

**History 282 US Diplomatic
Discussion Transcript for September 1, 2020
Partisan Diplomacy**

Main Reading: Chapter 2, Herring

This second chapter from Herring covers the surprising impact of foreign affairs on the domestic politics of the United States in the 1790s. Of course, it shouldn't be surprising to learn how vulnerable the new republic was—not only to threats on its borders, but also even to foreign meddling in its elections—and yet it often proves a revelation to students who only have a dim recollection of the fierce debates between Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians, which they studied once or twice in secondary school and which perhaps they encountered again while viewing the popular “Hamilton” musical. However, this chapter also provides depth in analysis of decision-making. Students should appreciate better after reading Herring how George Washington tried to navigate the challenges of navigating the US between France and Britain (and why the former French allies were so embittered by this neutrality) and how important it was that John Adams worked to contain the threat of war with France by the end of the 1790s.

The following selections come from student comments & questions.

WASHINGTON'S FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY

STUDENT COMMENT: “The Treaty of San Lorenzo signed in 1795 with Spain is one I would count as one of Washington's biggest foreign policy accomplishments. Because this gave Americans access to the Mississippi river and officially recognized the boundary claimed by the US since 1783, with rights to store goods in New Orleans without duties. This helped the Jay Treaty also signed under the Washington Administration more appealing to Americans, as it had initially caused public uproar and criticism, and even provoked the French to seize American ships while warning the US of other sanctions. I think Washington's biggest setback was not the Jay Treaty but the critique he received for the Treaty, as Herring points out that the treaty was economically beneficial in the long-term but it seemed as America had conceded to Britain and gotten too little from the treaty. I do think Washington's approach of looking for neutrality and not allying with nations in war, especially in Europe was one that defined American foreign policy for the next century, though there may have been several exceptions. And to be fair, Washington had no workable system to guide him on how to approach American foreign policy and it reflected American sentiment to a great degree, especially that of seeking independence from Europe. However, his abuse of executive power to dismiss three foreign ministers without approval from Congress highlighted weaknesses in the constitution and called for clarifying such ambiguities to keep the presidential power regarding foreign policy decisions in check.”

STUDENT COMMENT: “The main concern [for President Washington] was the French Revolution, and how the United States was to balance between its treaty obligations with France and the threat of war with the counter-revolutionary coalition. Washington chartered a narrow course, and for the first time, but certainly not the last (the Russian

annexation of Crimea comes to mind as a recent example), the United States sought to escape from its treaty obligations in light of a difficult political situation. Further strained relations with the French were avoided by a change of government in Paris (page 72), a stroke of luck for Washington. The negotiations of John Jay, while successful in preserving independence, were deeply unpopular at home, and seemed to have been a disappointment to Washington as well as the populace (pages 77-78). But despite that, the treaty was ratified, and peace maintained. However, Washington capitalized on Spanish uncertainty related to the Jay negotiations, the US gained its long-desired navigation rights to the Mississippi (page 81), a significant benefit. Ultimately, Washington's careful diplomacy was able to combine benefits of both Jefferson's and Hamilton's approaches to make realistic gains in a very dangerous international environment, while preserving the fledgling country's independence and prosperity."

STUDENT COMMENT: "The first section of the chapter talks about the efforts by President Washington and Secretary Knox to forcibly assimilate native peoples into the US in the 1790s. It also talks about the Haitian rebellion of 1791. Specifically, with the Creek, whose lands bordered on what was considered colonial Georgia, In the 1790s . The Creek originally signed a treaty in exchange for recognition of their tribal sovereignty they gave up 3 million acres. In the treaty it provided a provision "that the Creek nation may be led to a greater degree of civilization." In the North west along the Ohio River tribes were more resisted to encroaching settlers, due to dissatisfaction in with the treaties they had signed with the confederation government. As a result, the two sides were forced into a war. The U.S. backed treaties made with force of the United States army. These initiatives of foreign policy backed with force ended in a war with the natives which was disrupted by the slave revolt in Haiti. The US reaction to the Haitian rebellion was due to their own fears of a slave revolt and so they provided France with \$726 million as well as selling arms to slave owners of Saint-Domingue. This opposition to revolution shows an obvious double standard in the republican American ideology however, southern slave owners feared their own slave revolts in the south."

INSIGHTS ABOUT ELECTION INTERFERENCE

STUDENT COMMENT: "While both the 1796 and 2016 Presidential elections (and in all likelihood the 2020 election as well, up to this point) featured interference both sanctioned and sponsored by a foreign government, I find the two cases substantially different: while the French meddling in 1796 relied essentially on blackmail carried out by two agents on the behalf of the French government, what we know about the Russian interference in the 2016 election shows that it was far more insidious, relying on widespread misinformation intended to divide the American people that was dispersed by entire agencies of the Russian government and intelligence community. Thus, the French meddling would (in theory) be more easily dealt with, as the US would only need to prevent Fauchet and Adet from continuing their exploits - most likely by requesting their recall, as Herring notes the United States had done with the previous ambassador Genet when his actions displayed a blatant disregard for the sanctity of American political affairs. Meanwhile, addressing the recent Russian interference in our

elections would require the cooperation of several public agencies and private actors, and would no doubt prove more costly than addressing the previous French meddling as it would require combating the efforts of entire Russian agencies rather than those of a few individuals. Despite the differences between 1796 and today, however, I believe the election of 1796 does provide insight on a starting point for addressing Russian interference in our elections, and that starting point is a strong executive rebuke of the interference. Regardless of the candidate the interference is intended to benefit, foreign interference in our elections is a threat to national security and our democracy itself. The only appropriate response to such interference is public acknowledgement and subsequent denouncement of interference by the President, followed by a coordinated response using the rest of the tools of the government to stop it: not refusing to acknowledge interference occurred (and at some points seemingly encouraging more of it) and cozying up to the authoritarian leader of the government that is carrying it out.”

STUDENT COMMENT: “I found this chapter to be especially interesting because of the similarities that can be drawn to modern day politics. French meddling in the 1796 election can be seen to parallel the Russian interference in the 2016 election. In 1796, Pierre Adet meddled in the election by threatening that there would be a war if Jefferson was not elected. In response, Washington’s Farewell Address condemned the French actions and furthered the Federalist ideology. Washington referred to French interference in the election as “insidious wiles of foreign influence” (p. 82). The Federalists seemed to use the interference to their advantage by accusing the Republicans of collaborating with a foreign entity and ultimately John Adams won the election. Herring wrote that the election interference of this nature had not happened again, but a different kind of election interference happened in 2016 (after this book was published). In 2016, there was sufficient evidence of Russian interference in the U.S. Presidential election, but there was not substantial evidence of collusion with Donald Trump’s campaign. Adet interfered in an effort to seek a more cooperative government, and it was thought that Vladimir Putin interfered in order to have a President that would be friendlier and possibly more cooperative with Russia (my opinion is that he thought Trump could be more easily manipulated than his opponent).”

INSIGHTS ABOUT ALIEN & SEDITION CRISIS

STUDENT COMMENT: “When it comes to the Alien and Sedition Acts, these have been a continuous subject of debate and the Sedition Acts has especially resurfaced since 9/11. The Alien acts required recent French or ‘unfavorable’ immigrants to be deported (Herring 87). This owes to anxiety that the immigrants would threaten US national security by possibly supporting the French in their war efforts against the US by actively fighting or by passing along coveted information. It was seen on a horrifying scale during WWII with the Japanese Internment that was established on fear following Pearl Harbor and interned American citizens on the premise of their heritage. Herring describes the Sedition acts as, “made it a federal crime to interfere with the operation of the government or publish any ‘false, scandalous, and malicious writings’ against its officials.” (Herring 87). The controversy is that it potentially suspends people’s fundamental freedom guaranteed by the first amendment for the sake of national

security. It's almost as if democratic liberties belonged solely to the Americans and would not be extended to immigrants residing within the US. This issue was resurfaced with the Patriot act, which invaded US citizens' privacy on the basis of national security in the war on terror; however, technically the war on terror has been ongoing since 2001 so is. The ongoing fundamental debate of the Patriot act and the Sedition Act is whether or not it is constitutional to suspend rights in times of war."

ADAMS' FOREIGN POLICY LEGACY

STUDENT COMMENT: "I think that Herring agrees with Adams in that the Convention of 1800 was his greatest legacy as a statesman, but for different reasons. While Adams was proud of his ability to navigate the Quasi War with France without harming America's reputation or escalating it to a formal conflict, Herring, with the benefit of a historical perspective, recognizes the Convention of 1800 as what was essentially the beginning of the United States' independent foreign policy tradition, a legacy which has far outlived Adams and will continue to do so in all likelihood. Personally, I think Adams did an adequate job as President given the circumstances he inherited and served under, from essentially creating the US Navy in order to combat French attacks on American shipping to achieving peace with France in 1800. As a whole, despite mistakes such as the passing of the controversial Alien & Sedition Acts that occurred during his time in office, I believe that Adams helped to bring a degree of legitimacy to the United States on the international stage that had not been accorded to it by any of the European powers up to that point through his response to French transgressions, a great accomplishment unto itself."

STUDENT COMMENT: As John Adams acclaimed the Convention of 1800 as his greatest legacy, Herring assessed this as "a giant step toward an independent U.S. foreign policy" (p. 90). He also said that "they [Federalists] exploited the European war to America's advantage while scrupulously avoiding the full-scale involvement..." (p. 91). The Compromise terminated the alliance of 1778 and secured the U.S. position as a neutral state. Enjoying its status and trading with both England and France, America's foreign trade surplus increased by more than \$74 million. As the side effect of the negotiation, the Federalist Party was divided and defeated by the Republican Party in the 1800 election. I think that Adams successfully defended the national interests through the negotiation with France even though it became a factor of the defeat in the election. He helped America become a truly independent actor on the international stage by cutting off ties with France. It was necessary and inevitable as the United States grows as a sovereign and autonomous republic on the North American continent.