



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **The Evolution of Early Political Parties: Connecticut, 1750-1818, A Case Study**

Curriculum Unit 80.ch.05  
by John James Valente, Jr.

Political parties formed in Connecticut in a manner similar to the national experience. Parties throughout the country, as in Connecticut, divided over issues of religion, economics, and government by an establishment. For instance, most conflicts which polarized lower house members in the state government in the years preceeding the Constitution centered on religious issues instigated by the Great Awakening.<sup>25</sup> Economic conflict persisted in many states over property taxation. Anti-establishment politics existed in America as early as the formation of first governments. Virginia, for instance, divided its two houses between those who were thought of as “in” and those “out” of power.

Connecticut parties formed early in American history, but took a longer time to achieve acceptance than those in other states not until after the Convention of 1818. This slowness to accept political parties might be explained by Connecticut’s abundance of political conservatives and strength of religious orthodoxy. One historian has attributed this conservatism to Connecticut’s tremendous out-migration.<sup>26</sup> The Turnerian thesis would hold that this exodus permeitted conservatism because most of the dissidents left the state. For a full discussion of the Turner Thesis and its application to Connecticut, see Unit VI in this volume. Whatever the cause, Connecticut did have many articulate conservatives like Noah Webster and Timothy Dwight who continually preached against the horrors of political parties. The profuse existence of this negative philosophy may have deterred party formation and acceptance in Connecticut.

On both the national level and in Connecticut, parties were not created to destroy the government. As parties developed, although they were hell bent to destroy one another, they remained loyal to the country. This political anomaly, which is radically different from most world experiences, can, I think be explained by this country’s intense hatred for political parties. Although other countries had a similar distrust for parties, they did not have an intense hatred for them. Political philosophy was to subordinate conflict for the common good in America. In reality, this philosophy broke down early in America, but it was not forgotten. Rather than subvert their consensus ideal, Americans created political parties which would allow loyal conflict to exist. Besides allowing the ideal to exist, loyal opposition serves two important functions for the American political system: 1) it encourages people to remain fairly active in politics because it provides them with a stable outlet for their political desires, 2) it removes the possibility of political stagnation by one party or one form of government because it always suggests a conflict or an alternative.

## ***Why Two Parties?***

Recent scholarship on the existence of political parties in America has touched upon another anomaly typical in the American experience the existence of two parties. V. O. Key and Frank Sorauf submit that there is no one factor which has predisposed America to be a two party society. Some factors do, however, support the existence of a twoparty system more than others. In summary there are four major factors which seem to explain the existence of two parties in America: 1) our English background gave the colonists intellectual baggage which supports the continual existence of two parties, Whigs and Tories. Even in Connecticut colonists began to divide into groups of what they considered to be Whigs and Tories in the 1760's and 1770's. 2) Institutional factors which necessitate an election won by the majority vote of the people supports the existence of two parties. It is far easier for a majority vote to be agreed upon when two parties are involved than when more than two are involved. 3) The existence of single member districts forces the winning of only one party. 4) Social factors influence the existence of two parties. In a society with marred or hidden class consciousness the stakes in politics are smaller and the kinds of tolerance, compromise and confession necessary for a two party system to exist are easily attainable. <sup>27</sup>

## ***Study of Joel Barlow and Noah Webster***

One way of understanding the complexities of party development is to study some of the writings and lives of some of the party's members. In Connecticut there were a variety of writers who produced party polemic. Among them are Noah Webster, Timothy Dwight, Roger Griswold (Federalists); Joel Barlow, Emphraim Kirby, and Abraham Bishop (Democratic-Republicans). All of them present articulate views of party development and differences. Although literature from each party was tainted with anti-party philosophy, the most harsh anti-party sentiments were expressed by Federalists. Democratic-Republicans, on the other hand, tended to emphasize egalitarianism, and were more tolerant of parties. This section sketches an outline of the lives of Moah Webster and Joel Barlow in an attempt to illuminate the contemporary political philosophies in early America. Joel Barlow was selected for two reasons: 1) he changed his partisanship during his life, and 2) he is known as one of the most influential American liberals of the years between the end of the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Noah Webster was selected for his intense conservative Federalist philosophies about political parties. Both men will reflect what it was like to be caught in the nexus of early political parties.

### **Noah Webster (1758-1843)**

Noah Webster is probably remembered more for his dictionary than for his political philosophies. Nonetheless, Webster did write many political statements which were taken as views of the Federalist party.

Webster was born in what is now West Martford on October 16th, 1758, and attended Yale from 1774-1778. During his school days, Webster, a fervent patriot, set off to fight at Saratoga but was dismayed when the battle wss finished before he got there. It was not until 1785 that Webster wrote his first political pamphlet "Sketches of American Foreign Policy," which helped shape the developing principles of the Constitution. Webster maintained throughout his life that he abhorred parties and was a non-partisan-though moat considered him to be a Federalist. Geroge Washington, was to Webster, the symbol of true Americanism. <sup>28</sup>

In his *History of Political Parties* (1843) (see section in Appendix D) Webster concisely articulates the Federalist abhorrance of political parties and fear of the Democratic-Republicans. The work, he said, was written to "record my testimony against the audacious practice of publishing misrepresentationa for party purposea. In short, this practice frustrates the great object of a rePublican government, by subjecting our citizens to the sway of some petty oligarchy, changeable every four years." Webster lays the blame for

political party development on the structure of the Constitution and on the desires of selfish men.

### **Joel Barlow (1754-1812)**

Joel Barlow was a Connecticut born poet, writer, and diplomat who was considered one of the most influential American liberals between the Revolution and the War of 1812. Between 1783 and 1787 Barlow was a member of the Hartford Wits a group of Yale poets who were motivated not only by a love of literature but also by their Revolutionary past. Their goal was to initiate a national literature that would reflect American principles and accomplishments. Their work praised the institutions of the United States and the cause of human rights while attacking the beliefs of the anti-establishment (Anti-Federalists). Barlow was a true Federalist who had a deep desire for national unity. According to Barlow this desire could be fulfilled through the publication of literature which glorified the American past and brought hope to its future. One such work published by Barlow was *Vision of Columbus* (1787), a nine book epic in which an angel exhibits America to Columbus as the harbinger of universal peace. The work received acclaim, though much of it was uncritical.

Barlow's perochial American perspective widened when he moved to France in 1788 to work for the Soito Land Company. While in France he made little money for the land speculation company, but made a great deal for himself. Between 1790 and 1792 he lived in London and set his literary sights on an attack on the established church, feudal property rights, and monarchism in his pamphlet *Advice to the Privileged Orders* (1792). In that same year Barlow changed his partisanship to Democratic-Republican. Barlow changed parties for two reasons: 1) he agreed with the Democratic-Republican sympathies for the French Revolution, and 2) he believed that the Federalists of 1792 were not the same party as they were in 1788, but has become monarchists and apologists for the decadent British cause. <sup>29</sup>

At the prodding of Thomas Jefferson, a close friend, Barlow began to work on a history of the United States in 1810 which would "serve as an antidote to the Federalist history now in print." By the time of his death, Barlow had finished only three small sections of the work. (See in Appendix E). The work well articulates the Republican spirit of the time. In the first section Barlow attacks the Federalists of 1810 as hypocrites to their name. To Barlow the Democratic-Republicans had become the true Federalists of 1788. In section two of the work Barlow demonstrates the Democratic-Republican propensity to accept experiment in government. Federalists, on the other hand, as we had seen through Webster prefer experience over experiment. <sup>30</sup>

## **Classroom Strategies and Classroom Activities**

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This section will briefly outline how I intend to get this material across to students. The plans included here ambitiously cover, for some teachers and students, too much in a short period of time; teachers are advised to use their own discretion and the understanding of their students to shape the unit to fit their needs. After a weekly outline of plans, I provide a set of three sample classroom activities.

*Week 1* After the distribution of packet material, students will begin to discover the precise meaning of "political party." They will, in small discussion groups, address the questions of "what is a political party? What are some of its characteristics? What are some of its characteristics? What are its purposes?" After a consensus is achieved as to a class definition, I will have them read an 18th century definition and ask if there is any difference between their definition and the one of the 18th century. After students have formulated two distinct definitions they will be asked to write an essay which shows the difference between these

definitions.

After the formulation of a conceptual framework, I will teach material on the evolution of Connecticut political parties. Students will engage in readings and analyze Noah Webster's "History of Political Parties" (small sections). Webster clearly articulates a typical 18th century hatred for political parties. Students will be presented with an enigma "If famous people like Noah Webster hated political parties, why do you think they developed?" Once early national Connecticut history has been studied, students will begin study of the lives and writings of Noah Webster and Joel Barlow. Joel Barlow will provide good summary of 18th and early 19th century anti-establishment statements. Students will search local newspapers for evidence of anti-establishment statements in local or national present day campaigns.

*Week 2* Students will continue work on early Connecticut political leaders. They will engage in a debate of Federalist versus Democratic-Republican after an orientation to and readings on issues which divided the early Connecticut electorate. Students will then be introduced to early methods of party organization and publicity. Students will be asked to create a Federalist and Democratic-Republican newspaper which "puffs" some Connecticut candidate. Students will search local newspapers for present day examples of political "puffs."

*Week 3* Students will study political rhetoric from 1800-1818. Students will be asked to address the question "What are the differences and/or similarities between rhetoric of the earlier time period and the later time period?" Local politicians will be asked to address the class on their political viewpoints and on the differences between the two parties and on 20th century political issues. Students will be asked to draw analogies from past study of Connecticut political parties and issues. Students will study recent student council elections and try to draw parallel themes with national, local or historical party politics.

### *Classroom Activities*

- 1) Objective: Students will be able to present orally both sides of a hypothetical debate between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans concerning issues of the early 19th century in Connecticut.  
Activity: After students are presented with substantive material on issues dividing Connecticut in the early 19th century, have students classify which issues are of most concern to what party. After classifying have students write the party stance for each issue. Have students divide issues politics. Have students select by "stand up" voting the issue to be first debated. Select four debaters, a time keeper, and a room of judges. (Activity assumes previous debate orientation.)
- 2) Objective: Students will be able to make analogies between present and past historical parties of Connecticut.  
Activity: After students have a good working knowledge of the history of Connecticut parties, have students begin to search present day newspapers, magazines, etc. for recurrent themes that precipitated the development of parties. e.g., anti-establishment, economic conflict, religious issues, etc. Make sure students take good notes on this material. Have them prove in a good argumentative essay that an analogy can be made between a party of the past and one of the present. Be sure to instruct students that analogies need supporting evidence from each era.
- 3) Objective: Students will be able to analyze the political rhetoric of early political writers of the 19th century.  
Activity: Have students read either Barlow's work or Webster's in a small group with assigned tasks. Tell all students they are to be able to understand the document they are reading and they are to be able to formulate as a group a one sentence summary of it. Have one student of each group be responsible for dictionary aid, have another take notes, and a third read. After students have summarized the work, ask them to read biographical material on Barlow or Webster. Ask students to address this question: "How are the authors' lives reflected in their writings?"

## **Appendix A: *LIST OF TERMS TO BE MASTERED***

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Political Party (20th-century definition)

Political Party (18th-century definition)

Faction

Deference Politics

Federalist

Anti-Federalist

Democratic-Republicans

Toleration Party

Constitutional Convention of 1818

Commonwealth Ideal

Democracy

Democrat

Republican

Anti-establishment party

Political Alienation

Voter Alignment

Party System

Caucus

Convention

Delegate

Political Puff

## Appendix B: *TIMELINE DIAGRAM OF PARTY DEVELOPMENT IN CONNECTICUT*

	Parties	Issues Emphasized
1750-60s	Faction Based Politics	
1763	New vs Old Lights	Religion
Great Awakening		Land Claims
1770s	Whigs vs Tories	British Rule
1780s	Anti-Establishment vs Establishment	Taxation Nationalism Democracy Exclusiveness
1790s	Anti Federalists vs Federalists	Clericalism
1800	Democratic- Republicans vs	Certification Act Appropriation Act
1808		Embargo
1812		War Hartford Convention
1815		Clericalism
1817	Tolerationist vs Federalists	Constitution Clericalism

## Appendix C: *OTHER EXAMPLES OF POLITICAL VITRIOL*

Timothy Pickering to C. C. Pinckney May 25th, 1800

Indignation and disgust,—these are and long have been my feelings towards Mr. Adams: disgust at his intolerable vanity; indignation for the disgrace and mischief which his conduct has brought on the cause of Federalism and the country . . . If you were to scan his actions minutely, you would find them influenced by selfishness, ambition and revenge; that his heart is cankered with envy, and deficient in sincerity; that he is blind, stone blind, to his own faults and failings, and incapable of discerning the vices and defects of his family connections.

Pickering to Rufus King March 4, 1804

I am disgusted with the men who now rule, and with their measures. At some manifestations of their malignancy, I am shocked. The cowardly wretch at their head, while, like a Parisian revolutionary monster, prating about humanity, would feel an infernal pleasure in the utter destruction of his opponents.

Gouverneur Morris to Moss Kent January 15, 1815

You will have seen that the Hartford Convention have been prudent. Their doings bring to mind one of La

Fontaine's fables. A Council of rats being convoked to devise measures of defence against feline depredations, a sleek young member was much applauded for proposing to tie a bell round puss's neck, which giving reasonable notice of her approach, would enable every one to take care of himself. Before the question was put, an old rat (addressing the chair) said, "I too, sir, entirely approve of our young friend's proposal, but wish, before I vote, to know who will fasten the bell."

Documents take from

Henry Adams (ed.) *Documents Relating to New England Federalism, 1800-1815*, New York, Burt Franklin, 1877.

## **Appendix D: SECTIONS OF "THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL PARTIES" BY NOAH WEBSTER**

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A Federalist View of the Origins of Political Parties

CHAPTER XIX.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE UNITED STATES.

The origin of the two great political parties which have agitated the United states for half a century; the causes which have produced and sustained them; and their injurious effects upon public measures—are subjects of deep interest to the citizens of our confederacy. As it has fallen to my lot to be well acquainted with the origin and history of these parties, it may be interesting to the present generation, most of whom have been born since they originated, to see a brief narrative of facts relating to their origin, their respective motives and measures of policy, and to their influence in disturbing public harmony, embarrassing our national councils, and interrupting the prosperity of the country.

The division of the citizens of the United States into two political parties originated in principle or honest views; at least with a great portion of those citizens; but when formed these parties were converted into the instruments of personal ambition.

The principal cause of the parties now existing in this country, and one which will endure as long as the constitution, is the election of the chief magistrate. The power of the president to appoint most of the officers of government, and to remove them at pleasure, gives to him, and to the candidates for that office, almost unlimited influence, and means of corruption; and we are not to suppose that such means will be neglected. While these powers are vested in that magistrate, our country will never cease to be harassed with scrambling for offices, and violent political agitations. And if corruption is used, it is the corruption of the citizens on whom depends the election of the president; and the chief magistrate, elected by a party, will usually or always be the president of a party, rather than of the nation.

Parties, to some extent, will exist in all free governments; but in this country, the constitution, the fundamental form of government, is adapted to call them into existence, and perpetuate them. The powers of the president for appointing and removing officers, are sources of endless contentions in election; contentions which will produce every species of corruption, sometimes violence, and always instability of public measures. With these provisions in the constitution, such evils can no more be prevented by prohibitions and penalties,



than the laws of gravity can be suspended by human power. In this assertion, I am warranted by the whole tenor of the divine oracles, in the description of the character of man; by the history of mankind from Adam to this day, every chapter of which verifies the Scriptures; and by the observations of every man who has lived half a century. The reason is obvious; government is restraint; but our constitution, instead of restraining the selfishness and ambition of men, those unconquerable passions which occasion the principal political disorders, presents the most powerful motives to excite them into action. The emoluments of office operate as bounties to excite and encourage factions.

These are some of the principal causes which rend our nation into irreconcilable parties, frustrating all efforts at union, and with the collision of interests growing out of the different circumstances of the states, defeat all attempts to establish a permanent system of laws and measures of general utility, which are demanded by all our national interests.

Thus it happens that some of the provisions of the constitution, intended to be the principal means of securing popular rights, on republican principles, become the instruments of interminable discord.

## **Appendix E: BARLOW'S FIRST AND SECOND ESSAYS ON THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES (1810)**

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### The Republican Perspective on the Evolution of Political Parties

When the federal constitution of the United States had been framed by a National Convention and proposed to the consideration of the people, its adoption became an object of deep solicitude to those who understood it, and of real interest to the world at large. It was recommended by a majority of our enlightened citizens, though it was opposed by a minority respectable both for their numbers and talents. Its merits were at that time unfolded and the arguments for its ratification enforced with singular energy in a set of papers called *The Federalist*, first published in New York in the year 1788.

The title of that memorable and meritorious work gave name at the time to a numerous portion of our leading men who declared themselves friends to the constitution. While they were denominated federal, it seemed natural to fix upon their opponents an opposite appellation; and those who voted against the adoption of the constitution were called antifederal.

Such was the state of parties, and such the names by which they were designated, during the discussions on the question of ratifying the constitution. Nor did they materially change for two or three years after it had received the sanction of the people and had begun its operation in the hands of the national government.

It is no part of my present object to develop that interesting and instructive portion of our history which followed those events and occupied the last ten years of the eighteenth century. It is well known that during that period the word federalist underwent a total change of meaning in its sectarian use, as applied to a political party in this country. Instead of designating a friend to our federal system, which naturally supposes a republican, it now designates a monarchist; a doubtful friend if not an enemy of republican principles, and of all representative government.

By monarchist however I do not necessarily mean royalist, or the adherent of a kingly government exclusively. *Monarchia*, unum imperium, signifies one integral dominion. In this country it would signify an amalgamation



of the several states into one great state; which great state, administered by a single magistrate, whatever were his title, would be a monarchy, in the sense in which I use the word.

I must also apprise the reader that I am far from ascribing any dishonest views to the monarchists of the United States. I consider them as sincere in acting from their opinions as I wish them to consider me in announcing my own in the course of these essays. They doubtless believe that a monarchy is the best form of government. I believe a federal and representative system the best, especially for this country. Let us however live in good fellowship, and in the free exchange of opinions; it is a commerce that may be advantageous to both parties.

Many of the old antifederal men, without changing their principles have changed their denomination, and now call themselves federalists; while most of the genuine federalists of 1788 (who are still the same, being friends of the federal constitution) are no longer called by that name. These call themselves republicans; their opposers stile them democrats.

Names are of so much importance in political discussion that it is doubtless to be regretted that the republicans ever consented to give up their ancient denomination of federalists. To them it exclusively belonged and was appropriated; to them in its true sense it still belongs; they have uniformly supported the federal constitution under all the shocks it has recieved from its enemies who have usurbed its name. It is probable that the danger to which the cause of liberty has been exposed in this country has been greatly owing to this deceptive denomination of parties. The name of federalism was inviting, it was analogous to our situation; it was constitutional and patriotic. The effect therefore of yielding it up to be exclusively assumed by the secret friends of monarchy was powerful; it drew after them for a while a majority of the citizens of the United States. And there is no wonder that in this case it should take the great mass of the people several years to learn to discriminate between men and things, and to find out the true object their leaders were driving at, so as to leave them to the natural strength of their own little party.

In fact the delusion is not yet destroyed. A vast plurality of those who still vote with the monarchists under their federal disguise, are in reality true republicans; and they would have always remained with us, had we retained our original and true denomination, which our oppenents have usurped.

Would it be advisable at this day for the republicans to resume their rights in this respect, and take back the name they never ought to have resigned. <sup>20</sup> (P)erhaps not; but I have a reason which I hope will be satisfactory for resuming it myself, as a writer on this occasion. Being a genuine federalist of the school of 1788 I am going to invite the attention of my countrymen to a few essays on the present and approaching condition of the United States, considered in their federal capacity.

My predecessor the *Federalist* of 1788 showed the importance of *adopting* the constitution; my object is to show the importance of *preserving* it. I shall endeavor to do this in as clear and concise a manner as the disultory nature of newspaper discussion will admit, by dividing the general subject into something like the following sections. 1 The nature of our political system considered under its two great characteristic features, representation and federalunion. It's capacity of extension, of affording protection to the citizens, of protecting itself, of encouraging the development of the human faculties and virtues of communicating by the influence of example its own pacific principles to other nations, and civilization to other governments. 2 The best means of ameliorating our political system. Exterior defence—interior improvements—arts and sciences—education—new settlements—how far our federal system may be extended geographically—how far its administration may be improved— what are the dangers that now threaten it, or will assail it hereafter. <sup>21</sup>

Many subordinate topics will necessarily branch out from these general heads. A wide range should be indulged in the history of other governments and the progress of the social arts within those ages to which our histories reach, as well as a view of the capacity of the same social arts for farther advancement. So that the prospect in which we expatiate may be duly compared with the retrospect, in which there is no deception.

My attachment to the leading principles of our present constitution, it will be perceived, arises to enthusiasm. I have not eloquence enough to impart this enthusiasm to the reader; but I hope to engage him to form some estimate of so important an object, and to search with candor the means of preserving if not improving it.

I apprehend no immediate danger of a dismemberment of the empire from the audacity of a few daring adventurers whose views are understood. <sup>22</sup> But I would guard against such attempts in future by the best of possible precautions, by making it more and more the interest of every description of citizens to cherish the federal union, and by enabling them more and more to discern that interest.

It is easy to perceive an immense weight of duty lying upon the present generation. It is not difficult to foresee the fatal result of negligence, should it be indulged; nor to anticipate the fruits of timely wisdom and a well directed attention to the unspeakable advantages that providence has placed within our power.

## Footnotes

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2. A "declared electorate" is a group of voters who are willing to declare their partisanship through voter registration.
3. Robert K. Carr, Marvin H. Bernstein, et. al., *Essentials of American Democracy* (Hinsdale, Illinois, 1973).
4. Jackson Turner Main, *Political Parties Before the Constitution* (Williamsburg, Virginia, 1973).
5. *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York, 1975).
6. Richard J. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee, Character and the Social Order in Connecticut 1690-1765* (New York, 1970).
7. Oscar Zeichner, *Connecticut's Years of Controversy 1750-1776* (Richmond, Virginia, 1948).
8. Edmond Morgan, *Biography of Ezra Stiles* (Chicago, )
9. Zeichner.
10. *Ibid* .
11. Bonnie Bromberger Collier, " *Connecticut's Handing Order end its Political Opposition, 1785-1800 .*" Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of
12. *Ibid* .
13. *Connecticut Gazette* , 1787, *Ibid* .
14. Collier, *op . cit* .
15. *Ibid* .
16. Noah Webster, *Ibid* .
17. Journal, Feb. 24, 1803 in *The Public Records of the State of Connecticut, Volumes XI* ed. by Christopher Collier (Hartford, 1967). p. xxi
18. *Courant*, Mar. 16, 23, 30, April 6, 1803, *Ibid* .
19. Richard Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818* Wesleyan, 1963.

20. *Courant* in *Ibid* .
21. Purcell.
22. *Federalists, Republicans and Foreign Entanglements 1789-1815*. ed. Robert McColley (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969).
23. Purcell.
24. *Courant*, 1818 in Purcell.
25. Main.
26. Lois Kimbull Nathews, *The Expansion of New England, The Spread of New England Settlements and Institutions to the Mississippi River, 1620-1865*, (New York 1902).
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30. Christine Lizanich, "The Harch of Government; Joel Barlow's Unwritten History of the United States," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1975.

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- + Collier, Bonnie. Unpublished Master's Thesis. 1969 Fine treatment of the years between 1783-1800. Counters current scholarship on the lull of Party activity in the years following the Revolutionary War.
- \* Collier, Christopher. *Bloody Country* Narrative follows pioneers from Connecticut to the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. Studies the problem of Federalism.
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- ++ Cuningham, Noble. *The Jeffersonian Republicans: 1789-1801* Chapel Hill, North Carolina: North Carolina Press, 1963. Gives a good analysis of the rise of the Democratic-Republicans in a national perspective with emphasis on the role of the Press.
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