Chapter 8 – Creating a Nation

Launching the National Republic

❖ Beginning the New Government
  ➢ On April 16, 1789, George Washington was unanimously named president of the United States by the Electoral College.
  ➢ Many thought his inaugural speech was too reminiscent of the English monarchy.
  ➢ Congress had to decide how to formally address Washington: “His Most Benign Highness,” and other kingly titles fortunately gave way to “Mr. President.”

❖ The Bill of Rights
  ➢ Among Congress’s first tasks was debate over the constitutional amendments that several states had made conditional to ratification.
  ➢ Congress argued the merits of twelve perspective amendments, finally selecting ten to become the national Bill of Rights.
  ➢ Ratification of the amendments came in December, 1791.

❖ The People Divide
  ➢ Criticism of the new national government was quick to appear.
  ➢ Opposition groups had formed a united front called the Jeffersonian Republicans.
  ➢ The administration’s supporters were known as Federalists.
  ➢ Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton favored the federal assumption of all war debts incurred by the states.

❖ The Whiskey Rebellion
  ➢ The farmers of western Pennsylvania vented their anger at the federal government through an armed demonstration against the hated Whiskey Tax.
  ➢ Their livelihood depended on the transport of surplus grain in the form of distilled alcohol; this was easier to ship.
  ➢ This pseudo-insurrection demonstrated the government’s vulnerability.

The Republic in a Threatening World

❖ The Promise and the Peril of the French Revolution
  ➢ France’s revolution began in 1789 as an effort to reform the injustices of a weakened monarchy and soon exploded into a radical rebellion with the beheading of Louis XVI.
  ➢ For more than a decade the revolution dominated the stage in European politics.

❖ The Democratic-Republican Societies
  ➢ Political clubs served as tools of democratic reform, providing safe havens for dissidents and intellectuals.
  ➢ The Jacobin clubs in France were the most famous, but similar organizations appeared in the United States.
  ➢ As early as 1792, constitutional societies were formed to oversee the rights of the people.
  ➢ The increase in these clubs was spurred by the visit of Citizen Edmund Genet, French minister to the United States.
Jay’s Controversial Treaty
- Alarmed by sinking relations with England, President Washington dispatched Chief Justice John Jay to London in 1794 to negotiate a number of disagreements left over from the Revolutionary War.
- Jay’s Treaty contained only partial remedies to these problems and angered Southern planters...there would be no compensation for their lost slaves.

The Political Crisis Deepens

The Election of 1796
- The presidential election of 1796 reflected the political uncertainty of the times as Washington announced he would not seek a third term.
- The potential successor was narrowed to Jefferson or John Adams, two very different men who had a great deal of shared experiences in the Revolution and the creation of the government.
- Adams won the election, with Jefferson to serve as his Vice President.

The War Crisis with France
- Adam’s first trial as president was the interference of American shipping by French naval vessels.
- An American delegation was dispatched to Paris where arrogant administrators demanded bribes and promises of huge loans before they would allow them to see the French foreign minister.
- Called the XYZ Affair, Adams recalled his delegation and denounced the French government.

The Alien and Sedition Acts
- The Federalist-dominated Congress acted to staunch the flow of aliens into the country through:
  - The Naturalization Act – raised citizenship requirement of residency from 5 to 14 years
  - The Alien Act – authorized the president to expel aliens whom he judged dangerous
  - The Alien Enemies Act – allowed the president to imprison or banish the subjects of any hostile nation at will.
  - The Sedition Act – made punishable by fine and imprisonment for anyone to conspire in opposition to the government.

The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions
- Building on the protests that met the Alien and Sedition Acts, the Virginia and Kentucky legislatures passed resolutions that directly challenged the federal laws.
- The Kentucky Resolutions declared the federal government had violated the Bill of Rights.
- The Virginia Resolutions declared the right of states to set aside a federal law found to be a threat to liberty.

Restoring American Liberty

Politics and the Federal Courts
- After a sweep of the presidency and the Congress, the Jeffersonians prepared to purge several Federalist judges from the District courts.
Listing questionable charges, the Jeffersonians next impeached a Supreme Court Justice and seriously considered the impeachment of the Chief Justice.

Fortunately, a constitutional crisis was averted to allow time and attrition cleanse the courts of the opposition.

Dismantling the Federalist War Program

- Jefferson ended any Federalist program that he saw as an affront to personal liberty.
- Assuming the presidency, Jefferson freed jailed violators of the Alien and Sedition acts and let the hated laws expire. Moreover, he disbanded the Federalist provisional army and reduced the size of the federal government.

Building an Agrarian Nation

- The Jeffersonian Vision
  - Political liberty could survive only under the specific conditions of broad-based social and economic equality.
  - The path to equality in a world valuing the pursuit of wealth was territorial expansionism.

- The Windfall Louisiana Purchase
  - James Monroe was sent to Paris by Jefferson to buy West Florida and possibly New Orleans from Napoleon.
  - Incredibly, Napoleon wanted to sell all of the Louisiana Territory for $15 million.
  - The United States gained 830,000 square miles of new territory