americans’ attachment to the union are therefore not possible. Moreover, even if we can find cases in the historical records where public professions of loyalty were made, it remains difficult to interpret them. For example, loyalty oaths taken during the American Revolution cannot simply be used to prove that those who swore them in fact supported the declaration of independence, since many of them might have done so merely because of severe social pressure and not because they actually supported the patriots’ cause. For these reasons, all claims about the state of American nationalism in, say, 1776, 1783, 1793, and 1815 are prone to be disputed.

However, I believe myself to be on rather solid ground when arguing that national consciousness was a phenomenon that only reached mass scale in the U.S. during the early republic. On the one hand, this claim is based on the research of numerous historians of the colonial period such as Jack Greene, Timothy Breen, and Joseph Torsella, who have shown that the colonists’ identification as Americans did not increase over the course of the colonial period, but that their loyalty to the British Empire actually reached a peak at the end of the Seven Years War, as Americans, painfully aware of their own provinciality, mimicked British styles, fashions, and tastes. It was, as these scholars convincingly argue, the very fact that Americans identified as Britons that made them resist Parliament’s efforts to tighten imperial control so vehemently in the 1760s and 1770s, since they seemed to suggest that, at least in the eyes of British policy makers, Americans were not fully British after all. Moreover, as scholars of the revolutionary period have demonstrated, once the colonists renounced their allegiance to the British Crown, their major political loyalty was not transferred to the newly created United States, but to...
the individual colonies seeking independence. As a result of these insights, the early republic appears to be the period in which Americans came to identify with the union.

On the other hand, I maintain that the early republic was the era in which American nationalism emerged as a mass movement because the preconditions for its spread simply were not yet existent in the colonial period. For one, a national communication system that allowed Americans from all states to be discursively connected was only created in the early 1790s when the number of newspapers exploded, the postal system was enlarged, and free exchanges of newspapers between printers through the U.S. postal service were provided. Moreover, only after the Constitution had consolidated the power of the federal government could the federal state apparatus be effectively used to promote American nationalism. Most importantly, as the Constitution gave the federal government the exclusive power to conduct foreign policy, the U.S. could now act as a unified player on the international scene and thereby strengthen Americans' consciousness of forming a distinct nation.

Peter S. Onuf is, of course, correct in noting that the U.S. had already become an independent state in 1783 when its former mother country recognized its sovereignty. However, it does not follow that the inhabitants of this state had a national identity, i.e. that they were emotionally attached to it. This was an ongoing process that matured over the course of the early republic as Americans grew accustomed to living in a common country and as they were threatened (or perceived to be threatened) by foreign nations that treated the U.S. as a single entity. I also fully agree with Onuf that this mechanism had already become visible during the War of Independence, but I contend that the reach of national sentiment still remained limited or, put differently, that the nation-building process had just begun, but was far from finished in 1783.

Applying the three-phase model of the emergence of national movements that nationalism scholar Miroslav Hroch introduced in his study of nineteenth century Europe to the early history of the U.S. might clarify and even bridge our differences. According to Hroch, in the first phase, a few intellectuals, scholars, artists, and public figures started identifying with the nation. They then strove to spread national feelings among the larger populace using mass media and, where applicable, the state apparatus. Finally, nationalism turned into a mass movement, and hence became a factor shaping history itself; in other words, it became an explanans rather than an explanandum. In the case of the U.S., the first phase happened in the revolutionary period when many of those serving in the Continental Congress, the Continental Army or as representatives abroad developed a national sense of self. The second phase occurred in the early republic when a national public sphere, in which Americans from all states could simultaneously deliberate, emerged and when continuous foreign crises triggered national discourses on what set Americans apart from their foreign reference points. Finally, the War of 1812 marked the turning point to the third phase when American nationalism had become a mass phenomenon.

The second issue that emerges from this roundtable is the question of which nations and groups served as significant external and internal Others for white Americans as they imagined their nation-in-the-making. In this regard, Rhonda M.


Barlow mentions the Spanish Empire, the Barbary States, and the Indian nations; Onuf also raises attention to African-Americans. Of course, it is true that white Americans also defined their nation in opposition to these reference points.

The enslavement of white American sailors at the hands of the Barbary corsairs in the Mediterranean and the eastern North Atlantic caused severe racial anxieties in a society in which slavery was exclusively associated with blacks. Successfully resisting such piracy therefore seemed paramount to stabilize the racial order at home. The Othering of the Catholic Spanish neighbor in North America in turn fostered Protestant definitions of U.S. identity. Generally speaking, defining a nation entails defining its borders and excluding everyone, and not just some, on the other side. In other words: nations can have more than two external Others. Yet, how significant these foreign Others are for defining one’s nation differs. France and Great Britain were the only foreign nations that posed a military threat to the U.S. homeland that could be used to bind Americans together in the early republic. Spain, by contrast, was successfully pressured by the U.S. into surrendering its position on the border of Florida and the navigation rights on the Mississippi, and the Barbary States were militarily defeated by the U.S. Navy in two wars. More importantly, Great Britain and France became symbols for the two competing ideologies of conservatism and democratic egalitarianism that Federalists and Republicans fought over at home. In comparison, the ideological significance of the Barbary States and Spain paled. Republicans and Federalists did not argue over whether one or the other was a suitable positive or negative model for Americans. Not coincidentally, the American press devoted much more space to Anglo- and Franco-American relations than to Spanish-American relations or the problems caused by the Barbary States, and differences over how to handle problems with Spain and the Barbary pirates did not trigger feverish and frantic debates between Federalists and Republicans.

The Othering of Native and African Americans, on the other hand, was at least as important to the formation of a national identity among white Americans as the dissociation from Great Britain and France. Important works have been published on the subject and The Genesis of America is not a challenge to them, but rather complements them. There are many facets to the nascent American identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In my book, I do not intend to give a comprehensive overview, but rather focus on a particular aspect: white Americans’ disassociation from their major European reference points. What distinguished Americans from Britons, who looked and spoke alike and shared the same culture, traditions, customs, and heritage? How in turn was the U.S. different to France, after she had turned into a republic as well? Both questions posed themselves only after independence. Before the American Revolution, American colonists had mostly emphasized their Britishness, and before the French Revolution, Americans did not have to ponder too much about what made their republic unique.

Setting white Americans apart from Native and African Americans—a process already well underway in the colonial period—was of no immediate help in answering these questions, since race actually bound them to their European brethren on the other side of the Atlantic. In other words: in addition to the continued racial Othering of Native and African Americans, the issue at hand for nationalists in the early republic seeking to construct a uniquely American identity was now to also emphasize, exaggerate, or outright invent differences between Americans and Europeans (20-21).

Admittedly, external and internal Othering processes cannot always be neatly separated. “On the one hand, forcing—through an assertive foreign policy—its European parent societies to acknowledge that the U.S. was an equal part of the ‘civilized world’ was essential for white Americans to substantiate their claims of superiority over their racial Others in North America,” as I explain in the introduction (21). “On the other hand, to become accepted as an equal and independent member of the European state system the federal government had to establish its unchallenged authority over U.S. territory by wresting sovereignty over the hinterlands from Native Americans that resisted white expansionism” (22). Whenever both processes—setting white Americans apart from Native and African Americans and from Britons and

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Frenchmen—were intertwined, I do consider racial Others in my analysis. For example, I note the difficulty faced by Republicans in criticizing the Jay Treaty for its failure to offer compensation for slaves the British had liberated during the War of Independence, since in 1794 the French National Assembly had emancipated all slaves in France’s colonies. I also discuss the racially charged nature of the impressment issue, the British practice of forcing white Americans into service challenging the racial foundation of slavery in the American South. Also, I analyze how white Americans were keen to charge Britons with instigating, arming, and giving shelter to Native Americans in the Northwest, since their continued and (at least partially) successful resistance cast doubt on their claims of racial superiority.

However, for reasons of coherence, clarity, and rigor, the book, rather than attempting to include all processes of Othering for the purposes of American nation-building equally, focuses on the research question that I have outlined above and the relevance of which should by now be apparent: How was foreign policy used to promote the demarcation process from Europe in general, and Great Britain and France in particular, and thereby contribute to the formation of an American national identity?

The third issue, which came up in two of the reviews (Barlow’s and Lindsay M. Chervinsky’s), involves the question of who was responsible for the Quasi-War and the War of 1812: the American government or the French and British government, respectively. The American decision makers at the time repeatedly insisted that they were merely reacting to French and British insults to American honor and infringements on the maritime rights of the U.S. as a neutral carrier. French interference with America’s trade with Great Britain rendered it the president’s “indispensable duty to recommend to” Congress the arming of American merchantmen, the use of U.S. warships as convoys, and a build-up of the U.S. military, as Adams explained to Congress in his bellicose message of May 16, 1797.7 “We are dragged into the contest,” as the pro-Administration *Columbian Centinel*, therefore, maintained, as the crisis intensified.8 In 1807, President Thomas Jefferson told Congress that British actions on the high seas “have admitted but of one decision,” when deciding to shelve the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806.9 Five years later, President James Madison claimed that there already was “on the side of Great Britain, a state of war against the United States” when asking Congress to issue a formal declaration of war. The House Foreign Relations Committee then concluded in its report on his war message that the War of 1812 was “forced on the United States.”10

Diplomatic historians have mostly adopted the interpretation that Americans were primarily reacting to external pressures and provocations. To be sure, they have often been critical of the Federalist and Republican Administrations, chastising them for conducting an inept diplomacy, being overly ambitious in their aims, entering armed conflict without prior military preparations, and poorly executing the war effort. Yet, in terms of the wars’ origins, they have mostly agreed that Americans were responding to “very real insults to national honor,” as Chervinsky calls it in her review.

However, American foreign-policy makers did have a choice. Federalists did not need to escalate tensions with France in 1797 and 1798. They made the conscious decision to dispatch U.S. warships to the Atlantic to attack French vessels in 1798. Republicans in turn did not have to wage economic warfare against Great Britain in 1807 and declare war against her


8 “For the Centinel” by “Clarendon,” in *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), 25 November 1797.


in 1812. Instead, they could have tried to defuse the complicated issue of British impressment on the high seas, for example by taking more effective measures to bar British subjects from serving on U.S. ships. Yet, they showed no inclination to negotiate a give-and-take compromise (as evidenced by Jefferson’s refusal to submit the reasonable Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806 to the Senate for ratification). As the American government therefore played an active part in bringing the Quasi-War and the War of 1812 about, it seemed worthwhile to me to inquire about their agenda. What did they hope to achieve when they opted for armed hostilities?

This is not to imply that all fault lies with the American government. The French attempts to obtain a bribe were "clumsy," as I state in the book (122), and the British government was ill advised when it believed that the U.S. was too divided for the Madison Administration to dare declare war in 1812. “Therefore, part of the blame for the outbreak of hostilities rests on policy makers in London,” as I make clear in my discussion of the origins of the war (213). Both governments seriously underestimated the nationally aroused public mood in the U.S. when they made so little effort to assuage Americans’ post-colonial sensibilities. Therefore, they share in the war guilt.

My attempts to add a corrective to the historiography by demonstrating that Federalists and Republicans deliberately pursued a rather confrontational foreign policy and that the U.S. was not simply the victim of British and French aggressions—coupled with the fact that given that my study is on U.S. foreign policy and not on British and French foreign policy, I deal mostly with the motives of American decision makers—might have given the wrong impression that I hold the U.S. solely responsible for both conflicts. This was not my intention.

A fourth issue is raised by Matthew Rainbow Hale, who doubts that there is a connection between public opinion and the newspaper discourse on the one hand and foreign policy and factual developments on the other. In view of contemporary internet conspiracies and disinformation campaigns, he argues that in times of extreme partisanship people tend to be irrational and will believe whatever they want no matter whether it is actually true.

In the early republic, the population of the U.S. was indeed highly polarized, the press was fiercely partisan, and Federalists and Republicans frequently accused each other of national disloyalty and treason. One might therefore be tempted to see parallels between then and now. However, despite widespread political passion, frenzy, and even paranoia, the public discourse was not completely detached from developments in the “real world” or, as I put it in the book, “while the perception of reality and reality itself can certainly diverge, they are still connected” (156). Many Federalist sympathizers, without factual evidence, seriously believed that the French government harbored plans to invade the U.S. in 1798, but few feared imminent attack after the French fleet had been decimated at the Battle of the Nile, Great Britain had been able to build a second coalition with Russia and Austria against France, and President Adams had agreed to French overtures to engage in peace negotiations in 1799. Similarly, Republican warnings that Great Britain had the intention to destroy the U.S. appeared more credible in the winter of 1793/94 when the Royal Navy seized 250 American merchant vessels going to or coming from the French West Indies than two years later when the American public discovered that the British government had agreed to compensate American merchants for the seizures, grant them most-favored nation-status as well as access to the West Indies and East India, and evacuate their posts in the U.S. Northwest.

Admittedly, not everyone was convinced. Some, even many, stubbornly clung to their belief in British hostility and French enmity respectively, but enough were swayed to make a difference. Hale is right that the House only narrowly appropriated the funds to carry the Jay Treaty’s provisions into effect in 1796. The fact that it did was nonetheless remarkable, since Republicans held a majority in the chamber and had vociferously campaigned against the Anglo-American accord in the preceding months. Enough Republican Representatives changed their mind when the final vote came, and they cited pressure from their constituents as the reason for their volte-face. Similarly, several, possibly many, die-hard Federalists continued warning of a French invasion in 1799, but significantly, the Federalists lost the subsequent federal elections, demonstrating that by now a majority of the electorate no longer trusted them.
Historians are notoriously bad prophets, but I dare maintain that my claim that “in a pluralistic public sphere, promoters of an ideology are at a profound disadvantage if they are compelled to ignore or even fabricate a sizable body of empirical evidence” (156) holds true even today—if not in the short, at least in the medium term.

The last issue concerns the influence of America’s first parties and their relationship to the press. Chervinsky finds that my analysis of the elections to the Twelfth Congress attributes “too much power to party structures and organizing ability,” doubting that “the Republican Party employed such sophisticated newspaper and voter turnout campaigns around the issue of foreign policy.”11 This is a misreading of my argument, since I do not claim in my book that the Republican leadership orchestrated a campaign to bring pro-war candidates into Congress, which would help them obtain a formal declaration of war. To the contrary, while pursuing a confrontational foreign policy towards Great Britain, Jefferson and Madison did not desire actual war, being seriously concerned about the effects of a war on America’s republican form of government (as evidenced by Jefferson’s reluctance to militarily react to the Chesapeake Affair and Madison’s refusal to consider military options after the Embargo had failed to have an effect on British maritime policy). However, their refusal to agree to a quid-pro-quo compromise on the issues troubling Anglo-American relations contributed to a gradual escalation of tensions, which fuelled a bellicose Anglophobic nationalistic movement over which the Republican leadership had increasingly less control. Elsewhere, I have used the metaphor of the sorcerer’s apprentice in this context to explain how the Anglophobic nationalism that the Jefferson and Madison administrations had been fomenting since the beginning of the century had taken on a dynamic of its own, creating a nationalistic movement, headed and promoted by the press, that put increasing pressure on them to bring matters with Great Britain to a head, even though the Republican leaders did not actually wish for armed conflict.12

What was the role of the elections of the Twelfth Congress in this context? They were not necessarily a referendum on the war question, as, contrary to Chervinsky’s claim, I make clear in the book (202-203), since large turn-overs in congressional membership were common in the early nineteenth century. Moreover, there is no clear pattern of Congressmen procrastinating on the war question being systematically voted out of office and replaced by more hawkish Representatives. Nevertheless, Republican newspapers such as the influential Philadelphia Aurora, the Baltimore Whig, the Richmond Enquirer, and the Lexington Reporter (to name but a few), which had vociferously called on Americans to vote for candidates advocating war, interpreted the election results as a popular mandate for war. Given that opinion polls were not available yet, federal policy makers, desiring to know what the public mood on the war question was (at least among Republican voters), would consult Republican newspapers, since the press was the main forum in which the public sphere constituted itself in the early republic. Reading the Republican flagships, the editorials of which were reprinted in local newspapers across the country, they would have had to conclude in 1811 that the public preferred armed conflict over further negotiation. In other words: I do not claim that the majority of Americans were eager for war, but that political office-holders came to believe that they were and that the elections to the Twelfth Congress served as the focal point, in which this nationalistic movement, which was not centrally organized and did not pursue a coordinated campaign, expressed itself most clearly.

Let me conclude by yet again expressing my gratitude to the reviewers for their careful engagement with my book. I am very pleased that all of them found my study stimulating, original, and rewarding, even though they were not convinced by some

11 With regards to the Quasi-War, Chervinsky also criticizes that the quotations from Senators Lloyd and Sedgwick on page 133 were made after the conflict had already started and therefore do not help explain its causes. That is true. Yet, they appear in the chapter on how the Quasi-War made most Republicans renounce their Francophilia and not in the chapter on the origins of the Quasi-War. The pertinent evidence on the Federalist intentions in 1797 and 1798 is provided on pages 114-115, where I examine the purposes of the diplomatic mission by John Marshall, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and Elbridge Gerry, and on pages 122-124, where I analyze the discussions of leading Federalists on how to use the XYZ Affair to push through their war program.

of my claims. Our disagreements in this regard are normal and healthy for scholars to have and I hope that I have been able to clarify my points and that the readers of this roundtable have found our debate enlightening.