CHAPTER 11

The Triumphs and Travails of the Jeffersonian Republic, 1800–1812

FOCUS QUESTIONS
1. How did Jefferson behave as president, and how did he deal with his predecessors federalist programs?
2. What were the circumstances that gave birth to the principle of judicial review?
3. How was the United States able to acquire the Louisiana territory and why did Jefferson struggle with the purchase?
4. What foreign policy challenges did Jefferson face and how did he respond to each?
5. Why did Madison ask Congress to declare war on Britain in 1812?

DISCUSSION TOPICS

• Discuss the rivalry between John Adams and Jefferson, examining their genuine and deeply held differences of principle regarding power, liberty, and the meaning of the new American experiment. Trace the evolution of their relationship, as it eventually revealed (in their letters) the even deeper commitments to American values that they shared.

• Examine the close connection between politics and law in the early history of the Supreme Court, with Federalist Marshall contending with Republican Jefferson. Show the importance of Marshall’s bold new principle that the Supreme Court has the final power to interpret the Constitution.

• Analyze the causes and consequences of the Louisiana Purchase, particularly, its long-term implications for the Federalist-Republican conflict. Consider the expansion into Louisiana in relation to Americans’ increasing fascination with the West, spurred in part by the Lewis and Clark expedition.

• Identify the puzzling problem of the causes of the War of 1812 and, particularly, the issue of maritime causes versus the Western War Hawks’s frontier concerns. Examine the question of whether declaring war against Britain was essentially an emotional and irrational outburst or whether it involved a defense of central American interests and principles.
CHAPTER SUMMARY
The ideological conflicts of the early Republic culminated in the bitter election of 1800 between Adams and Jefferson. Despite the fierce rhetoric of the campaign, the Revolution of 1800 demonstrated that the infant Republic could peacefully transfer power from one party to another. The election of 1800 also signaled the decline of the conservative Federalist Party, which proved unable to adjust to the democratic future of American politics.

Jefferson, the political theorist, came to Washington determined to restore what he saw as the original American revolutionary ideals and to implement his Republican principles of limited and frugal government, strict construction, and an antimilitarist foreign policy. But Jefferson, the practical politician, had to compromise many of these goals, thereby moderating the Republican-Federalist ideological conflict.

The sharpest political conflicts occurred over the judiciary, where John Marshall worked effectively to enshrine the principles of judicial review and a strong federal government. Against his original intentions, Jefferson himself also enhanced federal power by waging war against the Barbary pirates and by his dramatic purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon. The Louisiana Purchase was Jefferson’s greatest success, increasing national unity and pointing to America’s long-term future in the West. But in the short term the vast geographic expansion fostered schemes like Aaron Burr’s to break the West away from the United States.

Nevertheless, Jefferson became increasingly entangled in the horrific European wars between Napoleonic France and Britain, as both great powers obstructed American trade and violated freedom of the seas. Jefferson attempted to avoid war through his embargo policy, which damaged the American economy and stirred bitter opposition in New England.

Jefferson’s successor, James Madison, soon stumbled into a diplomatic trap set by Napoleon, and western War Hawks, hoping to acquire Canada, whooped the United States into a war with Britain in 1812. The nation went to war totally unprepared, bitterly divided, and devoid of any coherent strategy.