

PRIMARY SOURCES: EARLY NATIONAL/ DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE

[Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia \(1787\)](#)

In 1780 François Marbois, secretary of the French legation in the United States, sent a questionnaire to leading members of Congress. Marbois wanted information about the institutions and physical character of the various states. A copy of the document found its way into the hands of Thomas Jefferson, then governor of Virginia. For several years Jefferson worked on a manuscript eventually published as Notes. The essay is much more than a survey of Virginia's natural resources. Jefferson speculates about the future of the nation, arguing that its continuing strength depended on yeomen farmers, in other words, on free, white landowners. The Jeffersonian vision did not include blacks, at least, not as full citizens. He turned science into a tool for excluding African Americans from republican equality.

[George Washington, Farewell Address \(1796\)](#)

George Washington delivered his farewell address in September 1796, stating that he would not accept a third term as president. He was 64 years old and disheartened: the patriot, war hero, president, and national symbol had been unable to stay above the fray of political argument. In his address, he argues for a nation united rather than divided by parties, economic policies, and foreign affairs.

[The Alien and Sedition Acts \(1798\)](#)

From time to time in this nation's long history, federal authorities have tried to silence their opponents. Those who attack free speech and due process usually claim that the ends justify the means. The Federalists succumbed to such a sordid logic in 1798, passing a group of bills known collectively as the Alien and Sedition Acts. Although the Federalists claimed that they were acting for the good of the country, they were clearly intent on punishing the Jeffersonians, a party that seemed to have promoted dangerous French ideologies.

[Thomas Jefferson, "First Inaugural Address" \(1801\)](#)

At the stroke of noon on March 4, 1801, Thomas Jefferson began walking down New Jersey Avenue toward the Capitol, where he was to be sworn in as the third president of the United States. As befitted a leader of the Republican Party, the occasion was simple. He carried his Inaugural Address, a document that had gone through several drafts and represented Jefferson's most polished prose. Although he delivered the speech in an inaudible mumble, Jefferson produced a document of enduring significance. As a biographer explained, "The genius of the address lay in its seemingly artless elevation of the Republican creed to a creed of Americanism."

[Richard McNemar, The Kentucky Revival, or a Short History of the Late Extraordinary Out-Pouring of the Spirit of God, in the Western States of America \(1808\)](#)

Richard McNemar (1770–1839) brought the full force of the Second Great Awakening to the Kentucky frontier. Like other evangelical ministers of the region, the Presbyterian McNemar preached a highly emotional brand of Calvinism, which had an effect on ordinary men and women that was both immediate and remarkable. They literally felt the terrible burden of sin, and, in the process of obtaining a new birth in Christ, some of them experienced involuntary body movements, behavior that McNemar and his allies saw as a sign of religious authenticity but that critics found unsettling, even repellent.

[Andrew Jackson, First Annual Message to Congress \(1829\)](#)

In the early nineteenth century, the lands occupied by southeastern and northwestern Native American groups, including the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole, Fox, and Creek, were closed in upon by an expanding frontier of white settlement. In this address, President Jackson, a former frontiersman and Indian fighter, cloaked his argument for the relocation of Native Americans in the language of concern and honor. Indian removal helped bring about economic expansion for the new republic, but at tremendous cost to both the Native Americans who fought displacement and who moved west.