

# REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY

An analysis of current historical literature indicates there were several significant ideological positions, which emerged from the American Revolution. Moreover, each of these figure prominently in subsequent political conflict over the Constitution and its implementation during the early republic. Therefore, this will attempt basically to describe each of them as "ideal types." Illustrating the extreme case of each position will focus attention on the most important issues each group supported, despite the varying degrees of commitment from the bulk of membership associated with each group. These types will be discussed as the "commercial republican," the "agrarian republican," and the "democrat."

The archetypical commercial republican staunchly supported the Federal Constitution, was a nationalist, and a member of the local elite who drew his income and prestige from commerce. Conservative in outlook, this group feared democracy and disorder because of their leveling tendencies and potential threat to the established social order. In his political views, this group was firmly within the classical tradition, advocating responsible government managed by a cadre of virtuous leaders who represented the best elements of society. Of course, he believed his social group was probably the best example of those capable of leadership; those who owned the country should also govern it.

On the other hand, the commercial republican was a firm advocate of the market economy, financial moderation and international political and economic relations. For these reasons, and because of the domestic stability it implied, the commercial republican advocated a strong federal government, which was unquestionably the supreme power in the union. In the contest between Federalism and Jeffersonian Republicanism, the commercial republican sided more towards federalism. Federal supremacy and fears over the rhetoric of the opposition tended to provoke a reactionary response of a frightened conservative.

While most of the historiography of the Early Republic paints the entire Federalist coalition from 1790 to 1800 in these terms, the commercial republican was almost certainly a minority in terms of numbers. Given the small portion of the population living in towns and cities, and the even smaller portion engaged in commerce, the rank and file of Federalists came from other sectors of society. The importance of the commercial republican is his domination of Federalism both in terms of political power within the coalition, and in the degree to which commercial republican values were articulated when attempting to mobilize public support. The archetypical agrarian republican advocated local control of the political system, resisted implementation of the Federal Constitution, and was usually a conditional supporter of the federal government. A member of the local elite, the agrarian republican resisted the growth of centralized political power because of its potential to limit his and his class' regional autonomy. Unlike the commercial republican, who relied on the federal government to mute the effects of the social transformation being brought about by capitalism, the agrarian republican was firmly in control of the local social structure and resisted the creation of any higher authority. If the key watchwords of the commercial republican were virtue and (the fear of) licentiousness, the watchword of the agrarian republican was corruption. The development

of central power presented a higher authority, which could, through the "corrupt" aggrandizement of power, potentially reduce local autonomy, introduce the market and upset the existing social hierarchy. Consequently, agrarian republicans were in the forefront of both Anti-Federalism and the Republican opposition to Federalism. Advocates of states' rights and home rule, their ideal about liberty and freedom ended at the state border. At home they were as much, if not more, conservative than the commercial republican.

The democrat was a product of the Revolution. The rhetoric of colonial opposition against Britain, combined with the massive mobilization required to prosecute the war, raised substantive resistance to hierarchic social arrangements with the U.S. Thus, the democrat tended to be an American who either achieved or hoped to achieve increased political power as a result of the revolution, and who also desired to use that new power in pursuit of social or economic advantage. The democrat was equally at home in the town or country and supported or resisted federal authority based on its perceived effect on his future. For example, artisans who lived in coastal cities supported the ratification of the Constitution because of the economic stability offered by the federal government. However, during the 1790s, they tended to defect to the Republican opposition due to the resistance by commercial republicans to their political and social aspirations. Similarly, rural democrats in Pennsylvania resisted ratification of the Constitution because they feared (rightly) the state's local institutions-democratized to an unprecedented degree-would fall back under the sway of eastern commercial republicans. Afterwards, they continued to resist federal authority to the point of armed rebellion. On the other hand, rural democrats in Virginia supported the Constitution and remained Federalist through 1800 because of their frustration with agrarian republican control of state politics.

The democrat was a fundamentally new political animal. Produced by the Great Awakening and the Revolution, he had a sense of personal worth which was not based on a secure position within a hierarchic social or religious structure. Tending towards evangelical Protestantism, he carried the doctrine that each man is equal in God's eyes into his political and social affairs. And, at this moment in time, having participated in the Revolution, war and privation for the "glorious cause," he could not be ignored. Consequently the suffrage expanded and the rhetoric of popular sovereignty became entrenched in the American political vocabulary. Furthermore, the democrat would seek to support the political leadership or faction that best seemed to help him realize his hopes for the future.