The Road to Hartford: The Ideological Shift and Internal Self-Destruction of the Federalist Party

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THE ROAD TO HARTFORD:
THE IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT AND
INTERNAL SELF-DESTRUCTION
OF THE FEDERALIST PARTY

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THE ROAD TO HARTFORD: THE IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT & INTERNAL SELF-DESTRUCTION OF THE FEDERALIST PARTY

During the Revolutionary War, those fighting for freedom from the tyranny of the British monarchy united in this one common cause which forced them to lay aside differences and cooperate if the Revolution was to be a success. The patriots, in the spirit of the revolt, thus pushed aside controversy over any proposed form of government for the duration of the war. The miserable failure of the Confederation government, however, forced the founding fathers to reconsider the best method of uniting the states without endangering their very being. From this debate arose two polarized parties standing on opposite ends of the debate, each loudly advocating their vision as the only hope for surviving into the nineteenth century. The Jeffersonian Democrat-Republicans proclaimed a union modeled after the Confederation government in its allowances of states’ rights would best serve the union whereas the Federalist Party of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton espoused a union cemented into a cohesive unit by a strong central government. The latter vision led to the United States Constitution and the Federalist Party rode this momentum to a twelve year stranglehold on governmental proceedings. Yet the party, only fifteen years after its last President left office, was for all intents and purposes defunct due to its supposedly treasonous actions. One must therefore question how the party that dominated early American politics and was in itself primarily responsible for the American Constitution became in so short a period a party
characterized by secessionists. Through an examination of the founding principles of the Federalist Party, the intense party rivalries which arose in the late 1700s and early 1800s and the changing face of the party which led it to the Hartford Convention, it becomes apparent the Federalist Party abandoned all of its foundational principles due to radical influence brought about by party hatred and a desire to remain in office. This ideological shift stripped the party of all meaning instilled in it by its creators and it thus spiraled downward into meaninglessness. In essence, the Federalist Party abandoned its traditions and in the process allowed itself to fall into the hands of men who led it to destruction despite the best efforts of moderates working to save it.

Before one can understand the radical shifts in the Federalist Party, one must first understand the principles of the early Federalists. Although they left no declaration of beliefs per se, the party did hold dearly several prominent ideas that formed the core ideology of its founders. First, the party believed the country should maintain a strict neutrality in all instances of foreign conflict. Involvement in foreign entanglements, they felt, would imperil the union while eroding commerce, an occurrence which would devastate the American economy. One can see this belief most prominently in the Farewell Address of George Washington, who advised “The great rule of conduct for us, in regard to foreign nations is...too have with them as little political connection as possible.”  

This desire for neutrality was one of the basic tenets of the original Federalists.

To understand the second basic principle of the party, one must realize they held an undying belief in the need for an aristocratic leadership in government positions.

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Arising from Alexander Hamilton’s unwavering mistrust in the abilities of the common man, most Federalists believed society should be separate from those who controlled it. They believed only an elite few, the Federalist leaders themselves, should observe and practice the everyday functioning of government, for the common man did not possess the mental and spiritual attributes necessary to successfully govern.\(^2\) They believed men should abstain from following the whims of public opinion and instead vote their conscience. In this vein they also expected the common citizen to recognize their leadership superiority and thus feel obligated to continually return these intellectual leaders to office. One can see this repeatedly in the Federalist refusal to campaign for elections. Men such as Timothy Pickering and John Adams ran not by soliciting their constituents but on character alone.\(^3\) This highly elitist view of a society controlled by a select few leads one to the second basic tenet of the party.

This was an undying belief in the evils of democracy. Most Federalists did not like the common man, while some, such as Uriah Tracy, found “they are vicious and love vicious men for their leaders.”\(^4\) Federalists such as George Cabot declared “I hold democracy, in its natural operation, to be the government of the worst.”\(^5\) Federalists feared the people, if given free rein to choose all government officials, would invariably succumb to demagoguery that would sweep virtuous and skilled leaders from office in favor of commoners willing to bend to public will despite the cost. From this fear sprang

such plans as Hamilton’s motion for a lifetime appointment of all Senators and of the President, a plan which Republicans later used as ammunition to claim monarchical designs were inherent within the Federalist Party. Nevertheless, it is obvious the early Federalists did not trust the democratic process because it threatened their utopian dream of an American society governed by an elite few maintaining the government apart from public opinion.

The final and probably most important tenet of the original Federalist ideology was the desire for a strong national union to oversee the states. These men believed invariably the collection of states could not survive without a strong central government to unite them in times of crises and maintain the common peace in times of tranquillity. Washington also addressed this theme, stating:

The Unity of Government which constitutes you one people is a main pillar in the edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquillity at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very liberty which you so highly prize.

He further warned the leaders must protect it from “every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.” From this one can deduce that above all, the early Federalists held nothing so sacred as the sanctity of the national union. Although they greatly differed in opinion with the strongly pro-democratic party of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, these men were willing to endure any evil to preserve the newly enacted Constitution.

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Otherwise they feared the states themselves would crumble under both external and internal conflicts that would undoubtedly return the new nation to outside control.

These three principles formed the core of early Federalist thought and were the driving force in the erection of the national state. As noted, this system conflicted with many of the Jeffersonians, who eschewed the strong federal government in favor of states’ rights and strongly believed in the necessity of democracy to maintain society. These differences provided the basis for party conflict and as the Constitutional government began operating, the two parties gradually became sectionalized around their leaders. Those in the South primarily followed the example of the agrarian supporting Jefferson whereas the North congregated around the commerce driven philosophy of Hamilton. It is shortsighted to assume straight sectionalization, of course, for the Federalists essentially did not care what most of their constituents thought. The leaders themselves, however, did increasingly become sectionalized but managed to keep their office through minimal contact with the people. When they did bother to acknowledge their voters, their forecast of doom for commerce should the Republicans ever take control was enough to secure their reelection. In the South, however, Federalists were soon losing regularly to the fledgling party machine being created by Jefferson. The North of course had no such mechanism and it was the lack of such a body which allowed the growth of radicalism. While most Federalists were determined to make the unitarian vision of Washington a fact, an extreme group of radicals, unchecked because of the lack of party organization, arose determined to prevent any supposed indiscretion heaved at the North by the Southern Republicans.
These men began espousing their views before the venerable Washington even left office. A few members of the Essex Junto, a political group in early Massachusetts which arose in opposition to the State Constitution because they felt it did not give the state government enough power, became increasingly nervous about the possible election of the hated Jefferson to the Presidency.\(^{10}\) Prior to the election, members sent inquiries to other political leaders within the state and in neighboring Connecticut on the possibility of a Northern coalition against Jefferson. This prompted Lieutenant Governor Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut to reply "I sincerely wish the Northern States would separate from the Southern, the moment that event [the election of Jefferson] shall take place."\(^{11}\) The idea died with the election of Federalist John Adams, but the radicals quickly began undermining the idea of neutrality with their hateful remonstrations against France.

Descended primarily from the English upper class and dependent upon English commerce for their survival, events of the French Revolution greatly troubled Federalists and by 1798 they were ardently opposed to any form of Jacobinism which they feared would infiltrate the United States. The XYZ Affair enhanced this mistrust of France and when Adams moved to resolve the situation, party leaders turned against him, including the usually conservative Hamilton. Adams later lamented "They could not, or would not, distinguish between Jacobinism and neutrality. Everything with them was Jacobinism, except a war with France."\(^{12}\)


\(^{11}\) Oliver Wolcott to Connecticut Secretary of the Treasury, 1796, quoted in Charles Brown, *Northern Confederacy*, 14.

Even before its loss of control, radicals were slowly splintering the party from within party lines. One must realize this was largely due to their eschewment of the democratic process. The voters of Massachusetts, indoctrinated by their leaders on the dangers of free choice, were generally apathetic to the political process and ignored the early radicals while continuing to send them to office. This changed as the Republican organizers slowly crept into Massachusetts and began energizing the non-Federalist portions of the public, but these first crucial years saw no competition in elections. Additionally, the continued Federalist refusal to organize their own party machine, which could have censured the radicals, contributed to their relatively free hand. Thus these men continually undermined the original intents of the party and initiated its splintering while in the safety of its protecting ideology of a government apart from society and free from the public. The Federalists, in essence through their own beliefs, allowed the beginnings of the political suicide of their party.

Nevertheless, the split between Adams and a portion of his Massachusetts supporters doomed the incumbent in the election of 1800, allowing the despised Jefferson to gain control of the Presidency. This infuriated the radicals, including Pickering, who had vocally opposed Adams in favor of Aaron Burr, and they vociferously began calling for action. Suddenly the prospects of a federal government were not as appealing, as “the government, which, administered by themselves, was regarded as miserably feeble and

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13 The sources vary, but most, including Banner, Fischer and Livermore, believe that most of the Essex Junto supported Adams. The notable exception is Pickering, whom Adams fired from the post of Secretary of State. The most visible reason behind Adam’s fall from favor appears to have been Hamilton, who despised Adams and refused to support him in the election.
inefficient, became, on its transition, arbitrary and despotic." Federalists, who just a short time before had professed complete confidence in the federal government, began to question why the states did not have enough power. In essence they loved the idea of a strong federal government until they no longer controlled it. Men such as Pickering went even further, proclaiming "I will rather anticipate a new Confederacy, exempt from the corrupting influence and oppression of the aristocratic Democrats of the South. There will be...a separation." He justified these remarks by insisting "The Federalists are dissatisfied, because they see the public morals debased by the corrupt and corrupting system of our rulers." This is important in that Pickering refers to the very system of government which his party created and perpetuated as now corrupt and essentially worthless. This apparent repudiation of the federal system when under Republican control helps one understand the apparent selfishness and party extremism of the radical faction within the Federalist ranks. Ardent states' righters suddenly blossomed within the party of the federal government. These men, who had only a few years before dedicated themselves to stripping the states of some of their powers suddenly wanted more power for the states. Pickering was not alone in his diatribes, as Fisher Ames declared "Our country is too big for Union; too sordid for patriotism; too democratic for liberty." The radicals of New

14 Matthew Carey, The Olive Branch: or, Faults on Both Sides, Federalist and Democratic; a Serious Appeal on the Necessity of Mutual Forgiveness and Harmony, to Save Our Common Country from Ruin, 3rd ed. (Rowe & Hooper, 1815), 66.
16 Timothy Pickering to George Cabot, January 29, 1804 in Lodge, Life and Letters of George Cabot, 337.
England were slowly infecting the leading minds of the area with the idea of secession, but the lack of voter support and the general voter apathy paralyzed any hope of popular revolt, for New England was still enthralled in the Federalist utopia of government separate from society. The leaders, with no people to lead, thus hatched a conspiracy involving the vacant governorship of New York which alerted many to the clandestine confederacy plans of the radicals.

The conspiracy hinged on the election of Aaron Burr to the governor's seat. Once he was firmly entrenched in Albany, Pickering proposed "he alone...can break [the] Democratic phalanx." The plan called for Burr to orchestrate a secession convention for New York. The radicals felt that without New York and its powerful economy, the proposed confederacy could not survive. Although many of these men did not trust Burr, they supported him as their only hope for adding New York to their designs. The scheme failed miserably, however, when the vast majority of Federalist leaders vocally opposed the plan. George Cabot proclaimed "an experiment has been suggested by some of our friends, to which I object that it is impracticable, and if practicable, would be ineffectual." Hamilton, a notorious hater of Burr, also opposed the plan as one which would only increase Federalist problems while ignoring the most disturbing problem, that of a spreading democratic system. Other Federalists proclaimed "Aaron Burr is not of

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18 Timothy Pickering to Rufus King, March 4, 1804, quoted in Henry Adams, Documents, 352. This is echoed in a letter from Roger Griswold to Oliver Wolcott, March 11, 1804, also in Henry Adams, Documents, in which Griswold states his belief in Burr as the last hope for the Northern states.

19 George Cabot to Rufus King, March 17, 1804, quoted in Lodge, Life and Letters of George Cabot, 345. This is echoed in other letters by members of the Essex Junto, including Stephen Higginson in a letter to Timothy Pickering, March 17, 1804, quoted in Henry Adams, Documents, 361-62.

20 Alexander Hamilton to Theodore Sedgewick, July 10, 1804, quoted in Henry Adams, Documents, 366. Hamilton's actions to ensure the defeat of Burr led to the infamous duel in which Burr shot and killed the Federalist leader.
the Federalist party...but of a few turbulent and disappointed men.”21 While the plan did not come to fruition, it did alert other party leaders to the growing problems within the party and provided the Republicans with a great deal of ammunition with which to persuade the voters and arouse them from their apathy. It also served to heighten party tensions, as the rapidly organizing Republicans began to sweep elections through the work of a party machine intent on convincing the voters of the treasonous nature of the Federalists, although the majority of the Republican leaders, including Jefferson, who stated “The majority of the Federalists do not aim at separation,” knew this to be the work of a select few troublemakers within the party.22 Thus because of an inability on the part of moderates to control the radicals of the party, Republicans were able to classify as traitors all Federalists, including those who still held firm to the principles of the Constitutional years. The lack of reprieve from moderates also allowed these radicals to continue planting seeds of discontent throughout New England, which further enhanced Republican attempts to infiltrate the area. By the middle of 1805, foundational demands to ignore the whims of the public, whims the Republicans played for votes, and the loss of its philosophical leader Hamilton stripped the Federalist Party of all political initiative and paralyzed it. The hopes of the party to ever regain control of the federal government were gradually dissipating, a fact which only further encouraged the radicals to make mischief and stiffened moderate resolve to be peaceful protesters within the bounds of the Constitution.

21——, To the Republican Electors of the State (New York: Broadside, 1804), 1.
22 Thomas Jefferson in an unspecified letter, quoted in Charles Brown, Northern Confederacy.
Adding to the problems of the moderates was the increasing hatred between the two parties, as contact disintegrated and attempts at civil debate often resulted in violence. One must realize this was not the party bickering present in modern society but a powderkeg characterized by outright hatred and murderous feelings. These feelings originated in the national government versus states’ rights debate but remained in full force as party lines blurred. Impartial writers observed “The violence of opinion, the disgraceful and hateful appellations...mutually given by the individuals of the parties to each other.”

Others declared the “parties hate each other as the French and English hate each [other] in time of war” and “So embittered are the minds of the parties that I fear the first blood that flows may possibly be shed in civil war.” Incidents of violence abounded. Society, despite the wishes of Federalists, became more and more involved in these disputes to the point that many cities became for all intents and purposes segregated. Republicans did not allow Federalists to use Republican bathrooms and Federalists forbade Republicans to frequent Federalist libraries. Taverns were definitively party affiliated, with party members beating the unfortunate soul who stumbled into the wrong bar. Party members mugged and beat people because of their party affiliation and brawls in Congress became an everyday occurrence. A fight between J. H. Nicholson and Michael Leib in the Capitol lasted over one hour, resulting in both persons covered with blood, with no attempts to end it emanating from the observers.

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24 Parson Bentley in unspecified letter, 1809, quoted in Fischer, *American Conservatism*, 183; F. M. Gilbert to Sarah Hillhouse, June 20, 1812, quoted in Fischer, *American Conservatism*, 183. These and numerous other impartial observations of party hatred are reproduced in Fischer, *American Conservatism*, 179-190.

When one considers the intensity of party hatred, it becomes easier to understand why the Federalist radicals reacted as they did to the Jefferson presidency. They feared he would outlaw Federalism, if not declare all members of the party criminals. They returned hatred in kind but were unwilling to endure the role of the minority party as the Jeffersonians did. Those deeply involved in the party disputes realized they were now fighting against men with whom they once fought alongside. Jefferson lamented "Men who have been intimate all their lives, cross the streets to avoid meeting and turn their heads another way, lest they should be obliged to touch their hats." Yet Jefferson also was a very active participant in the party battles, as he often ruthlessly attacked his enemies, most notably Hamilton, whom Jefferson often deemed a threat to the republic and an unmitigated monarchist. Federalists were by no means quiet about the actions of the Republicans, as leaders such as Josiah Quincy declared "Nothing it seems to me can be politically good, whose root springs on the other side of the political equator...a pure stream cannot issue from a corrupt fountain." The accusations and counter-accusations are much too numerous to list in detail, but these few examples illustrate the intensity of party feeling. The disagreement, although it arose from political differences, became much more personal during the nation’s first quarter-century. Politicians not only disagreed with their opponent’s stance on governmental matters, they essentially hated their


opponent for even having a disagreement. The pressures of trying to lead the fledging republic to success in the face of the historical failures of all other republics weighed heavily on the minds of these men and thus their contrasting views on the proper course for the country initiated a dislike which quickly descended into hate and distrust. They did not just disagree on one issue, but instead disagreed on every issue. By the start of the War of 1812, party disagreement was so essential to party delineation that the radicals of the Federalist Party were able to characterize every step by the Republican leadership as a misstep designed to destroy the union and the North, while the Republicans were able to counteract with accusations the Federalists were essentially trying to destroy the union and the South. There was no bipartisan debate, only partisan hatred.

As mentioned, the disagreement spread to every aspect of governmental decision-making and each party believed the other to be continuously searching for ways to undermine their own plans. No subject raised greater fears, however, than the debate over which country to support during the Napoleonic Era. Federalists were convinced the Republicans, whose warm feelings for France sprang from Jefferson's time in Paris, were preparing the country for a Jacobin Revolution and subservience to Napoleon. "The proposal for establishing a Directory in America," accused John Quincy Adams, "like that of France, is no new thing."29 Other writers were convinced Jefferson was only a puppet

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of Napoleon and the preparations for conquering America would soon commence.\textsuperscript{30} The Boston Spectator declared:

Neither the cupidity or thirst of power of any despot has ever been so apparent or so dreadful, nor have they ever carried a single ruler to such desperate extremes, as we have witnessed in our age in France, and in this country.\textsuperscript{31}

The Republicans saw the same ghosts in the Federalist relationship with Great Britain, as John Q. Adams, after his defection to the Republican Party, accused:

[The Federalists held] inexpressible contempt for the whole American nation--this fanatical idolatry of Britain and this delirious dream of Bonaparte coming in the shape of a tiger to eat up our children--have all become standing articles of faith in the Junto creed.\textsuperscript{32}

The disagreement between which country to support of course violated Washington’s instructions to avoid foreign connections, but the Federalists ignored him and chose to side with England anyway. As one can deduce from the sources, the rivalry between France and England clearly divided the United States. Although Federalist feelings towards Great Britain were primarily tied to trade relations, Republicans continually accused the Federalists of monarchical designs and painted a picture of the Federalists reinstating the English royalty to preeminence over America. Likewise, the Republican affinity for France which originated with Jefferson’s respect for their democratic principles at the beginning of the French Revolution quickly became the backbone for a conspiracy to hand the United States to Napoleon on a silver platter. As one can see, neither party was afraid to stretch the truth and from the continued disagreements over France and

\textsuperscript{30} A Word to the Federalists and Those Who Love the Memory of Washington (Boston, 1810), 11.
\textsuperscript{31} Boston Spectator, January 29, 1814, 17.
\textsuperscript{32} John Q. Adams, ed., A Review of the Works of Fisher Ames, Compiled by a Number of His Friends and First Published in the Boston Patriot (Boston: Everett and Munroe, 1809), 5.
England one can gain valuable insight into the ridiculous grounds on which party members fought. One must return to the fact both parties were so intensely aware of the difficulty of maintaining a republic and each felt their way to be the only way to maintain it. This led them to continued disagreement and contributed heavily to the Federalist break with traditional principles in order to counteract any action by the Republicans.

This also led to Federalist objections over expansion and representation. After the Louisiana Purchase, a number of Federalists lamented the action because they envisioned a coalition between the South and the West which would undermine all Federalist attempts to regain control of the country. Josiah Quincy declared the admission of Louisiana into the Union would essentially equal a Southern declaration of indifference to Northern concerns and therefore free the North to choose its own path.\(^{33}\) Likewise, the issue of the three-fifths allowance in representation continually pricked the fury of the Northerners. Pickering cried “Without separation, can those states [New England] ever rid themselves of Negro Presidents and Negro Congresses?”\(^{34}\) The Federalists protested once again, for they were concerned the North would be forgotten and thus lose its importance in the union. They felt the Republicans were packing the union to ensure their continued control of the union while already receiving an unfair advantage through the three-fifths amendment. Unless the Jeffersonians immediately ceased such abominations, the Federalists realized they might never regain control of the government and Republicans might forever shape it in the Jeffersonian mold. This is why the radicals were able to continue their vociferations and why party politics continued to decline. Washington’s

\(^{33}\) Josiah Quincy, in a speech on the Senate floor, quoted in Charles Brown, *Northern Confederacy*, 78.

\(^{34}\) Timothy Pickering to Rufus King, March 4, 1804, quoted in Henry Adams, *Documents*, 352.
national union was quickly becoming internally hostile, as the apparently hopeless Federalists struggled in vain to hold once again the seat of prominence.

Remarkably, the Republicans provided the Federalists with just such a chance. Angered by French and British seizure of American goods and the continued British impressment of American sailors, the Republicans enacted an embargo which prevented all exportation. Radical Federalists claimed Republicans designed the action solely for the destruction of New England’s precious commerce and therefore the destruction of New England. Pickering claimed Madison wanted to bring New England to her knees while Massachusetts Senator Hillhouse proclaimed “I consider this to be an act which directs a mortal blow at the liberties of my country...TO WHICH THE PEOPLE ARE NOT BOUND TO SUBMIT.”

Moderate Federalists, however, realized the Embargo was their best hope to regain prestige and were actually partly responsible for the action. They continually claimed the administration did not care about New England because it refused to protect her commerce from foreign attackers. Then, as Carey notes, “After goading the government into resistance, and vilifying them for not procuring redress, [the Federalists] thwarted, opposed and rendered negatory every rational effort made to accomplish the very object they professed to seek.” Whether or not the Federalist leaders knowingly contrived the plan as a way to steal votes from the Republicans, they did in fact use the action to finally launch their own fledgling party organization and retake some of their lost


36 Carey, Olive Branch, 61. Carey also provides, on page 74, George Cabot’s call for action in response to the injured New England commerce as proof some Federalists were asking for the Embargo.
votes. The origination of a Federalist Party organization had begun in 1804 after Jefferson swept all of Massachusetts' electoral votes. The younger Federalists decided "If we mean to preserve the commonwealth and New England, our organization must be more complete and systematic." While many older Federalists initially lambasted this action as stooping to the factional level of the Republicans, they gradually warmed to the idea as they realized they could not hope to win any national election without a political base. Despite their desire for an organization, however, the party was unable to shake the ardent Federalist supporters from their aforementioned apathy while the Republicans had stolen many of the centrist voters from under the Federalist fold, leaving the Federalists with little if any foundation on which to build their proposed party machine.

The embargo changed this delineation. The Federalists finally were able to convince most of the North that Southerners dominated the Republican Party and were determined to eradicate commerce. The moderate party leaders also attempted for the first time to silence the radicals, for they realized they could not hope to recapture power as long as some of their members were campaigning for secession. Cabot sent a letter to Pickering requesting him to abstain from secessionist talks, because the Republicans were on the ropes and were using the Federalist radical's secessionist propaganda to retain some of their own votes. The moderates also suggested a possible convention in which the Federalists could construct a list of grievances against the government and thus capture more of the public attention in preparation for a push at reclaiming their

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37 Clarfield, Timothy Pickering, 228.
38 Harrison Gray Otis quoted in Fischer, American Conservatism, 59.
39 George Cabot to Timothy Pickering, October 5, 1808, quoted in Lodge, Life and Letters of George Cabot, 308. A similar letter was sent by Harrison Gray Otis to Josiah Quincy on December 15, 1808, quoted in Adams, Documents, which insisted it was a big mistake to promote secession.
superiority. Although the furor subsided when Congress lifted the embargo, even Jefferson admitted the action was a mistake, but true to Federalist fears, likened the entire uproar to another secessionist plot:

The monarchists of the North have been able to make so successful use of the Embargo as to have federalized the Southeastern states and endangered New York, and they now mean to organize their opposition by the regular powers of their state governments. The Massachusetts legislature which is to meet the middle of the month, it is believed, will call a convention to consider the question of a separation of the union, and to propose it to the whole country East of the North River, and they are assured the protection of Great Britain...We must save the Union.\textsuperscript{40}

Although the moderates within the Federalist Party were trying to stop such rumors, the people of New England, greatly injured due to the lack of commerce, were actually interested in the propaganda of the radicals. The party organization which moderates such as Otis had labored to construct began, once it finally aroused enough support to make a difference, to fall under the spell of the radical demagogues. Although some of the luster died with the repeal of the embargo, the radicals, with popular support behind them, began to campaign for the convention moderates had originally proposed. The only difference was their convention would be a convention of secession.

One must not overlook the importance of the embargo in the evolution of Federalist thinking. They finally abandoned their hope of a government removed from society in their determination to recapture prominence within the union. The radicals decided this was no longer a desirable goal and thus stole the thunder of the moderates by indoctrinating the minds of the newly organized Federalist supporters with propaganda citing the irrevocable damage done to the North by the South. The event is significant

\textsuperscript{40} Thomas Jefferson, in Annals of Congress, 10\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session, 1808-09, p. 1798, quoted in Charles Brown, Northern Confederacy, 66.
because it essentially saw another remnant of original Federalist thought fall away. The party, both moderates and radicals, had long abandoned the hope of neutrality in response to Republican support of France. This marked the end of Federalist hopes to avoid democracy. They were now becoming the very thing they hated most about the Republicans. They were basing decisions on the whims of the public for their own political gain. Society was now becoming intermingled irrevocably with government. The original Federalist philosophy was almost devoid of support even by the Federalist Party.

The final tenet of Federalism which remained was that of national unity. While radicals had been campaigning for dissolution for years, they were essentially alone in their protests (as evidenced by the Burr conspiracy). Determined to convince the public of the evil inherent in the Republican Party, the radicals continued stoking the secessionist fire after the repeal of the embargo. The moderates appeared to be regaining control when the War of 1812 began. The radicals used this as one last opportunity to break the union and they were finally able to convince the public that the concept of national unity would be better served if the union ended north of the Potomac.

From the beginning, all of New England resisted the call to war. They resisted troop requests and requests for money to fight a war against a country they considered their best friend. Throughout New England, the prevalent feeling was:

> Every American, who regards either justice, or the honour [sic] of his country, will maintain this fact, with unyielding firmness, that the people of the United States are not at war with Great Britain. That it is a mere party affair affected by the President and a few ambitious men around him.41

Radicals encouraged the entire North to abstain from assisting the President in any way, while many radicals suddenly seemed less radical to the general public. Federalists
dominated New England elections, with many of the state legislatures containing almost as many radicals as moderates. The Massachusetts House of Representatives, for example, contained men with enough hatred for the Republicans and disdain for the union to issue a declaration accusing the Republicans of starting the war solely because it was jealous of commerce and ignorant in the true meaning of Federalism. The radicals once again contemplated the idea of a convention to address the possibility of secession or, as Pickering envisioned the event, a chance to make the Republicans cater to New England or face her secession. This time, however, the radicals were not lone voices in the wilderness. The entire state of Massachusetts, angered over a lack of naval protection on her coast, eagerly supported the proposed convention. Unfortunately for the radicals and their secessionist aspirations, they expended all of their energy attempting to get the convention declared. The moderates quickly pushed them aside and attempted to control the damage of the secession cries, but in reality it was too late. The Federalist Party for all intents and purposes had lost all semblance of the original party. Now only a small set of moderates held to the idea of national unity. Federalism in essence had ceased being the party of Hamilton and now more closely resembled the original party of Jefferson. The only thing left for the party was to pull the trigger on its own demise, which leads one to Hartford.

As noted, the moderates did attempt to curb the damage created by the radicals. They essentially elected themselves as delegates to the convention in Hartford and insisted

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41 *Boston Spectator*, January 8, 1814, 5.
43 Timothy Pickering to Samuel Putnam, February 24, 1814, quoted in Henry Adams, *Documents*, 393.
the purpose of the convention was innocent while trying to distance themselves from the
“nest of vipers, who are sucking the blood of the people, and fatten upon the distress of
their fellow citizens.”45 The radicals, realizing they had lost the initiative, foresaw the
danger emanating from the convention and lamented they “expect no good, but much evil
from it. It will embarrass us, aid the enemy and protect the war.”46 They predicted the
delegates would address grievances and do little else so they entirely abandoned the
process. Thus the originators of the Federalist downfall actually left the scene of the crime
without a whimper prior to the party’s flaming descent. Those who had labored the
longest to fight the Jeffersonians realized what they perceived as the last best chance to
make the Republicans stand at attention would in fact in the hands of the moderates do
little but hurt the party.

Predictably, the radicals were correct in their assumptions. While the events
excited The London Times with hopes about the possible dissolution of the enemy, the
delegates did little besides declare their rights.47 They asserted the right of interposition,
or the right of states to decline submission to unconstitutional and harmful laws and they
also prepared a list of proposed amendments which would help soothe wounded sectional
feelings.48 In a colossal instance of shortsightedness, however, the delegates held the

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44 Harrison Gray Otis, Otis’ Letters in Defense of the Hartford Convention (Boston: S. Gardner,
1824), 10.
45 Boston Spectator, December ?, 1814, 193.
46 An Anonymous Massachusetts State Congressman, quoted in Charles Brown, Northern
Confederacy, 108.
47 London Times, January 3, 1815.
48 Charles Brown, Northern Confederacy, 112. The proposed amendments are as follows: 1) representation
based solely on the free white population, 2) to allow no new states into the union without
a 2/3s vote of Congress, 3) to limit embargoes to 60 days, 4) to require a 2/3s vote of Congress to enact an
embargo, 5) to require a 2/3s vote of Congress to wage an offensive war, 6) would bar all naturalized
citizens from holding any national office and 7) would prohibit a President to succeed himself as well as a
convention in complete secrecy. Thus although they did not actually propose any radical ideas or even contemplate secession, Republicans nonetheless were able to brand them traitors because no one actually knew what transpired behind the closed doors of the Convention except the delegates themselves. The radicals were right when they predicted the convention would only harm the Federalist cause. The delegates neglected to even consider the desires for action emanating from the people, who also quickly abandoned them. Thus Republicans stigmatized the men who had tried valiantly to hold the union together as the most treasonous men in the country. Although some, such as Otis, protested "the people of Massachusetts are either an intelligent people and guilty of premeditation-or they are an ignorant people and the dupes were hoodwinked and led by the knaves," the majority of the blame fell upon the delegates. To make matters worse, the President announced the treaty ending the war at almost the same time as the Hartford Convention adjourned. The nation was able to turn its full wrath upon the proceedings in Hartford and continually lambasted the delegates for considering secession when a foreign power threatened the very existence of the nation. This in itself became the most unforgivable crime of all. Suddenly Republicans rendered voiceless the only people within the Federalist party who still believed in the sanctity of union.

This in essence signaled the end of the Federalist Party in national politics. Quincy Adams in retrospect theorized "the party wasn't prepared for the convulsion, to which the prohibition on two successive Presidents from the same state. These amendments are found in Dwight, 377-78.

49 Otis, Otis' Letters, 12.
measures and designs of their leaders was instigating them." The end of the war and the patriotism flowing from the Battle of New Orleans led Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York to reject unanimously and unequivocally the Convention’s proposals. Republicans left the Federalists with no place to turn and swept them from office in the elections of 1816. Their own mistakes ended their days of prominence and the party was never again a factor in national politics. Although the entire party did not abandon the idea of national unity under a strong federal government, Republicans stigmatized those who still favored it as the most deplorable of all the Federalist traitors. This completed the abandonment of the three essential principles of Hamiltonian Federalism and it thus saw the death of the party.

One can therefore see how the party which controlled early American politics in so short a time lost not only the political initiative but also the reason to exist. No longer did the Federalists believe in neutrality, a principle abandoned to counteract supposed Republican misdeeds with France. Additionally, the party no longer relied on an aristocratic and undemocratic process. They abandoned this principle in order to gain votes after the Republicans swept them from office. Concerned and fearful over the fate of the union, the Federalists succumbed to democracy to save their vision of how to best perpetuate the prosperity of the republic and save it from the destruction sure to arise from Republican control. Yet the organization of party leaders backfired when they became unable to control the very monster they had created. Radicals took control of the organization and pushed it towards dissolution, a stigma which in essence destroyed the

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50 John Quincy Adams, Correspondence Between John Quincy Adams, President of the United States, and Several Citizens of Massachusetts, Concerning the Charge of a Design to Dissolve the Union Alleged to Have Existed in that State (Boston: Press of the Boston Daily Advertiser, 1829), 17.
party. While the moderates were trying to mimic the Republicans, the radicals were destroying the infrastructure of the party through their secessionist rants. By the time the delegates arrived at Hartford, the party was for all intensive purposes dead. It had abandoned its roots in an effort to subsist and in the process lost all meaning. The party became nothing more than a less energized brand of Republicanism emphasizing foreign connections, government by the people, and states' rights. The party's ideology had in essence ceased being traditional Federalism. Their own mistakes and fears reduced the party of Washington and Hamilton to nothing more than a radical branch of Republicanism struggling to escape the truth of this fact. The Federalist Party ceased existing because it eschewed its foundations and thus ceased being Federalist.
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