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Evolution of a Word: Democracy and the Democratic-Republican Societies, 1793-1796

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Under the Direction of David Sehat

ABSTRACT

Even though most historians agree on democracy's basic definition and that it emerged with the American Revolution in the United States, historians disagree on how it developed after the Revolution. Some argue that democracy thrived while others claim that it was tamed during the 1790s. Instead of siding with one side or the other, this thesis argues that democracy meant different things to different people and developed in multiple ways. People created their own definition and over time they helped evolve it and one group was the Democratic-Republican Societies that formed in 1793 and ended in 1796. Their definition started out by describing an egalitarian society, but over time it evolved in reaction to three different events: French Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the Jay Treaty. Each event allowed their definition to become clearer because through their responses the Societies defined democracy.

INDEX WORDS: Democracy, Democratic-Republican Societies, Early Republic

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INTRODUCTION

Almost all historians agree that democracy is a type of government where the power was lodged in the people, but they do not agree about how democracy developed in the United States. On one side, historians Joyce Appleby, Sean Wilentz, and Gordon S. Wood argue that democracy spread after the American Revolution even in the face of fierce opposition. For Appleby ideas of democracy and liberalism were at the core of American society, and American Revolution unleashed democracy into the nation.[1] Wilentz and Wood, not as optimistic as Appleby, argue that the importance of the Revolution rested in how it broke down traditional forms of hierarchy. Not until the ratification of the Constitution did democracy become the defining characteristic of American society.[2]

Historians Terry Bouton and Seth Cotlar stand on the other side of the debate. Democracy did not win out in their historical narratives. Instead it became tamed during the 1790s. For Bouton "the moneyed elite" tamed democracy by taming western Pennsylvanian farmers who were proponents of democracy. These farmers fought against economic policies enacted by "the moneyed elite," that placed them at a disadvantage. To stop them, according to Bouton, "the moneyed elite" pushed for the ratification of the Constitution and then the use of federal force during the Whiskey Rebellion.[3] For historian Seth Cotlar the word democracy became tamed during the 1790s and made safe for the general public. Federalists, Jeffersonians,

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[1] Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984); Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000).

[2] Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

[3] Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: "The People," the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

and others tamed democracy by demonizing those who supported the more radical meaning of the term. Instead of calling them democrats they referred to them as atheist or Jacobins.[4]

It might seem paradoxical for the historians to agree a definition of democracy but disagree on how it developed in the U.S., especially when comparing Appleby's, Wood's, and Wilentz's narrative to Bouton's and Cotlar's narrative. The first three historians saw democracy spread while the latter two saw it become tamed. The question then becomes how can these historians agree on a basic definition but not agree on democracy's narrative? The answer is that democracy did not contain a single or static definition, but it evolved over time and meant different things to different people. Further, people supplied democracy with its own meanings based off of their experiences, beliefs and events that affected them. Out of the five historians only two acknowledge democracy's flexibility and fluidity.

Sean Wilentz believed democracy to be "a historical fact, rooted in a vast array of events and experiences, that comes into being out of changing human relations between governors and the governed."[5] Democracy's meaning changed over time in relation to different events which allowed democracy to contain multiple definitions over time. Unlike Wilentz, Seth Cotlar saw democracy as having multiple definitions at the same time. Cotlar places a greater emphasis on those who defined the word and their perspective by saying that democracy is an abstract word that "meant different things to different people."[6] By pointing out democracy's flexible meaning they allow for multiple narratives to exist either at the same time or through time.

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[4] Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 1-11.

[5] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, xviii.

[6] Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 5.

The importance of my thesis is not to bring forth groundbreaking ideas on the study of democracy, but to focus on how democracy evolved when it first emerged in the United States. I want to look at the newness of democracy to the founding generation to show that ideas did not emerge fully formed. They emerged tentatively and inchoately. During the three year period I am studying, democracy did not have a single meaning, but multiple meanings. Groups waged rhetorical battles in newspapers and other publication over democracy's definition. A definition was informed by a person or groups ideology and came in response to events that shaped their world view. Many of the definitions emerged with their own contradictions, that they either ignored or smoothed out after the contradiction was exposed. Simply put ideas needed time to evolve and grow. My thesis attempts to look at how a group of people helped evolve a definition of democracy.

For my thesis I will focus on how the Democratic-Republican Societies, who formed in 1793 and ended by 1796, defined and developed their own definition of democracy and how it evolved over time. To the societies democracy was a type of government that sprang forth after the American Revolution and was based in ideas of liberalism and republicanism. They believed, in the words of one Society, all men had the right and the duty to actively participate in politics either through its' "immediate administration, or by his [own] advice and watchfulness."[7] At the heart of their definition of democracy was an embrace of an egalitarian society for all white men.

The creation and evolution of their definition happened in reaction to different events that affected the Societies. Each event allowed their definition to become clearer because of the way

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[7] German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts*, ed. Philip Foner (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 53.

in which they reacted to and experienced each one. Three events are crucial to shaping the societies' definition: the French Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the negotiation and ratification of the Jay Treaty. The French Revolution reinvigorated the men who joined and the formed the societies as well as brought over ideas crucial to their definition. The Whiskey Rebellion and the Jay Treaty challenged Societies' beliefs and proved that not everyone agreed with their definition of democracy. The Democratic-Republican Societies responded by expressing their definition in a way that more people found acceptable and by offering ways to ensure the creation of an egalitarian society.

CHAPTER 1: THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Beginning in 1793, Democratic-Republican Societies formed throughout the United States of America at a time when the direction of the nation was uncertain. In 1792, the Constitution was still new. Drafted five years before, in 1787, some saw the Constitution as an attempt to solidify the democratic tendencies of the American Revolution and ensure majority rule. Others believed it was created to ensure that only a select group of men could hold public office and participate in politics. The first election held under the new Constitution was in 1788. In 1792, George Washington's first term as president ended with him again standing for reelection without any opposition. Throughout the 1790s politicians and ordinary people alike debated important political questions. One of the main questions debated during the 1790s was - what was democracy?

Everyone agreed that at its core democracy represented an egalitarian society. In 1755, Samuel Johnson defined democracy as a form of government "which the sovereign power is neither lodged in one man, nor in the nobles, but in the collective body of the people."[8] Johnson's definition though left two important questions unanswered concerning what democracy was. The two questions were: Who constituted "the people"? and What powers do "the people" hold? During the 1790s the answers were hotly contested with many answering them differently. Because answers differed, people created multiple definitions of democracy at the same time with their answers influenced by history, current events, and their own beliefs and experiences. Since a person used current events to define democracy, a person's definition evolved over time in reaction to new events and experiences.

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[8] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* vol. 1 (London: W. Strahan, 1755), 563. Accessed from johnsonsdictionaryonline.com on December 2, 2012.

In the 1790s one of the current events that shaped a persons response at the time was the French Revolution. Since the American Revolution a connection existed between the people of the United States and France. As time went on the connection dwindled into a small transatlantic community of men who shared similar hopes and fears. What kept the community alive was the explosion of print culture that characterized the time. Either from newspapers, letters, or other publications, people in the United States read and kept themselves informed about what was happening in France. A consequence of the spread of information was the spread of ideas. The transatlantic community offered a path for ideas to travel between different people. One of the ideas was democracy.

The Democratic-Republican Societies and the French Revolution

Most historians agree that the American Revolution signaled the beginning of democracy in the United States. Not everyone supported the development of a democratic society, and it was during the Constitutional Convention that the split became amplified. Out of the Constitutional Convention two groups emerged: the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. Leading the Federalist were Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and for a time James Madison. What pushed Madison away from the Federalists and to the Jeffersonian Republicans, the successors to the Anti-Federalists, was Hamilton and Jay's answer to the two questions posed in the chapter's introduction. John Jay claimed, "Those who own the country ought to govern it." Hamilton concurred. Serving as Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton pushed for financial programs that lined the pockets of Federalists merchants and bankers.[9] As historian Philip Foner

[9] Philip Foner ed., *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1976), 5. For a more indepth discussion on Hamilton's attempts to enrich him and other Federalists, read Bouton, *Taming Democracy*.

commented, "freedom was once again in danger."[10] A general pessimism seemed to descend amongst those that did not look to gain from Hamilton's plans.

Hope was not lost because after the American Revolution democracy spread to France and sparked the French Revolution in 1789, which in turn rekindled the democratic spirit of some Republicans in America. According to Philip Foner, support for the French Revolution was widespread in the United States between the years 1789, when the Revolution began, and 1792, before the Reign of Terror began. Not only did France serve as America's ally and savior during the American Revolution but the sister republic now stood as their ally in the battle against monarchy and aristocracy. Many also pointed out the similarities between the two revolutions. Both fought to overthrow a unjust monarchy and establish a more egalitarian form of government. With news of the September massacres and the beginning of the Reign of Terror, many, mainly Federalists, withdrew their support of the new republic by January 1793. Federalists also distanced their own revolution from the one happening in France by citing the large amount of civilian violence coming out of the French Revolution.

Matters became worse with the arrival of the new French minister Citizen Edmund Charles Genet. After President Washington issued his Proclamation of Neutrality in the war between France and England, Genet appealed to the American people to rise up in support of France. Genet even attempted to enlist privateers while in Charleston, S.C. to fight for France and recruited Americans to fight the Spanish in Louisiana. While Federalists' support for the French Revolution was already in decline by Genet's arrival, Genet's action pushed some

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[10] Philip Foner ed., *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 5.

Republicans, former Anti-Federalists and even some Federalists, to withdraw their support of the French Revolution.[11]

At the time when popular support for the French Revolution was on a decline and the community between France and America was growing smaller, the Democratic-Republican Societies formed. In April 1793, the German Republican Society of Philadelphia formed in response to an article published by Philip Freneau, who created, published, and edited the *National Gazette* at the request of Thomas Jefferson. In the article Freneau called for citizens to form "constitutional societies in every part of the United States, for the purpose of watching over the rights of the people."[12] A month later the Democratic Society of Philadelphia formed and over the next few years at least thirty-five other societies formed throughout America. In total, between 1793 and 1796 at least thirty-seven societies formed throughout America. Membership totals for the societies ranged widely. The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, considered the "mother society," by Federalists, containing around 315 members. Besides the Democratic Society of Philadelphia, the other two largest Societies were the Democratic Society of the City of New York with membership ranging from 100 to 200 men and The Republican Society of Charleston, South Carolina at 114. Most of the other societies were not as large with membership ranging between twenty to twenty-five men.[13]

Through the formation of the Democratic-Republican Societies, the connection that existed between France and the United States transformed into a small transatlantic community. During their entire existence the Societies published toasts, resolutions, and memorials that

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[11] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 16-20.

[12] Philip Freneau, *National Gazette,* July 25, 1792, quoted in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 3.

[13] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 7.

supported the French Revolution and the French revolutionaries. Some Societies even corresponded with their French counterparts. Upon his arrival to Philadelphia, the German Republican Society of Philadelphia sent a letter to Citizen Genet welcoming him to the city and expressing their sympathies with the French people.[14] According to the Democratic Society of Philadelphia, what bound them together was a "strong connection which arises from a similarity of government and of political principles." The Society also stated that anyone who opposed the French Revolution were "enemies to republicanism and their country."[15] Another Society said, "that he who is an enemy to the French Revolution, cannot be a firm republican; and...ought not to be entrusted with the guidance of any part of the machine of government."[16] The Republican Society of Charleston, S.C. established a line of communication with both a French Jacobin Club and the Citizen Counsel in France.[17] On September 25, 1795, the Republican Society of Pendleton County, South Carolina sent a letter to Thomas Paine after learning about the Jay Treaty.[18]

With the strengthening of the transatlantic community brought on by the formation of the Democratic-Republican Societies, an evolved definition of democracy spread back to America. In France democracy's definition evolved to acknowledge that democracy was fragile and was constantly under threat. The main threat to democracy was monarchy or aristocracy. For the

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[14] The German Republican Society, "To Citizen Genet and His Reply, May 17, 1793," in Foner, 55-56.

[15] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscripts Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: January 9, 1794," in Foner, 69.

[16] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 1794.

[17] The Republican Society of Charleston, S.C., "Discussion in the French Jacobin Society on a Petition from the Republican Society of South Carolina, October 1793," in Foner, 381; The Republican Society of Charleston, S.C., "Manuscript Minutes, August 1793 to April, 1794," in Foner, 383-386.

[18] The Republican Society of Pendleton County, "To Messeurs Freneau and Paine, September 25, 1795," in Foner, 398.

French the aristocratic and monarchical threat was represented by Great Britain. Even though Great Britain represented a threat to democracy in the United States, the Democratic-Republican Societies saw a more immediate threat in Hamilton's and other Federalists policies that intended to place power in the hands of rich. In a letter to the German Republican Society the Democratic Society of Philadelphia rejoiced in their declaration to "not be intimidated," by "the prescriptions of Aristocracy, under the masque of Federalism."[19] To counter the aristocratic threat, represented by the Federalists, the Democratic-Republican Societies emphasized the importance of an active citizenry in a democracy. Pushing for an citizenry that actively participated in politics broke from the Federalist's conception of citizenry because the Federalists believed the role of the citizen was to vote in an election and let those elected rule. The Democratic-Republican Societies had a much different belief.

To understand what the Societies meant by an active citizenry it is important to start with who they referred to as a citizen. Written in 1755 Samuel Johnson's dictionary, which the Societies used, defined a citizen as "A freeman of a city; not a foreigner, not a slave." Better yet, Johnson's second definition defined a citizen as "A townsman; a man of trade; not a gentlemen."[20] While the Societies might have connected with the first definition, Johnson's second definition connected the most with the Societies. The reason was quite simple: the majority of the members were tradesmen and were not considered gentlemen. Out of the 206 members of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia in 1794, a 103 of them were craftsmen with

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[19] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscripts Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: March 13, 1794," in Foner, 73.

[20] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 381. Accessed from johnsonsdictionaryonline.com on March 6, 2013.

the second largest group being merchants at thirty members.[21] With the majority of the members being artisans, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia supported the manufacturers of America. According to them, "the general welfare of our country is involved in promoting necessary manufactures as far as is consistent with our situation in giving full employment and comfortable support to all our citizens."[22]

By emphasizing a select group of people, Johnson's and then the Societies' definition of citizen also served as a way to show who was excluded, politically speaking, in a democracy. At the top of the list were women and African-American which Johnson's definition did not state but was common for the time. Because the exclusion of women and African-Americans were common for the time, I will not talk about their exclusion anymore. Instead the major group of people the Societies believed could not and should not exist in a democracy was the gentlemen. Unlike the definition of citizen, the Democratic-Republican Societies broke with Johnson because his definition of a gentlemen could be applied to some of the Democratic-Republican Societies' officers.

According to Johnson's dictionary a gentleman was "A man of birth; a man of extraction, though not noble." Further he defined a gentleman as "A man raised above the vulgar by his character or post."[23] Both of Johnson's definition can be applied to the leaders of the Democratic-Republican Societies who were merchants, lawyers, printers and even doctors.[24]

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[21] Eugene P. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), 72.

[22] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscripts Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: April 10, 1794," in Foner, 77

[23] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 893. Accessed from johnsonsdictionaryonline.com on March 6, 2013.

[24] Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 72.

Also many of the Societies pushed for men to raise their character through education. Instead the Societies saw a gentleman as a man who did not have to rely on the market for his lively hood. Their definition fits with how historian Gordon S. Wood defines a gentlemen in his book *Radicalism of the American Revolution.* Even when the definition changed to mean new things, a gentlemen always assumed the role of not having to work for a living according to Wood.[25] Wood also highlights the importance between working and not working. As he puts it, "Because every free American was presumed to work at something and for pay, every free American was to that extent equal."[26] Not only did Wood's definition of a gentlemen not apply to any of the Societies' members because all of them relied on the market, but it also points out another way to create and ensure an egalitarian society.[27]

While people used the title "citizen" in America before the French Revolution, it was in response to the French Revolution that the Democratic-Republican Societies adopted the term. Early in their creation the Democratic Society of Philadelphia struck out the use of the titles "Sir" and "humble Servants," and replaced them with the title "citizen."[28] The Democratic Society of the City of New York adopted the term in their Constitution. Like the Philadelphia Society, they excluded any use of titles except for descriptive titles, such as president, vice-president, secretary, and such.[29] The Democratic-Republican Societies adopted the title as a way to further show their support for the French Revolution. What was more important was that the

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[25] Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 30, 36, 195, 282.

[26] Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 286.

[27] Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, *Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 459.

[28] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscripts Minutes, July 3, 1793 to January 1, 1795: July 3rd, 1793," in Foner, 67.

[29] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Constitution, 1794," in Foner, 153.

adoption of the title citizen announced that the Societies supported the egalitarian and democratic ideas that drove the French Revolution. The Democratic-Republican Societies did not with Johnson's definition of a citizen, but added that in a democracy the citizenry must be actively engaged in politics.

By actively participating in politics, the Societies referred to what they believed to be the main duty of all citizens: to offer their "advice and watchfulness" on all governmental affairs and those entrusted with the power of the government.[30] The Democratic-Republican Societies mentioned different rights that allowed a citizenry to exercise their duty to offer their "advice and watchfulness." They were the right of free investigation, freedom of speech, and freedom of press. By free investigation the Societies referred to the people's right to inquire into the conduct and actions of their government which meant there was no governmental secrecy. It was the right to free investigation that allowed the citizens to watch "with the eye of an eagle," the government and those entrusted with powers. A member of the Democratic Society of the City of New York pointed out that free investigation allowed Americans to procure their "emancipation from the destable yoke of British thraldom;" and allowed for "the adoption of the constitution of the United States."[31] Free investigation also allowed citizens to acquire information on governmental affairs which in turn allowed them to offer advice on government decisions and create public opinion. A citizen offered their advice by publishing their opinions in the press or other medium which was protected by the freedom of speech and freedom of press.

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[30] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in Foner, 53-54.

[31] "Cato," "'Cato' to the *Newark Gazette*, March 12, 1794," in Foner, 144.

According to the Democratic-Republican Societies each of these rights were a "natural privilege of every free citizen," and had been secured by the American Revolution.[32] When denouncing their enemies, a member of the Democratic Society of the City of New York referred to these rights as "principles which they know...brought forth the most glorious epoch in the annals of our country, the ever memorable 4th of July, 1776."[33] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia sent out a circular letter to other Societies throughout the country that invited them "to join your efforts with ours in the preservation of those rights, for which Americans fought, bled and died."[34]

In the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy an active citizenry countered and prevented any attempts made by the aristocratic powers that might harm equality. Because of their role in protecting equality, an active citizenry was a crucial part of the Democratic-Republican Societies definition of democracy. While these three rights were crucial to insuring an active citizenry, in response to the French Revolution the Democratic-Republican Societies advocated for citizens to exercise another right in a democracy. Following the American Revolution, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia noted a "lethargic calm of republic presage," that developed among the people and that "attention to private concerns" superseded "the interest in the general weal." The Society referred to a growing trend that placed the focus on the individual which was spearheaded by the decline of classical republican ideals and the growth of classical liberalism's focus on capitalist individualism. Calling the development of

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[32] The German Republican Society, "To the President and Members of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia, February 20, 1794," in Foner, 57

[33] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 171.

[34] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: May 29, 1794," in Foner, 80.

these two ideas anti-democratic, broke with the conception of democracy offered by Joyce Appleby who considered both classical liberalism and capitalism fundamental to democracy.[35] Fortunately "the French Revolution gave a new impulse to America," in the form of "Associations of citizens for political purposes."[36]

The idea of associationalism did not originate in France, but it started in the United States with the formation of the Sons of Liberty and Public Safety Committees. During the American Revolution, the purpose of associations like the Sons of Liberty was to spread the revolutionary spirit and organize mass resistance against Great Britain. After the Revolution, the idea of associationalism traveled across the ocean to Britain, Ireland and France where political groups began to form. In Britain and Ireland the groups took the form of Corresponding Societies or the United Freemen while in France it would best be seen in the French Jacobin clubs. With the creation of the Democratic-Republican Societies, the idea of associationalism had come full circle. Because the idea of associationalism raveled back and forth in the transatlantic community, a debate has arisen among historians over who inspired the Democratic-Republican Societies.[37] Focusing on the purpose of the Democratic-Republican Societies, though, shows a break between them and the Sons of Liberty and more of an alignment with the French Jacobin clubs.

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[35] Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order*; Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination*.

[36] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: June 5, 1794," in Foner, 83-84.

[37] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*. For an indepth look at those arguing for the Sons of Liberty influence, read Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*. For foreign influence, read Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America.*

Compared to the Sons of Liberty, the Societies primarily served in a defensive role. In their first publication the German Republican Society of Philadelphia stated, "[Political associations] would prove powerful instruments in support of the present system of equality."[38] Associations protected equality by allowing citizens to work collectively and provided citizens more opportunities to actively participate in politics because they had more power in a group. The Democratic Society of Philadelphia stated that "popular societies have been cherished and incouraged," because they allowed citizens "to meet together in a peaceable manner, to discuss with temper,...and to declare and publish their Sentiments to their fellow citizens."[39] Along with facilitating the rights of an active citizenry to meet, discuss, and publish their opinions, the Societies made it easier for citizens to publish their opinions for debate. Numerous members of Democratic-Republican Societies were newspaper editors or publishers. One of the most famous was Benjamin Franklin Bache who was the grandson of Benjamin Franklin and an officer of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia.[40] Even without publishers and editors among their ranks, friendly democratic newspapers were willing to print the Societies resolutions, communications, and other publications.

Not only did associations offer citizens the opportunity to discuss and publish their opinions, they offered a better opportunity to investigate into the actions of the government because of their power in numbers.. A man titling himself "Cato" said that the Societies were "best calculated to acquire and diffuse political knowledge."[41] "For this reason," noted a

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[38] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in Foner, 53.

[39] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: January 9, 1793," in Foner, 68.

[40] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 413 n. 17.

[41] "Cato", "'Cato' to the *Newark Gazette*, March 12, 1794," in Foner, 143.

member of the Republican Society of the Town of Newark, "they [the Federalists] oppose the forming of Republican Societies, because it will have a tendency to enlighten the minds of the people."[42] The main way they helped "enlighten the minds of the people," and raised an alarm if they uncovered corruption, was through publishing their findings in the newspaper. All the Democratic-Republican Societies in the United States constantly published addresses, resolutions, and memorials in newspapers across the country. Publishing their ideas and findings allowed for information to spread throughout the country and disseminated to a majority of Americans.

Conclusion: Impact of the French Revolution

Thanks to the French Revolution the Democratic-Republican Societies envisioned a democratic society that contained white citizens taken from all classes who actively participated in politics individually as well as collectively. While democracy existed in America since the American Revolution, the Societies definition evolved in response to the changing times and the impact of the French Revolution. It gave the Societies hope that democracy could indeed destroy tyranny and liberate the world, but it reminded them that citizens needed to be ever vigilant and actively participate in politics. Initially the American Revolution secured the rights needed for citizens to actively participate in politics, but the French Revolution rekindled the importance of political associations. Though political associations existed during the American Revolution, it was the type of associations that came out of the French Revolution that the Democratic-Republican Societies incorporated into their definition of democracy.

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[42] The Republican Society of the Town of Newark, "'Republicanism' to Friends and Countrymen, March 19, 1794," in Foner, 145.

Throughout their writings the Societies rarely referred to the Reign of Terror that began in France around September 1793. Even with their relative silence on an event that pushed many other Americans away from supporting the French Revolution, the Societies did not condone the violence and disorder caused by the Terror. Their condemnation did not come in response to the French Revolution, but in response to a rebellion happening much closer to home. It was the Whiskey Rebellion. Unlike the French Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion did not bring new ideas to their definition of democracy but allowed them to expand upon and better explain their definition.

CHAPTER 2: THE WHISKEY REBELLION AND THE CONSTITUTION

In the previous chapter the French Revolution shaped the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy by reintroducing and reinvigorating ideas that existed since the American Revolution. Out of the French Revolution came a definition full of optimism as well as fear. The societies believed that tyranny awaited around every corner, and only an active and vocal citizenry would vanquish it and protect democracy. To help foster an active citizenry, the Societies believed that political associations, such as their own, needed to form throughout the nation. The impulse to form associations came in response to the French Revolution. But, soon the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy started to evolve in reaction to the events happening in western Pennsylvania collectively called the Whiskey Rebellion.

What brought on the evolution of the Societies' definition of democracy was the Federalists who used the Democratic-Republican Societies connections with the rebellion to tarnish and ruin their reputation.[43] Along with blaming the Societies for instigating the rebellion, the Federalists attacked the legitimacy of private political associations and called the Societies unconstitutional. While the Federalists had attempted to tarnish the Societies' reputation since their creation, the Whiskey Rebellion offered them some evidence to support their accusations. It was in response to the Federalists' two accusations that the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy evolved. To counter the Federalists' accusations the Societies portrayed themselves as less idealistic by showing how their own ideas worked within the United States Constitution. In general, the Societies responded by emphasizing the importance of the

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[43] William Miller, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62 no. 3 (July 1938): 324, 342.

Constitution and majority rule in a democracy in an attempt to make their definition of democracy acceptable to those who did not share the Societies' point of view.

The Democratic-Republican Societies and the Whiskey Rebellion

Between 1791 and 1794 violence erupted in western Pennsylvania over an excise tax that narrowly passed Congress on March 3, 1791. The problem of the excise tax was that it placed a burden on famers and distillers who relied on distillation to make a profit because it was cheaper to ship distilled crops across the mountains. Since the government tried excise cases only in the Federal Court, another burden was placed on the farmers who had to travel to Philadelphia for trial. Approaching the summer of 1794 the violence escalated. In November of 1793, western Pennsylvania farmers and distillers burned down the home of a tax inspector. They also planned to seize an armory, but soon decided to abandon their plan.

To try to placate the farmers' grievances, Congress passed an act on June 4, 1794, that allowed state courts to try excise cases which relieved the burden on traveling to Philadelphia for some of the farmers. Unfortunately on March 31, the federal court issued 75 legal processes against western distillers four days before the new act passed Congress. Because they were issued before March 31, the government still required farmers to travel to Philadelphia for court. Attempts to serve the legal processes by Marshal David Lenox, accompanied by General John Neville and a small group of soldiers stationed in Pittsburgh, lead to the first shots of the Whiskey Rebellion on July 17, 1794 at General Neville's Bower Hall home.[44]

While the extent of their participation is still debated by historians, most agree that the three Societies located in Pennsylvania's western counties played some role in the rebellion.

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[44] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 27-28.

They were the Democratic Society of Washington County, the Mingo Creek Society of United Freemen, and the Republican Society of the Yough. The largest and most prominent of them were the Democratic Society of Washington County. Part of the reason for its prominence was the composition of its membership which included both artisans and other laborers, doctors, lawyers, and rich planters. The division between laborers and the more moneyed men was represented largely in the division between the rank and file, composed of the former, and the officers, composed of the latter. From the Democratic Society of Washington County only James Marshel, president of the Society, David Bradford,vice-president of the Society, John Hamilton, and John Canon, along with two others fought alongside the rebels.[45] Not only did Marshel and Bradford serve as leaders in the Society, they also were leaders of the rebellion. Because they served as leaders in both the Society and the rebellion, historian Eugene P. Link believed that the rest of the Democratic Society of Washington County must have sympathized with the rebels even if they did not offer their full support.[46]

Not all the members of the Society supported the rebellion, though. David Reddick, another officer of the Society, called for the Democratic Society of Washington County to disband after the rebellion because of the part that its leaders played in instigating the rebellion.[47] Hugh H. Brackenridge, a founder of the Democratic Society of Washington County, recorded his own account of the rebellion to try to clear his name of any wrongdoing once the rebellion ended. In his account he claimed the Mingo Creek Society of United Freemen to be "the cradle

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[45] The Democratic Society of Washington County, "Democratic Society to Fellow Citizens of the United States, January 31, 1795," in Foner, 139.

[46] Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* , 145-146; Democratic Society of the County of Washington, "Democratic Society to Fellow Citizens of the United States, January 31, 1795," in Foner 139.

[47] David Reddick, "David Reddick to Mr. Scull, December 25, 1794," in Foner, 136-137.

of the insurrection."[48] Since Brackenridge wrote his account to clear his name, it might be seen as him just trying to pass the blame on to someone else. Even if that was true, the Mingo Creek Society played an active role in the rebellion. The first chairman of the Society, James McFarland, died trying to obtain a truce at the battle that took place at General Neville's home. Benjamin Parkinson replaced McFarland and went on to work with Marshel and Bradford throughout the rebellion.[49] It is likely that the Mingo Creek Society and the Republican Society of the Yough served more as the ground troops during the Rebellion with the Democratic Society of Washington County serving as their leaders. Unlike the Democratic Society of Washington County, the Mingo Creek Society and the Republican Society of the Yough was composed largely of farmers and other labors.

Beyond the Societies located in Western Pennsylvania, it is safe to say that the majority of the Democratic-Republican Societies did not cause or play any role in instigating the rebellion. In fact, most of the Societies denounced the rebellion because it violated the Constitution and majority rule. Support for the Constitution had always been around for the Democratic-Republican Societies with members acknowledging that previously members were both anti-Federalists and Federalists. Even though the "anti-Federalists" title carried a stigma anti-Constitution, a member of the Democratic-Society of the City of New York claimed, "All parties agreed, that a new constitution was necessary." He claimed both groups supported the Constitution with the only difference being whether the Bill of Rights should be adopted before

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[48] Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Incidents of the Insurrection*, ed. Daniel Marder (1795; repr., New Haven: College & University Press, 1972), 17.

[49] Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 147.

the Constitution was ratified.[50] During a Civic Festival put together on May 1, 1794, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia toasted the Constitution and said, "May its form and spirit be the invariable guide of all who administer it - May its authority never be prostituted, nor its departments illegally blended for the purpose of intrigue."[51]

The Democratic-Republican Societies even emulated the Constitution in their own organizations. When the Societies formed almost all of them set down rules and regulations that typically took the form of a constitution. The Democratic Society of the City of New York's constitution contained seven chapters and a preamble with each focusing on a different aspect of running the Society. Their Constitution laid down the principles and purpose of the Society. It also took care of the association's business matters such as: when and where they would meet, how to adopt new members, how to elect officers, and other day to day matters of the association.[52] When the Societies adopted resolutions, memorials, or other items to be published, the piece of writing needed a majority vote to become adopted and published. Everything about the Democratic-Republican Societies echoed the importance of rules and a constitution.

When news of the Whiskey Rebellion reached the Democratic-Republican Societies all of them condemned the actions of the rebels because it trampled upon the Constitution and went against the wishes of the majority. On July 29, the German Republican Society stated, "that every law enacted by the majority of the people ought to be submitted to, and that every

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[50] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 173.

[51] "Toast drunk at a Civic Festival on May 1, 1794 put on by the Democratic Society of Philadelphia," in Foner, 103.

[52] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Constitution, 1794," in Foner, 151-153.

opposition to the laws by violence is unconstitutional and dangerous." "To resist the will of the majority by force," according to the German Republican Society was, "subversive of the principles of a free government." In regards to the rebels the Society seemed to come down fairly light on them. Instead of a scathing attack the Society said that they "highly disapprove of the resistance of the citizens of the western counties."[53]

Two days later the Democratic Society of Philadelphia adopted their own list of resolutions in response to the Whiskey Rebellion that echoed the German Republican Society. The first and most important statement was "that in a Democracy, a majority ought in all cases to govern," which they followed by saying, "that where a Constitution exists, which emanated from the People, the remedies pointed out by it against unjust and oppressive laws and bad measures, ought to be resorted to; and that every other appeal but to the Constitution itself, except in cases of extremity, is improper & dangerous." To emphasize the importance of their first statement the Society mentioned that even though they considered the excise tax to be "oppressive, hostile to the liberties of this Country, and a nursery of vice and sycophancy," it still must be followed because it was a law that the majority voted for. Like the German Republican Society, the Society did not come down harshly on the rebels themselves. They even pledged their "utmost efforts" to get the excise tax repealed as long as it was through "Constitutional means."[54]

While most of the Democratic-Republican Societies responded to the Whiskey Rebellion by condemning the rebel's actions, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia responded three times. The first came on July 31. Their second response came in the form of a letter that they

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[53] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "Resolutions Adopted on the Resistance of Citizens in Western Pennsylvania, July 29, 1794," in Foner, 59.

[54] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: Thursday, July 31 1794," in Foner, 88-89.

wrote on September 4 and then sent to the rebels. Between their first and second response much had transpired between the rebels and the Federalist government. Throughout August peace negotiations went on between the rebels and five peace commissioners appointed by Pennsylvanian Governor Thomas Mifflin and President Washington. Unfortunately by August 28, President Washington learned from his commissioners that peace could not be accomplished through negotiation. Believing to have no other options, Washington ordered the militia to march to western Pennsylvanian and put the rebellion down through force.

When the Democratic Society of Philadelphia wrote and adopted their letter to the rebels on September 4, it was clear that the Society had not quite learned that the rebels refused Washington's demands because of the tone of the letter. The letter did not chide the rebels or attack them but had an extremely familiar and friendly tone. Once again the Society offered their assistance "to apply a constitutional remedy...by obtaining a repeal of the law," but they did qualify their statement. In order for the rebels to receive their help, they needed to peacefully disperse or comply with the peace negotiators Washington sent. Besides the extremely friendly tone of the letter, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia also offered the clearest explanation of how majority rule and the Constitution worked together in their definition of democracy. The Society said that "the genuine principles of Democracy [majority rule] were perfectly compatible with the principles of social order [the Constitution]."[55]

Seven days later, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia published a third response. Unlike their previous two, the Philadelphia Society's third response went after the western farmers who were in open rebellion with the Federal government. After discovering the rebels

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[55] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: Thursday, September 4, 1794," in Foner, 90-91, quote on 91.

refused to submit to "minimum demands of the government," the Democratic Society of Philadelphia stated, "That we fully concur in the sentiment, That the strength of the State ought to be exerted, should the power of reason prove inadequate with the Western citizens." While their support for military force was surprising for an organization built around republican principles, it was the third resolution that proved to be the most controversial resolution. Instead of disapproving of the rebel's action, the third resolution called for democrats to withdraw their support and patronage from the rebels. Worse, the Society claimed that by not accepting President Washington's "equitable and pacific proposals," the rebels exhibited "a rank aristocratic feature." By "a rank aristocratic feature," the Society referred to an aristocracy' tendency to place the needs and wants of the "few" ahead of the "many." It was so controversial that when debating on whether to adopt it, half of the members, including the Societies' President, walked out and the resolution never became adopted.[56]

Going through each of the Democratic-Republican Societies' reaction to the rebels, it became clear that the Constitution and majority rule were critical components of their definition of democracy. In the case of the Whiskey Rebellion, democracy was represented as majority rule, because it was majority rule that helped ensure power was not consolidated in the few. By few, the Society would refer to an aristocracy which is why the Philadelphia society called the rebel's action "a rank aristocratic feature."[57] Without taking away from the importance of majority rule though, it was the role of the Constitution in the Societies' definition of democracy that became clarified in reaction to the rebels. Each of the Societies' responses noted that the

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[56] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795: Thursday, September 11th, 1794," in Foner, 90-92.

[57] Ibid.

Constitution represented order because it set down or inferred that there were rules and regulations that people needed to follow. If they did not follow the Constitution, society was thrown into chaos, which was exactly what the rebel's had done by rebelling against the excise tax. Simply put, the role of the Constitution in the Societies' definition of democracy was to create and provide a framework for democracy to exist in.

With the call to troops issued by Washington, the rebels' opinion on peace changed. On October 2, the rebels reconvened and decided to submit to the federal government. Even though the rebels dispersed, troops continued to march in western Pennsylvania and proceeded to capture the ringleaders of the rebellion for trail.[58] With only two ringleaders convicted of treason, both later pardoned by Washington, the Whiskey Rebellion ended.[59] After the arrest, the troops remained until November 17. Even then a small number of troops remained in Pittsburgh "for winter defense."[60]

Following the Whiskey Rebellion, President Washington went before Congress and gave his annual message where, at the behest of Alexander Hamilton, he blamed the Democratic-Republican Societies for instigating the rebellion.[61] By blaming the Societies in front of Congress, Washington publicized the Federalists' accusations against the Societies that existed almost from the start of the Rebellion. During the Whiskey Rebellion President Washington sent a letter to the Governor Henry Lee that said, "I consider this insurrection as the first Formidable fruit of the Democratic Societies."[62] While Washington referred to the Societies directly in his

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[58] Miller, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection,": 332-333.

[59] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 28-29.

[60] Miller, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection,": 333.

[61] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 64-65.

[62] Miller, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection,": 324, 342.

letter to Governor Lee, in his annual message he referred to them as "self-created societies," which was important because it showed that political associations did not fit into his own definition of democracy.

Almost immediately after Washington's message, the Senate followed suit and passed a piece of legislation that condemned and called for the censure of the "self-created societies." The House of Representatives intended to follow suit with a piece of legislation put forward by Thomas Fitzsimmons, but two Republican representatives, James Christie of Maryland and James Madison of Virginia, stopped them.[63] Christie responded to the amendment by pointing out that the Republican Society of Baltimore had nothing to do with instigating the rebellion. He even mentioned that the Baltimore Societies' members marched against the rebels. Christie's defensive was also important because he was the only representative to defend a Society by name.[64] For James Madison, whether the Societies were guilty did not matter. What mattered to him was the question that Fitzsimmons amendment raised about the power of the government in censuring and condemning the people.

Madison believed that the government did not hold any censorial power over the people which included the Democratic-Republican Societies. He also believed that censuring the Societies placed the government on a path that might eventually lead to the censuring of the freedom of speech and press. Madison, like the Democratic-Republican Societies, believed "that the censorial power is in the people over the Government, and not in the Government over the people." He considered it part of "the nature of Republican Government." Madison even

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[63] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 31; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, 64-65.

[64] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 31

thought that the power of the Societies "will stand or fall by the public opinion," which was another agreement he had with the Societies. Whether Madison's quasi-defense of the Democratic-Republican Societies came from an attachment to them, his defense was very important because of his concluding principle. According to Madison, "The law is the only rule of right; what is consistent with that, is not punishable; what is contrary to that, is innocent, or at least not censurable by the Legislative body."[65]

While the actual rebellion ended in November, Washington's annual message to Congress represented how the Federalists used the Whiskey Rebellion to tarnish the Democratic-Republican Societies' reputation by accusing them of instigating the rebellion. For the Democratic-Republican Societies the Federalists' accusations were a serious threat because it threatened to turn public opinion against them. According to the Societies public opinion was "one of the most important guards against a bad administration of government."[66] Further, the Societies believed that in a democracy power rested in the people which meant the government as well as the Democratic-Republican Societies served the people. When they published their writings, unless addressed to a specific person they addressed them to the general public. If the Federalists succeeded then, the public would turn on the Societies, which meant the loss of public support and their destruction.

The Federalists' accusations posed another problem for the Societies. By referring to the Societies as "self-created," Washington challenged the constitutionality and legality of political

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[65] *Annals of Congress*, 3d Congress, 1794, 912-914; Gaillard Hunt ed., *The Writings of James Madison* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), vol. 6: 222 quoted in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 31-32; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 64-66.

[66] The Republican Society of the Town of Newark, "Resolutions Adopted Upholding Freedom of Speech, Writing, and Publishing, December 17, 1794," in Foner, 149.

associations and the role of the citizen, which in turn challenged the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy. As it has already been shown, the Societies believed that a democracy contained an active citizenry who had an unalienable right to form associations for political purposes. Washington and many Federalists believed that the role of the citizen was to cast his vote during an election and let those elected into office govern without any help from the citizenry. Political associations, according to the Federalists, were dangerous and led the United States into anarchy.[67] To prove that they were right, the Federalists linked the Societies to the Whiskey Rebellion.

For the Federalists there was no question that the Societies instigated the rebellion and/or actively participated in it.[68] To prove the Societies' guilt, the Federalists pointed out the connection between the Democratic-Republican Societies and the western Pennsylvanian farmers in rebellion. They started by highlighting some of the Democratic-Republican Societies involvement in the Whiskey Rebellion but that only incorporated three Societies. To connect all the Societies to the rebellion and the rebels, the Federalists focused on the community that existed between the Societies and the rebels. Like the transatlantic community, the community between the Societies and the rebels contained a shared value system, similar beliefs and communication with one another. To make the connection all the Federalists had to do was point to the Societies shared distaste for the excise tax and the familiarity that the Societies, such as the Democratic Society of Philadelphia, had with the rebels. Simply put, the Federalists tried to make the Societies guilty by association.

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[67] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795 :Thursday, June 5, 1794," in Foner, 84.

[68] Miller, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection,": 324, 342.

The Democratic-Republican Societies were not unaware of Federalists' motivation in blaming the Societies for starting the rebellion. Upon learning about the accusations, the Democratic-Republican Societies pointed out that the Federalists offered no sort of evidence to support their claim. The Democratic Society of Philadelphia claimed that the Federalists "fabricated [the charges] for the destruction of the Patriotic Societies in America."[69] They even noted that the claims were to "rest upon their bare assertion," which might have been a cause for concern because of Washington's prestige.[70] James Madison agreed, and even believed the charges were made to try to defeat the Republicans in Congress.[71] For the Democratic-Republican Societies the attempts to tarnish their reputation and sway public support away from them was a serious threat. Because of the potential threat, the Democratic-Republican Societies needed to find a way to combat these accusations without betraying their own beliefs but keeping public opinion on their side. It was through their defense that we can see how the Democratic-Republican Societies definition of democracy evolved.

To combat and defeat the Federalists' accusations and keep public support, the Democratic-Republican Societies portrayed themselves as less idealistic. It was in response to the accusations that the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy evolved because they grounded their definition of democracy in the Constitution. By using the Constitution to support their definition of democracy, the Societies attempted to portray a definition that was more acceptable to those who did not share the same point of view. The

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[69] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795 :Thursday, October 9, 1794," in Foner, 93

[70] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795 :Thursday, December 18, 1794," in Foner, 98; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 64-65.

[71] James Madison to James Monroe, December 4, 1794, quoted in Hunt, *Writings of James Madison*: 220-221, quoted in Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 32.

evolution can best be seen in how the Societies defended their own organization and the idea of associationalism. It made sense for the Societies to defend associations since it was the legality and constitutionality of political associations that the Federalists attacked.

Before the rebellion the Democratic-Republican Societies claimed the idea of associationalism to be a self-evident truth and inherent in democracy. One member of the Democratic Society of the City of New York felt so strongly that he thought "the Society would be disgraced by attempting to prove," that people held the right to associate.[72] After the rebellion the Societies emphasized how the Constitution protected political associations. The transformation can been seen in an address by the Democratic Society of Philadelphia. When talking about the freedom of speech and expression of opinion, both of which fall under the right to associate, the Society claimed both to be "an imprescriptable right, independent of any Constitution or social compact." While before the rebellion they might have left it at that, the society went further by simply and directly stating that the two rights "are recognized by our Constitution."[73] The Democratic Society of the City of New York took a similar but different approach to proving the Constitution protected the right of association.

On January 26, 1795, members of the Democratic Society of the City of New York published an addressed intended to defend themselves against the Federalists' accusations. They began by calling on the public to decide their guilt, and then systematically going through the charges levied by the Federalists. In the response to the claims about being self-created, the society responded by asking "By *whom* then ought we be constituted?" To the Society "all

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[72] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "A Member of the Democratic Society of the City of New York" to a "Federal Republican," June 18, 1794," in Foner 165.

[73] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia "Manuscript Minutes, July 3, 1793, to January 1, 1795 :Thursday, December 18, 1794," in Foner, 99.

private associations [were] established upon the foundation of their own authority sanctioned by the first principles of social life." For them the charge of being "self-created" was pointless and they even mocked the term by asking, "Was it *necessary* to obtain a *special act* of legislature for the *exclusive* creation of the SOCIETY of CINCINNATUS [?]" By mentioning the Society of Cincinnatus the Democratic Society of the City of New York wanted to draw attention to the fact that President Washington at one time was the presiding officer of a society similar to their own. They hoped by pointing out Washington's own hypocrisy, the public would realize that the Federalists' accusations was a ploy to destroy the Democratic-Republican Societies.[74]

Next the Democratic Society of the City of New York asked, "Is it for *assembling* that we are accused? what law FORBIDS it?" Of course the Society already knew the answer to the question, but they wanted to point out that no law actually forbid citizens from peacefully assembling. It was also here that the Societies used James Madison's concluding principle in the House's debate on Thomas Fitzsimmons amendment. Even without Madison's defense they justified political associations existence in the social compact theory that formed the Constitution. The Societies' line of argument followed as such. The people created the government and entrusted it with power. Whether "popular or representative" the government was responsible to "*any part of the people.*" Since an individual held the right to freedom of speech, press, and free investigation, a collection of individuals held the right, "because every association *must comprehend all the privileges*, and *properties* of the members whom it is composed."[75] By making the argument that collection of individuals held the same rights as

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[74] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to 'Fellow Freeman,' January 26, 1795," in Foner, 192-194.

[75] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to 'Fellow Freeman,' January 26, 1795," in Foner, 194-196.

individuals, and that the Constitution protected the same rights, the Constitution then protected political associations.

Conclusion: Impact of the Whiskey Rebellion

Unlike the French Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion did not bring any new ideas to the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy. Instead, in reaction to the Whiskey Rebellion the Societies' definition evolved through their emphasis of the role of the Constitution that was agreed upon by a majority of the people. The evolution started with the Societies' responses to the actions of the rebels, with the Societies emphasizing how the Constitution of the United States laid the groundwork of a democratic society. For them the Constitution created an orderly society that secured the rights of the people, and by violently resting a legal, but immoral, law the rebels threw society into chaos and put democracy in jeopardy.

The Societies' definition of democracy continued to evolve in reaction to the Federalists' accusations that challenged the Societies' definition of democracy, specifically the role of the citizenry. The Federalists believed that the citizenry was to remain quite until an election, where they could vote. Their challenge came with the Federalists's claims that the Democratic-Republican Societies were unconstitutional and dangerous, and their claim that the Societies instigated Rebellion as proof. The Democratic-Republican Societies responded by denying that they had any hand in starting the rebellion and by arguing that the Constitution protected a citizen's right to associate.

For the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy, couching their defense of associations in the Constitution grounded it and made it more acceptable to the general public, in an attempt to keep public support on their side. At the same time as the

Whiskey Rebellion, the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy continued to evolve in reaction to the Jay Treaty. Like the rebellion, the Jay Treaty did not change their conception of democracy but allowed them to further explain their idea of democracy in a clearer way.

CHAPTER 3: THE JAY TREATY, EGALITARIANISM, AND EDUCATION

One of the most important aspects of the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy was egalitarianism. As we have seen in the first chapter, the French Revolution "hastened the growth of egalitarianism" in the United States.[76] For the Democratic-Republican Societies, it appeared in their adoption of the title "citizen" for all members and their exclusion of any other title not descriptive, such as president, vice-president, etc.[77] In an article entitled "Republicanism," the Republican Society of the Town of Newark stated, "It must be the mechanics and farmers, or the poorer class of people (as they are generally called) that must support the freedom of America."[78] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia considered it the "duty incumbent on *every citizen* [emphasis added] to afford his assistance, either by taking a part in its immediate administration, or by his advice and watchfulness." The first chapter talked about the latter of these two duties. This chapter will focus on the former: the citizen's duty to participate in the government's "immediate administration."[79]

While the French Revolution helped reinvigorate egalitarianism in America, the Jay Treaty offered the Democratic-Republican Societies the chance to further describe how it shaped their definition of democracy. By the Jay Treaty, I am referring to both the appointment of Chief Justice John Jay as special envoy to Great Britain, and the treaty he carried back to the United States. With the exception of Benjamin Franklin Bache, none of the Democratic-Republican

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[76] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 23.

[77] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Manuscripts Minutes, July 3, 1793 to January 1, 1795: July 3rd, 1793," in Foner, 67; The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Constitution, 1794," in Foner, 153.

[78] The Republican Society of the Town of Newark, "'Republicanism' to Friends and Countrymen, March 19, 1794," in Foner, 145.

[79] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in Foner, 53.

Societies were directly involved with the events of the Jay Treaty. Instead, they simply acted as observers. When the Societies responded to the events surrounding the Jay Treaty, they based their responses on their perception of it. In turn, the Societies' definition of democracy evolved based on their perception of the Jay Treaty. While the Societies experienced the Jay Treaty similar to the French Revolution, their definition did not evolve in the same way. Instead democracy evolved similar to how it did in response to the Whiskey Rebellion. The Jay Treaty prompted the Societies to emphasize new ways in which egalitarianism took shape in a democracy and how to help bring about a more egalitarian society.

The Democratic-Republican Societies and the Jay Treaty

Between early March and mid April, tensions escalated between the United States and Great Britain, leading some to believe that war was inevitable. President Washington was among this group and he stepped up efforts to prepare the country for war by March 27, 1794. Fortunately in the following days, he received news from Thomas Pickney, the American minister to London, that expressed Britain's hope of keeping a harmonious relationship with the United States. With that said, war was still possible, but the recent news helped support an idea put forward by some of President Washington's council to send a special envoy to Great Britain to negotiate a treaty. As historians Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick put it, "Washington now was in rather a dilemma," to make war or to negotiate for peace.[80]

On April 15, President Washington made up his mind to send a special envoy to Great Britain to negotiate for peace and offered the position to the current Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay. At first Jay declined, citing that the sequestration and non-intercourse resolutions

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[80] Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism*, 388-393.

being debated in Congress at the time would hurt their chances of negotiating with Great Britain. On the following day, after being visited by a number of Federalists urging him to accept, Jay finally accepted but repeated his thoughts on the damage that the two resolutions would cause to his mission. On April 19, his nomination would be confirmed in the Senate by a vote of 20-8. A few days later, on April 25, the non-intercourse resolution reached the Senate floor, where it was struck down by the Federalists two days later. Then on May 12, John Jay set sail for Great Britain, the same day that an embargo ended against Great Britain, which President Washington could have reimposed.[81]

The first Democratic-Republican Society that responded to John Jay's appointment was the Democratic Society of Philadelphia on May 8, 1794, four days before Jay left for Britain. To them Jay's appointment violated the separation of powers theory in the Constitution by entrusting one man with judicial and legislative functions. To make matters worse it was not the people that entrusted Jay with the position but the executive. The Societies believed "that permitting the executive to bestow offices of honor and profit upon judges, is to make them subordinate to that authority." Along with violating the Constitution, Washington's interference in the legislature subverted the people's "right of representation." The interference the Society referred to was that Washington, without the help of the Senate, advised John Jay on making the treaty. That meant it was entirely up to the President, one man, and his advisors, who were not elected, to construct a treaty that would become "supreme-law-of-the-land."[82]

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[81] Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism*, 393-395, quote on 393.

[82] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Resolutions Adopted on the Appointment of John Jay as Envoy to Great Britain, May 8, 1794," in Foner, 104-106.

As the Democratic Society of Philadelphia's response hinted at, the Democratic-Republican Societies did not approve of John Jay's appointment as special envoy. To many Societies, including the Philadelphia one, Jay's appointment represented an attempt by the Federalist to accumulate the government's power in the hands of a select few. In turn, the Societies believed that by appointing Jay as special envoy, the Federalists signaled their wish for the creation of an aristocracy that controlled the government and could squash democracy in the United States. Creating an aristocracy in the United States challenged the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy, because it prevented the development of an egalitarian society crucial to the Societies' definition of democracy.

In the first chapter, I talked about how the Societies believed that in a democracy the citizenry had the duty to actively participate in politics through his "advice and watchfulness."[83] In response to the Jay Treaty a second duty of an active citizenry became highlighted because the Jay's appointment hindered a citizen from executing the duty. Along with offering his "advice and watchfulness," the German Republican Society believed the citizen also had the duty to participate in the government's "immediate administration."[84] Further, many Societies believed that in a democracy governmental power needed to be distributed throughout the citizenry. The Democratic Society of the City of New York stated that "in Republican governments,...the offices of state are equally open to every class and description of citizens, without any other distinction than that which arises from a superiority of virtue and talents."[85] Jay's appointment

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[83] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in Foner, 53.

[84] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in Foner, 53.

[85] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 179.

challenged the Democratic-Republican Societies' egalitarian and democratic society as well as the second duty of a citizen. To prevent an aristocracy from developing and to ensure a citizen's could execute their second duty, the Societies offered ways to ensure an egalitarian society that distributed power throughout the citizens by giving them to opportunity to hold government positions.

It was in the Democratic-Republican Societies' ideas on how to ensure equality and allow all citizens to serve in a public office that that their definition of democracy evolved because now the Societies emphasized the importance of an educated citizenry.[86] Before the Jay Treaty, a man titling himself "Cato" published a letter that stated, "no community could remain for any length of time happy and free, unless there should be a general dissemination of political knowledge among the people."[87] The Democratic Society of the City of New York considered, "the best preservative of Liberty is public knowledge and information."[88] The Societies emphasized education and the spread of political knowledge because it responded to the Federalist beliefs that the gentry should rule. Both Federalists and the Societies agreed that an education was needed to effectively and properly run the government, and the Federalists claimed that the gentry received the best education which made them the most qualified. Creating an educated citizenry countered the Federalists' claim.

While not directly responding to John Jay's appointment, the Democratic Society of the City of New York offered one way to create an educated citizenry through the formation of

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[86] Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 13-49. Cotlar's first chapter looks at the construction of the reader-citizens in the 1790, which is similar to what I mean by an educated citizenry.

[87] "Cato," "'Cato' to the *Newark Gazette*, March 12, 1794," in Foner, 143.

[88] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 180

associations and societies such as their own. They considered an advantage of associations like their own was their "promotion of useful knowledge, and the dissemination of political information." Later in their address the Society became more direct and stated that one of their duties was, "to diffuse political information."[89] The main way the Societies distributed information was through newspaper publications. Remember that many of the Societies either had publishers or editors amongst their membership and/or were closely tied with a friendly newspaper.

In a more direct response, on June 23, 1794, the Democratic Society of Washington County considered Jay's appointment to be "an aristocratic engrossment of all offices and power in a few individuals." Worse, the Society believed it to be "a great indelicacy towards the people of the United States," because it showed that Washington did not trust the ability of the people. The Society even used the French Revolution as an example that "generals may be taken from the ranks, and ministers of state from the obscurity of the most remote village." Even though the Society did not offer a way to create an educated citizenry, it highlighted that the Society understood why Washington appointed Jay over any one else. The Society's response was also important because it mentioned that the Society had the same problems with the appointment of James Monroe, an ally to the Societies, as ambassador to France. It showed that the Societies, here, did not act out of partisan spite to protest Jay's appointment, but had a real problem with people already holding multiple government offices, especially in different governmental departments.[90]

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[89] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 179-180.

[90] The Democratic Society of Washington County, "Resolutions Adopted on the President's Proclamation of Neutrality, June 23, 1794," in Foner, 134-135.

The Democratic Society of Wythe County broke from other Societies on how the prevent the development of an aristocracy in response to Jay's appointment. On July 4, 1794, the Society called Jay's appointment "despotism," because it accumulated "executive, legislative, and judicial authorities in the same hands." Instead of calling for the education of the citizenry or spread of knowledge, the Wythe County society called for an amendment that restricted the President to two terms to prevent the creation of an aristocracy.[91] Even though the Society singled out the executive's term limit, their push for term limits was reminiscent of the Anti-Federalist during the Constitutional Convention who pushed for shorter terms for all public officials. By advocating for term limits, the Wythe County society further allowed for the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy to evolve because it showed an incorporation of Anti-Federalists' ideas about term limits.

Similar to the Democratic Society of the City of New York's address on May 28, the Madison Society of the County of Grenville responded to Jay's appointment by reaffirming their definition of democracy. On July 26, 1794, they claimed, "all officers of a free government ought to be divided as equally as possible among the citizens." To ensure their idea of democracy thrived in the United States, the Society again reaffirmed the importance of education but took a different path on how to educate the citizenry. To them, equally dividing the offices of the government offered "a means of disseminating political knowledge," and provided an incentive for men to become educated and qualified for public office.[92]

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[91] The Democratic Society in Wythe County, "Address to the People of the United States, July 4, 1794," in Foner, 353-354.

[92] The Madison Society of the County of Grenville, "Resolutions Adopted on the Officers of a Free Government, July 26, 1794," in Foner, 391.

Even though direct mentioning of John Jay dropped off after the Madison Society of the County of Grenville's response until the treaty became public on July 29, 1795, different Societies continued to offer ways to educate the citizenry. The Democratic-Republican Societies expressed another way to ensure the spread of information and the creation of an educated citizenry, by supporting public education and public schools. At the time, the majority of the people, notably farmers and other workers, could not afford an education for themselves and their children. Because of their inability to get an education a hierarchy formed between the poor and the rich based entirely on a person access to education. The distinction proved to be the groundwork of an aristocracy developing in America. The Democratic-Republican Societies believed public schools would counteract the development of an aristocracy because it gave everyone a chance to receive an education.

Many of the Societies' members, especially Robert Coram of the Patriotic Society of the County of Newcastle, supported public schools even before Jay's appointment, but it was after his appointment that Societies formally endorsed public education as a society.[93] On August 30, 1794, the Patriotic Society of the County of Newcastle, who Robert Coram was a member of, adopted a list of resolutions that called for public schools in Delaware. Public schools, according to the Society, educated "unfortunate children of indigence and neglect," with the "children of opulence and vigilance," which meant everyone received a similar education. Public schools then preserved the equality, "so necessary to the preservation of a pure Republican government."[94]

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[93] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 13-14.

[94] The Patriotic Society of the County of Newcastle, "Resolutions Adopted on the Establishment of Public Schools, August 30, 1794," in Foner, 322.

Later in the year, on December 23, the same Society sent a memorial to the Delaware legislature calling for them to fund public schools, because Delaware's constitution allowed for the creation of public schools, but none had formed yet.[95] Partly coming in response to the Whiskey Rebellion, the Democratic Society of Philadelphia expressed the same sentiments on the public schools on March 19, 1795. Public schools were "to be the best means of impressing every class of citizens...with a true sense of their rights, duties, and obligations." To the Society "diffusing a just knowledge of rational liberty, will improve, preserve, and perpetuate the blessings of independence and republicanism."[96] At a joint celebration for the 4th of July in 1795, the Democratic Society of the City of New York, along with other affiliated societies in New York, toasted to "The progress of education." Their toast consisted of three cheers to education's role in causing "a speedy abolition of every species of dangerous distinctions."[97]

Overall the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy evolved in response to John Jay's appointment as special envoy to Great Britain because it elevated the importance of education. With the emphasis on education, the type of citizenry the Societies called for in their definition of democracy evolved as well. Education was important because it disseminated power throughout the citizenry and it qualified them to hold political offices and offer better "advice and watchfulness."[98] Further the Societies description of an egalitarian society evolved because through their push for education they pointed out that no distinction

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[95] The Patriotic Society of the County of Newcastle, "Memorial to the Legislature on Schools, December 23, 1794," in Foner, 322-323.

[96] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Resolutions Adopted on the Importance of Establishing Public Schools, March 19, 1795," in Foner, 108.

[97] "Celebration of the Nineteenth Anniversary of American Independence by the Joint Societies, The Democratic, Tammany, Mechanic, and Military, July 4th, 1795," in Foner, 225.

[98] The German Republican Society of Philadelphia, "To Friends and Fellow Citizens, April 11, 1793," in Foner, 53.

should exist between white men, especially in the eyes of the government, in a democracy. Even though the Democratic Society of the City of New York noted that a distinction did form based on a person's virtue and talents, looking at the other Societies' responses they believed that education would even erase this distinction.[99] Their definition of democracy then did not just rely on equal opportunity but rested entirely on equality amongst who was considered a citizen.

The Jay Treaty did not just involve Jay's appointment as special envoy to Great Britain, but included the events surrounding the treaty when it came back to the United States. The Treaty of London, the official title of the Jay Treaty, was signed on November 19, 1794, but did not arrive back to President Washington until March 7, 1795. Since they adjourned a few days before the president received the treaty, the Senate did not receive the treaty until June 8. Behind closed doors, the Senate debated the treaty for 16 days, before ratifying it on June 24, 1794, by a vote of twenty to ten. Even after they ratified the treaty, Washington asked the Senators to keep the treaty's term secret. Unfortunately for President Washington, on June 29 Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora* and an officer of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia, published an extended abstract of the treaty. Then on July 1, he published the entire treaty in a pamphlet, and proceeded to sell it for twenty-five cents a piece. The secrecy and the unfavorable terms of the treaty created widespread criticism, but still on August 18, 1795, President Washington signed the treaty. [100]

Just like their response to John Jay's appointment as special envoy, the Democratic-Republican Societies condemned the Jay Treaty for many of the same reasons. The first Society

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[99] The Democratic Society of the City of New York, "Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794," in Foner, 179.

[100] Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism*, 415-431; Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 36-38.

to comment on the Jay Treaty was the Democratic Society of Philadelphia in a letter to the Democratic Society of the City of New York on March 25, 1795. In March though the terms of the treaty were still kept secret by the government and it had only recently been received by the Senate. Still the Democratic Society of Philadelphia hinted that when the treaty became public, the Democratic-Republican Societies would likely oppose it.[101] Next was the Democratic Society of Canaan, Columbian County who denounced the Treaty as the culumination of Federalists attempt to gain more power and control in the United States.[102]

Following the Canaan Society came the Republican Society of Pendleton County, S.C., which was one of the most vocal critics of Jay's Treaty among the Democratic-Republican Societies. The Republican Society of Pendleton County responded to the Jay Treaty twice. First the Societies sent a letter to Thomas Paine and Peter Freneau, the brother of Philip Freneau, on September 25, where in their P.S. they referred to the treaty as "Mr. Jay's manacles, of his fetters, of his shackles!"[103] Three days later, the Society published 28 resolutions opposing the treaty, and claimed it to be "as detestable in its origins, as contemptible in its event! - a treaty which can never be enforced but by the bayonet!"[104] While the Societies listed 28 reasons why they opposed the Jay Treaty, I want to highlight one in particular because it fell in line with their opposition to Jay's appointment.

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[101] The Democratic Society of Philadelphia, "Letter from the Corresponding Committee to the Committee of Correspondence of the Democratic Society of the City of New York, March 25, 1795," in Foner, 108-110.

[102] The Democratic Society of Canaan, Columbian County, "Address by a Member to the Democratic Society on Jay's Treaty, September 3, 1795," in Foner, 246-252.

[103] The Republican Society of Pendleton County, "To Messeurs Freneau and Paine, September 25, 1795," in Foner, 398-400, quote on 400.

[104] The Republican Society of Pendleton County, "Resolutions Adopted on Jay's Treaty, September 28, 1795," in Foner, 400-409, quote on page 400.

One of the reasons why the Republican Society of Pendleton County opposed was the secrecy that initially surrounded the treaty when it came back from Great Britain. "There is no authorized secrecy in *our* government, and to infer such a right," according to the Society was "a prostitution of republican principles." Keeping the Jay Treaty a secret signaled the formation of an aristocracy to the Democratic-Republican Societies because it lodged power, here as knowledge, in the hands of the few. The Society considered secrecy to rob the citizenry of their right to free investigation and it made "*twenty* greater than the *whole*," because the twenty had access to information. They even claimed that Washington received the Treaty in January, when the Senate was in session, but withheld it until June when no one was "in session to give the alarm!"[105] Looking at the Democratic-Republican Societies' responses to the Jay Treaty nothing changed about their definition of democracy. Instead the Jay Treaty reaffirmed the Democratic-Republican Societies' perception that the Federalists were attempting to create an aristocracy in the United States because they kept the terms of the Jay Treaty secret.

Conclusion: Impact of the Jay Treaty

The Democratic-Republican Societies perceived the Jay Treaty as an attempt by Federalists to create an aristocracy in the United States where only a select few obtained government positions and powers. Both Jay's appointment and Washington's attempt to keep the terms of the Treaty secret provided the Societies with evidence to support their claim. To prevent the development of an aristocracy and to ensure an egalitarian and democratic society, the Democratic-Republican Societies emphasized ways to educate the citizenry.

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[105] The Republican Society of Pendleton County, "Resolutions Adopted on Jay's Treaty, September 28, 1795," in Foner, 403-404.

The Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy evolved through their emphasis on the citizen's duty to hold government positions and their emphasis on education and the spread of political information to ensure the citizen could execute the duty. The Societies believed that in a democracy all citizens had the duty to hold government positions and the positions should be distributed throughout the citizenry to keep power from being accumulated in the hands of a few. To ensure that citizen's had the opportunity to hold office, the Societies emphasized the creation of an educated citizenry, because education showed that a citizen was qualified to hold a government position. Emphasizing education also responded to why the Federalists believed the gentry needed to control the government. With the creation of an educated citizenry, the Federalists no longer had any justification for gentry rule because with all citizen's educated no distinction between the gentry and everyone else existed. Creating a society that did not distinguish people based on education or their access to it, destroyed the Federalists' justification for their conception of the government and society that relied on gentry rule.

While the Jay Treaty reignited the Democratic-Republican Societies' enthusiasm for education in their definition of democracy, not all good came from the Jay Treaty. For the first year or so the treaty was overwhelmingly opposed by most Americans, until the spring of 1796, when, according to Elkins and McKitrick, "the noonday blaze of prosperity," arrived. "The noonday blaze" took the form of open navigation of the Mississippi, something the Western Societies had been fighting for; opening of the Northwest territories; and "the overseas carrying trade."[106] Because the treaty proved to be beneficial to many Americans, the Societies lost any

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[106] Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism*, 415, 432, quotes of 432.

support they had to defeat the Jay Treaty, and along with that they lost some of their own influence in American society. By September 1796, the *Gazette of the United States* gleefully proclaimed the death of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia.[107]

[107] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 38.

CONCLUSION

By 1796 the Democratic-Republican Societies started disappearing and membership declined throughout the nation. The main reason for the decline in membership was that the Federalists finally succeed in portraying the Societies as radical and dangerous. It started with the Jacobin Clubs and the French Revolution, which turned bloody with the Reign of Terror in 1793 when many Societies formed in the United States. What made it worse was the Societies never denied their connection to the Jacobin Clubs or stopped supporting the French Revolution. There was also the Whiskey Rebellion. Historian William Miller argued that the ultimate decline of the Democratic-Republican Societies began with Washington's public accusations that the Societies instigated the Whiskey Rebellion in November 1794.[108] Of course Sean Wilentz pointed out that some Societies grew in response to Washington's denunciation.[109] Another contribution came from the Jay Treaty which had recently turned public support in its favor because of the economic opportunities it brought to the United States, even though the Societies fought hard to have it repealed.[110] Overall, each event played some part in bringing about the downfall of the Democratic-Republican Societies,

The disbanding of the Democratic Society of Philadelphia excited many Federalists because they considered it to be the mother society of the other Democratic-Republican Societies. But they quickly became disappointed when they realized that not all the Societies disbanded. Philip Foner pointed out that the Democratic Society of the City of New York

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[108] Miller, "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection,": 334.

[109] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 65.

[110] Elkins and McKitrick, *Age of Federalism*, 415, 432.

continued to meet and stayed active up to 1799.[111] New Democratic-Republican Societies also formed in 1798, in response to the Alien and Sedation Acts. These later Societies though had a much closer connection with Jefferson and other Republican politicians, which leads me to describe them as more clearly a form of a political party. The Societies that formed between 1793 and 1796 did involve themselves in some form of politics and communicated with Republican politicians, but on a much smaller scale than the ones that formed later.

Even though the majority of the Societies disappeared after the Jay Treaty, the legacy of the Societies did not because they created a definition of democracy that had a lasting affect how we define democracy today. The Democratic-Republican Societies, though, did not develop a definition of democracy out of thin air and it did not match the same definition others had at the time, especially the Federalists. Instead their definition of democracy emerged inchoately and wrapped in contradictions. Over time their definition evolved and became clearer. For the Democratic-Republican Societies, the evolution of democracy was prompted by three different events that affected the Democratic-Republican Societies. The evolution that happened in their definition was informed by how the Society experienced the event and their own beliefs and ideology. Since their definition was informed by their own sensibilities and experiences, the definition of democracy was fairly unique to them.

My thesis has attempted to show the evolution of the Democratic-Republican Societies definition of democracy over the course of their short three-year existence. But in those three years three major events happened that profoundly shaped the way in which the Societies and others defined democracy. The events were the French Revolution, the Whiskey Rebellion and

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[111] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 38.

the Jay Treaty. The French Revolution served as an inspiration for the Societies that the spirit of democracy still existed in the world, but reminded them that it was under siege by aristocratic and capitalistic threats. To protect democracy the Democratic-Republican Societies emphasized the importance of a citizenry, which excluded African-Americans, women, and even the gentry, that actively participate in politics either individually or collectively. The French Revolution reinvigorated the importance and usefulness of political associations in a democracy.

Following the French Revolution was the Whiskey Rebellion. The Societies definition of democracy evolved in reaction to two aspects of the Whiskey Rebellion, but both emphasized the importance of the Constitution in democracy. First the Societies reacted to the rebels' action, which allowed them to emphasize how the Constitution created the framework that democracy existed in. Second came the Societies' reaction to the Federalists who blamed the Societies for causing the rebellion and who called the Democratic-Republican Societies unconstitutional. Many of the Societies recognized that the Federalists were trying to tarnish the Societies' reputation with the public in order to bring about the destruction of political association and the Societies conception of democracy. In response to the Federalists' accusations, the Societies definition of democracy evolved because it became grounded in the Constitution. The evolution was best seen in the Societies use of the Constitution to defend the legitimacy and constitutionality of political associations.

The last event that caused the Democratic-Republican Societies' definition of democracy to evolve was the Jay Treaty. The Jay Treaty incorporated two different events: the appointment of John Jay as special envoy to Great Britain and how the President and the Senate handled the treaty once it arrived back to the United States. To the Societies, Jay's appointment represented

an attempt by Federalists to create an aristocracy in the United States and prevent an egalitarian society form taking home. Preventing equality from spreading in America challenged the Societies' definition of democracy, because an egalitarian society rested at the center of democracy to the Societies. To prevent the Federalists from winning and to ensure the spread of equality the Societies emphasized the importance of education and the spread of information. It was in the emphasis on education that the Societies definition evolved because the Society expanded how they described the citizenry in a democracy from just an active citizenry to an educated and active citizenry. Once the treaty arrived back, their definition had already evolved and the secrecy that Washington shrouded the Treaty in only further supported the Societies belief that Federalists, and Washington specifically, wanted to create an aristocracy in the U.S.

After the Jay Treaty, many of the Democratic-Republican Societies disappeared, but their definition of democracy did not, specially the importance and role of political associations. While the Democratic-Republican Societies were independent of any formal political organization, they did pave the way for the development of political parties in the United States. According to Philip Foner, the Societies "contributed the techniques of democratic expression" used by the Republicans to defeat the Federalists, which included "the circulation of public petitions, manifestos, memorials, and resolutions."[112] Further, the Democratic-Republican Societies pushed for the inclusion of all whites into the voting process. Sean Wilentz attributed the Societies for the gradual inclusion of lower class whites into the political arena during the election of 1800.[113] Not only did it help the Republican defeat the Federalists, the Societies laid

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[112] Foner, *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*, 40.

[113] Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*,

the groundwork for the development of the Second Party System, especially the Democratic Party under Andrew Jackson.

This paper does not try to offer groundbreaking theories but looks to examine how a specific idea developed from its initial stages into a definition that a group of people shaped from their own experiences. Ideas did not initially appear fully developed, but they evolved over time. Ideas did not evolve on their own. They needed to be prompted and a person needed to decided how the definition would evolve and what the new meaning was. As historians, good citizens, or whatever we choose to be, we must keep this in mind because one day we might be part of a group starts or changes the meaning of a word and idea. We must not run from the task though, but rather embrace it as part of our duty.

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