



White House Historical Association

The protagonists. On the left, Rembrandt Peale's 1800 portrait of Jefferson; on the right, John Trumbull's posthumous portrait of Hamilton.

Even before the inauguration of Washington, stretching back to the Constitutional Convention and earlier, the philosophy and policy of what would become this 1789 New York Administration was ruthlessly and bloodily opposed by the Slave Interests of the South.

There are two related delusions concerning slavery and the American Republic. The first is that the founding fathers were either pro-slavery, or at least tolerant of that institution. The second is that slavery did not emerge as a decisive national crisis until the 1830s or 1840s, or until the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The truth, is that beginning with the inauguration of George Washington in 1789, war was declared against that Administration by the Slave Power, and beginning with the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800, the Southern Slave Power unleashed a relentless, unceasing effort to increase its power, expand geographically and ultimately take over the entire nation.

More was at stake than simply the institution of slavery. The first Washington Administration was an experiment as to whether the principles of the new American Constitution, a constitution steered to its completion by New Yorkers, might succeed in practice. It was the Administration of Alexander Hamilton's cre-

ation of a National Bank, and Hamilton's formation of the Society for Establishing Useful Manufactures. The Washington Presidency was the battleground for the creation of a type of Republic never before existent in human history. From the beginning, the mortal enemy of this design was the Slave Power of the South.

Part I

The Beginnings

John Jay and Robert Livingston met as students at King's College in the mid-1760s, and they became the closest of friends until their break in 1792-1794. Within a few years Gouverneur Morris was part of their group, and this trio was to provide the revolutionary leadership for New York State during the ensuing decade. Hamilton, the youngest of the group, was a slightly later addition, but it was this final arrival whose destiny was to be the greatest of them all. All four emerged from, or were linked to a network of prominent New York families, including the Livingstons, Van Rensselaers, Schuylers, and Morris. Alexander Hamilton and Steven Van Rensselaer both married daughters of Philip Schuyler,



Manhattan's King's College, 1776

and John Jay married one of the daughters of Walter Livingston.

During the Revolution, not only did Hamilton serve as Washington's most trusted aide, but it was Jay, Livingston, and particularly Morris who became Washington's most vigorous defenders in the Continental Congress. Morris and Livingston defended Washington against repeated attempts to remove him from command,¹ and throughout the war, no one fought harder than Morris to secure food, ammunition and medical care for Washington's troops.² It is vital to recognize that to a very real extent, the leadership of the later Washington Presidency was forged, so to speak, over the "campfires of war," by individuals who served directly with Washington during that conflict, including Hamilton, Gouverneur Morris (who spent four months with the army at Valley Forge), Henry Knox (later Washington's Secretary of War), John Marshall (also at Valley Forge) and Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee. These individuals, together with others not named here, remained unassailable in their loyalty to Washington until the moment of his death.

1. For example, the Conway Cabal.

2. In pleading for aid, Morris wrote to John Jay from Valley Forge, "Our troops, what misery! The Skeleton of an army presents itself to our eyes in a naked, starving, condition, out of Health, out of Spirits... without Clothes to wear, Victuals to eat, Wood to burn, or straw to lie on, the wonder is that they stay not that they go. For Heaven's sake, my dear friend, exert yourself strenuously..." Out of the 10,000 soldiers who marched into Valley Forge, 2,500 would die in camp.

In 1774, after the British government closed the Port of Boston, a committee is formed under John Jay's leadership, to organize a new revolutionary government for New York State: the New York Provisional Congress. Morris and Livingston are elected as representatives to the new legislature, and Jay is the first delegate chosen to the new Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

In 1776, the New York Provisional Congress, at the urging of Jay and Morris, authorize their representatives in Philadelphia to vote for independence. Livingston serves on the Committee of Five, together with Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, and John Adams, which drafts the final version of the Declaration of Independence. Later that year Jay and Morris author a new constitution for New York State, and elections are held to form a new state government.

Jay is elected Chief Justice, Livingston is elected Chancellor, and their ally Philip Schuyler is barely defeated for Governor by George Clinton.

From 1781 to 1783, Gouverneur Morris, together with Robert Morris, are the vital leaders in reorganizing the nation's finances and staving off national bankruptcy, and, together, they found the Bank of North America.

John Jay, from 1779 to 1782, serves as Ambassador to Spain and then, at the request of Benjamin Franklin, proceeds to Paris to aid Franklin (whose efforts are being sabotaged by John Adams) in securing the final peace treaty which ends the war.

Part II

The Constitution

A continuing lie surrounding the United States Constitution is that Alexander Hamilton played a minor role at the Constitutional Convention and had little input into the final document. The truth is that there would have been no Constitution without Hamilton. He was the initiator of the project and, almost single-handedly, responsible for the convening of the Convention in the summer of 1787; and, afterwards, Hamilton was the driving force for ratification in 1788. In addition, he intervened in two crucial and decisive ways at the Convention itself.