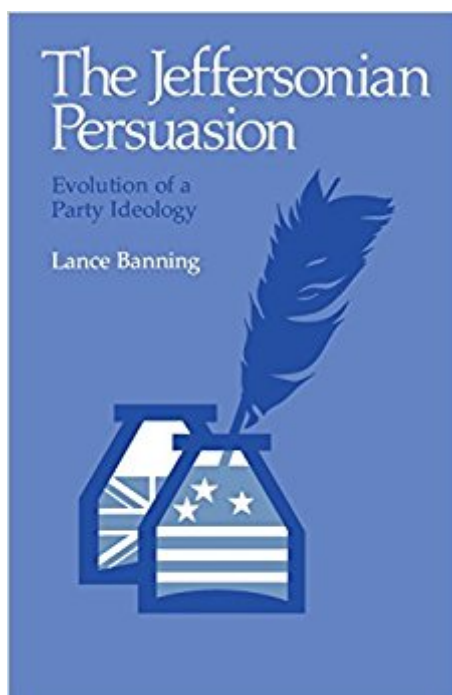


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# The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution Of A Party Ideology



## Synopsis

This revisionary study offers a convincing new interpretation of Jeffersonian Republican thought in the 1790s. Based on extensive research in the newspapers and political pamphlets of the decade as well as the public and private writings of party leaders, it traces the development of party ideology and examines the relationship of ideology to party growth and actions.

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## Customer Reviews

"Banning writes in clear, readable fashion. His chapters are compact and lucid, his arguments crisply made. He knows the Jeffersonian literature of the 1790s and the country tradition upon which the Jeffersonians drew. Most importantly, he provides the kind of perspective that makes Jeffersonian argumentation understandable in its own terms. And in the process he tells some important things about the ways in which revolutionary ideology informed political behavior in the early republic." [Journal of American History](#)"Banning supports his thesis with persuasive arguments, evidence, and a careful definition of the word 'ideology.' . . . In sum, this balanced and judicious book will be welcomed by all scholars of American history as a valuable contribution to our understanding of the nation's formative years." [The Historian](#)"No library holdings of political party development or the early political history of the nation will be complete without *The Jeffersonian Persuasion*." [Choice](#)"Banning records the first stirrings of Jeffersonian Republicanism, an alignment against an alleged threat by proponents of sovereignty and a moneyed aristocracy. His impressive study emphasizes that the final shape of America's stripling

government was never a foregone conclusion but was hammered out link by link as Old World political models confronted New World ideologies." — Booklist

This revisionary study offers a convincing new interpretation of Jeffersonian Republican thought in the 1790's. Based on extensive research in the newspapers and political pamphlets of the decade as well as the public and private writings of party leaders, it traces the development of party ideology and examines the relationship of ideology to party growth and actions.

This book is a fairly detailed look at the roots of Jefferson's Republican Party as it evolved through the 1790s and on into the 1800s. In terms of pre-Revolution ideological origins, it is a mere snapshot of what Bailyn covers in immense detail in his *Ideological Origins*. In addition, the author borrows much from Gordon Wood's *The Creation of the American Republic*. By far the most significant element of the Jeffersonian persuasion is the continuation of the English opposition of the 18th century to the British monarchy led by Lord Bolingbroke and the authors of *Cato's Letters*, among others. Their main theme was the corruption of the British government by a coterie of ministers with the power to influence members of Parliament through financial dispensations and grants of offices. It was the opposition of "Country" Whigs versus the "Court" Whigs, associated with the monarchy. Interestingly, the author claims that opposition resonated far more in the colonies. The taxation of the colonies undertaken by Parliament after the French and Indian War was a sure sign of British corruption creeping into the colonies. Those concerns, that is, the possibilities of the simple, agrarian, virtuous republican colonial society being corrupted, are not to be dismissed as a significant cause of the Revolution. The author notes that anti-Federalism and the Republican Party were distinct movements, though perhaps two sides of the same coin. Anti-Federalism, as a key force in politics, essentially died with the ratification of the US Constitution. Republicans were not anti Constitution - only its distortion by unprincipled men. Madison was a nationalist and a Federalist, but not for long. A focused opposition began to take shape with the formation of the first federal government in 1789. By far the biggest concern was the ambitious financial program that Alexander Hamilton, the Treasury secretary, put together over the first few years. As he moved from funding of the national debt, to assumption of state debts, to founding a national bank, and to support of manufacturing, those who wanted the Constitution to be strictly followed and agrarianism preserved saw the predictions of the inevitable decay of balanced governments well underway. To them, Hamilton's measures were producing a moneyed aristocracy, or "paper" men. Many of those speculators, bond holders, stock holders, and brokers were in Congress and could not help but be

influenced by a "minister" overstepping his Constitutional role - a repeat of the British situation. In addition, internal taxes, like excise taxes on the production of whiskey by farmers, were imposed on the general citizenry to pay these elites. The Hamilton program rippled into foreign affairs. The free flow of commerce with Britain was essential to the Hamilton program, which introduced a highly distasteful dependency on good relations with Britain. But the decade-long hostilities between England and France forced sides to be chosen. Washington's Proclamation of Neutrality toward the British and French was infuriating. The French, who had aided the US in the Revolution, were now joined with America in recognizing the rights of men, while the British were impressing American sailors, stirring up the Indians on our Northwest, etc. The ensuing Jay Treaty seemed to concede much to the British. The Republicans were livid that relations with a monarchy, already with great influence in the current government, could have any standing when compared with a nation with a high regard for republicanism. But it was the so-called XYZ Affair and the Quasi-War with the French under the Adams' administration that solidified the Republicans and made them an electoral force. With war fever in full swing, the Federalists called for a large increase in the army and navy, increased taxes, and new powers for the Executive branch. While those measures were alarming, the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 completely proved to the Republicans that the new government had become a tyranny in just a few short years. Many Republican newspaper editors were put out of business and jailed. For many today, this was the first blot on our nation's history. Upon taking office in 1801, Jefferson did not and could not completely rescind the Hamilton program. Of course, the Alien and Sedition Acts were not renewed. Internal taxation was rescinded, the standing army was greatly reduced, and a goal of quickly eliminating the national debt was set. But the Republican idea that the US could assert power against the great nations of the world through the use of only economic pressure proved to be wrong. The embargo adopted by Jefferson in 1807 had no appreciable effect on the British in executing their Orders of Council and impressing American sailors. The economic hardships were all endured by the Americans. The Republicans reluctantly turned to war, the War of 1812. Despite the War's inconclusiveness, a turning point in Republican thought did occur. The Republicans did not totally capitulate to Hamiltonian thinking, but the hand writing was on the wall. The US was not going to survive as an isolated agrarian society in a commercial world without financial and military policies that accepted realities. That battle continued over the next several decades between the Hamilton-like Clay American system and the Jeffersonian-like anti-bank, anti-corruption policies of Jackson and his followers. But the nature of the political battle had changed. Clay's Whigs and Jackson's Democrats had essentially moved beyond references to British government and opposition. Their focus was on the US domestic

situation. Furthermore, the Whigs and Democrats were the first full-blown American political parties, unlike the quasi parties of the Federalists and Republicans. The book is a very useful description of the Jeffersonian persuasion and the advent of the Republican Party essentially swallowed by both the Democrats and the Whigs. It tends to be repetitious, hammering home the theme of ties to the British opposition of the 18th century. If anything, one might have expected more extensive coverage of the Democratic-Republican societies and Republican electoral actions. Since this author leans on Woods' book, *The Creation of the American Republic*, it will be interesting to see if Woods leans on Banning in his new book, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, of 2009.

Robert Shalhope in his *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* talks about the tendency of historians to assert a "single and substantial 'reality' in the period they are studying and then judging individuals...by this standard" (Shalhope, p.8) He might well have added that as readers we tend to do the same thing. Mr. Murphy's review below is a good example of this. For some reason, many people want to beatify certain individuals and trends in our early history and then judge histories of that period by how well they cleave to that reader's historical construction. The best example of this is the way that readers or historians react to Alexander Hamilton. The problem with this tendency is that it distorts our reading of the history of that period. Here is a thought. I suggest that few people would be arrogant enough to claim that they had a standard by which the present could be judged. There are more things on heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophies and so on. Well here is the Taylor axiom: "If it doesn't work for the present, it doesn't work for the past". This is only to claim that we need to start seeing our past as not one reality but many different realities that were experienced by many different types of people. People who were liberal, radical, conservative, Whigs, rational and religious all at the same time. Otherwise, we cheapen them in the name of our pet ideas. A case in point. Banning's book while strongly influenced by Pocock's work can be equally said to be as strongly influenced by Bailyn, Wood, Maier, Cunningham, Peterson, Foner and Ketcham. To claim that Banning is just channeling Pocock is to not see Banning through your ideological forest. Furthermore to claim, that anyone who "really" knows his Jefferson will see through Banning's argument is a subtle ad hominem. I would appreciate actual quotes or some sort of evidence to back up such a claim. In any case, I am evidently not as knowledgeable as Mr. Murphy in that I am impressed by what Prof. Banning has to offer us. Banning's thesis is that the Real Whig (or the "country" ideology) was initially useful to the Revolutionary situation because it helped them to conceptualize and justify their opposition to British policy as a unwilling protest

against the corruption of the British regime. But later these same arguments became useful to the rising opposition to the Hamiltonian economic program. The arguments proved even more useful in delineating different approaches to foreign affairs and central to the fight against the Alien and Sedition Acts. Part of the reason the Country ideology fit the Jeffersonian's purposes so well is that their political situation was analogous to that of the Country party. Like Bolingbroke in his struggle with Walpole, John Taylor read the rising opposition not as the beginnings of a "party" (a dirty work for at least another 30 years) but as the reaction of "patriots" who were fighting against degeneracy and ministerial influence peddling (Banning, p. 200). Furthermore the Jeffersonians were initially a minority in Congress. "By nature, criticism of corruption was a weapon of minorities, who...claim that influence had perverted the expression of the people's will in order to claim that they spoke for the majority" (Banning, p.74). Overall, I find Banning's argument for the influence of the Country ideology on the Jeffersonians to be very persuasive. Are his arguments flawless? Heck, no. On pp. 138-9, Banning makes an argument that Hamilton "may" have been influenced by a reading of Hume and certain "Court" replies to the Country arguments. By the next page, that "may have been" has become a definite influence. I like to call this particular fault "arguing from wishful evidence". But apart from a few faux pas like that, Banning comes across as learned and judicious. This book is well worth the early American history reader's time to explore. And it should also be noted that Banning has published a companion volume called Liberty and Order which contains many of the original writings that he refers to throughout his book. This brings me to one point in which I am probably in complete agreement with Mr. Murphy. As good as it is to read about these wacky guys and gals, it is even better to read their own writings. It's our history, people. We should own it.

Although this work was officially written by Lance Banning, there is no mistake that it is an outgrowth of the theories of J.G.A. Pocock. Essentially, Banning tries to make the case that the Jeffersonian Republicans were the American version of Bolingbroke's "Country Party." Moreover, he tries to demonstrate how the party advocated the classical republican values of "civic humanism." Ultimately, the book falls flat on its face. Anyone acquainted with Jefferson, as well as his party, should be able to see right through Banning's account. Although there certainly were classical republican elements in their thought, these were only secondary and complimentary to the libertarian theories of natural rights and individualism. A more accurate (although still deeply flawed) account is Joyce Appleby's work "Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790's."

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