

Moral Panic and Political Rhetoric in the Early American Republic:  
A Study of American Newspaper Reporting of the Citizen Genêt Affair

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**Academic Abstract**

This study analyzes the reporting and editorializing in several major American newspapers during the height of the Citizen Genêt Affair in July and August, 1793. A hybrid form of sociological moral panic theory, focused predominantly on the “iteration” of moral panics and the language used to communicate them, is used to understand the dynamics of the information landscape of 1793. Specific attention is paid to the effects of time and space, personal and political bias, and incendiary historical rhetoric on reporting of and reactions to Genêt's actions. In doing so, this study highlights possible flaws or blind spots in both moral panic theory and historiography, and brings new understanding to the media environment in which America's political traditions gestated. Brief connections are drawn between this historical information landscape and series of events and contemporary concerns with regards to social media and incendiary political rhetoric.

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**General Audience Abstract**

One of America's first political and diplomatic scandals, the Citizen Genêt Affair of 1793, had a large impact on the foundation of the nation's original political traditions. Though this event usually constitutes little more than a footnote in traditional histories of America's formative years, newspaper reporting from the time casts the events of this scandal in a much different light. Numerous similarities can be observed between reporting on the Citizen Genêt Affair and a classic moral panic as outlined in sociological theory. At the same time however, studying these newspaper reports as a moral panic displays certain complications in moral panic theory in its present form. Finally, in studying this reporting, we can gain new understanding about incendiary political rhetoric in contemporary American media.

*“It is an undertaking of some degree of delicacy to examine into the cause of public disorders.”*

– Edmund Burke

*“Not all premonitions come to pass. But if we are saved, we never know for certain what we were saved from.”*

– David Frum

*“Bad news flies on falcon's wings; the good dawdles at every inn.”*

– Japanese proverb

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## **Introduction**

Moral panics are inherently iterative. Either in whole or in part, a moral panic is always about the one or several which came before it. Sociological theorists have developed a framework to explain the agents and mechanisms of moral panics which accepts the cyclical nature of moral panics as typical but non-essential. This study aims instead to bring that cyclical nature to center stage to see if such an approach might broaden our understanding of how moral panics begin, play out, resolve, and begin anew. After all, when we first hear the phrase “moral panic,” we immediately think some version of “Oh, I bet I know what that looks like; I bet I’ve seen one before.” We can recall instances in our past when we observed that large swaths of the public were – or at least appeared to be – deeply troubled by some threat to social stability, and that this concern was communicated largely through the news media. Specific rhetoric repeated itself throughout the panic episode, often to the point of losing its original meaning and becoming more a sign of panic itself than any earnest attempt to address the problem. Perhaps attempts were made in government to address the issue, or perhaps not. Frequently, the issue at the center of the controversy was really no issue at all, and the public was either overreacting to a freak occurrence or vastly overestimating its threat potential. But most importantly, people both within and without the panic looked at the situation at hand and said to themselves “Here we go again.”

Whatever our presumed folk associations with it may be, the term “moral panic” means something quite specific to sociologists. Much like other terms more broadly known to the public, such as “cultural relativism” and “folkway,” the term “moral panic” refers to a phenomenon whose aspects and mechanisms have been conceptualized, applied to case studies, and refined at both the theoretical and methodological levels. This study will interrogate this

concept, discover its limits, and expand both our understanding of what exactly constitutes a “moral panic” as well as our understanding of early American political discourse by using moral panic theory as a lens through which to read the various political publications and publishers of the first decade of the American republic. Specific attention will be paid in this study to what some scholars have called the first attempt by a foreign power to subvert the American federal government: the Citizen Genêt Affair.

The iteration of certain news stories and the attendant rhetoric surrounding the Genêt Affair indicates that there was as much political calculation as panic among newspaper printers and contributors who circulated the story. Articles were reprinted selectively, indicating the distribution of party opinions across geographic space, and discussions of the Genêt Affair were reiterated over the years, indicating the persistence of divided opinions over time. Some printers and contributors changed their opinions, which suggests that the reactions to Genêt’s perceived threat to American sovereignty were not hegemonic, and not necessarily always panicked. By using moral panic theory with particular attention to the interplay between iteration and rhetoric, we can see that there was little to no significant difference between political disagreement and moral outrage over perceived threats to social stability in the early American republic. Much of this can be explained by the characteristics of both early American newspapers themselves and the nature of their distribution. This environment, in which disagreement, outrage, opportunism, and panic all coexisted, had a greater impact on the trajectory of America’s various political traditions than any one specific incident, because that environment could potentially magnify any political disagreement into a threat to American federal sovereignty. The Genêt Affair is but one particularly rich incident among many in this period.

## **The Events of the Citizen Genêt Affair**

The newborn United States was ripe for a moral panic when Edmond-Charles Genêt arrived there in early April, 1793. Unresolved divisions from the Constitutional ratification debates of the late 1780s were solidifying into more pronounced political differences both between and within the states. In western Pennsylvania and the Kentucky territory, dissatisfied farmers had been protesting what they saw as an unjust alcohol tax since 1791, and these protests occasionally gave way to mob violence. Some American observers saw in these men echoes of Daniel Shays' armed insurrection in 1787 against the Massachusetts court system. Others saw in them the spiritual successors to the patriots of 1775 – the “whiskey rebels” certainly regarded themselves this way. Still others saw them as potential American counterparts to the populist Jacobin revolutionaries of France. Whether any of these uprisings was a cause for celebration or alarm depended greatly on how strongly an observer believed in popular democracy. To certain believers in the Constitutional project, any and all of these events appeared as threats to federal sovereignty and American social stability.

If the political situation in America in 1793 was tenuous, then the situation in Europe was dire. The assorted French revolutionaries had always taken their American forerunners as inspiration, but their republicanism had radicalized by the spring and summer of 1792. The idealistic Girondins – a faction of the radical Jacobin movement – ascended to power by the autumn of that year and declared war on several sovereign European states, taking the first step in their declared project to bring republican liberty to the globe. They executed Louis XVI by guillotine in January of 1793, in reaction to which Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and other European powers formed a coalition to isolate France and, later, to liberate conquered territories from French rule.

Out of such a Europe and into such an America sailed the young and charismatic Genêt, dispatched by the Girondins as the French Republic's new ambassador to the United States. Genêt disembarked in the United States just as executive power in France was passing to the Committee of Public Safety and legal authority to the Revolutionary Tribunal. News of all of this reached American shores after a 6-8 week crossing of the Atlantic. By early March, America knew that Louis XVI had died in late January; by early August, that civil war was raging in France and that, following the Parisian insurrection of May 31<sup>st</sup>, the radical Montagnards had assumed control of the National Assembly.

Genêt's American mission was doomed to fail from the beginning. As a diplomat, he was a textbook example of a good choice on paper and a bad choice in practice. He was the son of a career civil servant in France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had learned to speak and read several languages in his childhood; he had worked briefly as a translator in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in his early twenties. During that time, however, Genêt became disgusted with monarchy and grew enamored with radical French republicanism. His political-philosophical idealism appears to have undone him as a diplomat. In 1787, at the age of 24, he was sent to the French embassy in Russia as an ambassador, only to be declared *persona non grata* and expelled in 1792 due to his anti-aristocratic political views. He may also have told Catherine the Great directly that he expected Russia's peasants to overthrow her. His belief in the project of republicanism was such that rank and decorum meant nothing.<sup>1</sup> Non- or anti-republican leaders and governments were not simply different, but wrong.

Genêt's mission<sup>2</sup> was to make America a kind of "France in the New World" by raising

1 See Appendix A.1 and A.2 for a pair of examples of how Genêt addressed crowds of Frenchmen and Republicans in Philadelphia after his arrival in the city; see Appendix A.3 and A.4 for an exchange of letters between Genêt and Jefferson showing Genêt's disregard for decorum and procedure.

2 The following summary of the Genêt Affair owes much to Carol Berkin's book, *A Sovereign People*, and Eugene L. Sheridan's article, "The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet." To avoid confusion, notes will only be provided when direct quotations are employed.

privateer ships in American harbors and preying upon British shipping before invading British Canada and Spanish Louisiana with a mix of American and French militiamen drawn from the frontier.<sup>3</sup> He was also tasked with arranging for the full repayment of America's war debts to France to fund French war efforts, and with securing more favorable trade agreements between America and France. Genêt read into his orders that he was to achieve these goals by any means necessary.

Genêt's arrival in itself did not spark a moral panic,<sup>4</sup> though some men – particularly among the nascent Federalists – did see various causes for concern.<sup>5</sup> Though blown off-course and landing in Charleston, South Carolina instead of his intended destination of Philadelphia, Genêt decided to begin his mission immediately after his April 8<sup>th</sup> arrival, raising several privateer ships in Charleston harbor and crewing them with both French and American sailors. Genêt claimed he had the authority to do so under Franco-American treaties ratified in 1778. Whether these treaties indeed did grant him such authority – or whether they were still valid at all – became a political issue for the Federalists and Republicans to argue over, but little more – at first.

Unfortunately for his mission, Genêt had arrived in America while laboring under a misapprehension. Inspired though they were by America's Patriots of the 1770s and '80s, the Girondins read too much of their own republicanism into the newly founded American federal government. They saw Congress as equal to their National Convention, the highest power in the land to which all others answered, and expected it to support their military cause. Instead, on

3 Eugene L. Sheridan, "The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet: A Study in Transatlantic Politics and Diplomacy." *Diplomatic History* 18 (1994): 466. For more on Genêt designs on the American frontier, see Frederick J. Turner, "The Origin of Genet's Projected Attack on Louisiana and the Floridas."

4 See Appendix A.5 for an example of how the pro-French press reported his arrival in Charleston.

5 See e.g. Alexander Hamilton's letter to John Jay dated Apr. 9<sup>th</sup> in which he ruminated on how receiving Genêt could strain American-European relations because France's regent "may himself send an Ambassador to the United States." Qtd. in Carol Berkin, "The Genet Affair," *A Sovereign People: The Crises of the 1790s and the Birth of American Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 94.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, President George Washington issued a Proclamation of Neutrality in the wars between France and her enemies, caused in no small part by Genêt having raised privateer ships in Charleston before reporting to the State Department in Philadelphia. Of particular concern was America's relationship with Great Britain, which at the time was America's most important and lucrative trade partner and France's enemy on the seas.

Caught between the President's Proclamation and his own interpretation of the Franco-American treaties, Genêt responded by challenging the authority of the federal government. At issue was the *Little Sarah*, a British merchant vessel captured by Genêt's privateers and retrofitted for war in Philadelphia's harbor in violation of the April 22<sup>nd</sup> Proclamation. The administration had stated plainly that Genêt's privateering activity violated America's declared neutrality in the wars between France and her enemies. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, Alexander Dallas, Pennsylvania's Secretary of State, learned that the *Little Sarah* planned to sail the next morning, against the express demands of Washington's Cabinet. Late that night, Dallas met with Genêt to persuade the ambassador to have the ship remain in port. An argument broke out between the two men, and Genêt threatened to go over Washington's head and appeal directly to the American people for vindication. Dallas sent a letter to Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin who, in reaction, passed the information along to the Cabinet and called up a militia unit to detain the ship.

The next day, US Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson met with Genêt personally concerning the matter. According to Jefferson's notes on this meeting, it quickly became a lecture on the basic tenets of the federal Constitution.<sup>6</sup> Jefferson believed his persuasive efforts were successful, only to learn on July 11<sup>th</sup>, the day Washington returned to the capitol from a trip

<sup>6</sup> Example of note: According to Jefferson, when he informed Genêt that the president and executive branch – and thus not Congress – held final say in treaties and foreign policy, Genêt replied that he had “never before... had such an idea.” Qtd. in Berkin, *A Sovereign People*, 121.

to Mount Vernon, that Genêt had defied the administration's orders and moved the ship downriver.

Against the wishes of the Cabinet, news of Genêt's threat leaked to the public after this incident, sparking a possible moral panic as rumors circulated that Genêt was conspiring to overthrow the federal government with the help of French sympathizers among the American populace. By July 31<sup>st</sup>, rumors and fear-mongering about the July 6<sup>th</sup> incident had been reprinted in pro- and anti-federal newspapers alike. These rumors may have been partially driven by observed parallels between Governor Mifflin's militia summons and the Parisian mob marching Girondin deputies out of the National Assembly at bayonet-point, an event which was being reported in American papers at the time. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay and US Senator Rufus King of New York confirmed the appeal threat in a brief letter published in the *New York Diary* on August 12<sup>th</sup>. This was the beginning of the end of Genêt's diplomatic career in America. Washington's Cabinet spent several meetings in late July and early August working out how to demand Genêt's recall by the French government without giving offense; they dispatched their request in mid-August.

In addition to the appeal threat, Genêt was related or even central to a number of other controversial events during the summer of 1793. On June 20<sup>th</sup>, a fire broke out in Cape-François, the capital of the French colony in Haiti, which consumed most of the city. Refugees began arriving in American ports soon after, and around late July, the French ship *Jupiter* arrived in New York harbor carrying the two men held responsible for the fire, General Francois-Thomas Galbaud and Admiral Joseph de Cambis. The former of these men was – or at least believed himself to be – the military governor of Cape-François; the latter was Genêt's brother-in-law. The “*Jupiter* Affair” involved mutiny, escape attempts, and false claims of an attempt on Genêt's

life. Genêt also spent the summer meddling in the judicial trials of men who had served aboard his privateers. Finally, both Genêt and his secretary Pascal were accused of writing political essays that were printed in pro-French and anti-federal newspapers.

By early October, Gouverneur Morris, America's ambassador in France, had received the Cabinet's carefully worded request to have Genêt recalled and had forwarded it to the National Directory. They promptly approved it and tasked four men to travel to Philadelphia to take Genêt's place after having him arrested and sent back to France. The Girondins had fallen from power over the summer and been replaced by Robespierre's Montagnard faction, which disapproved of both Genêt's conduct and his failure. In fact, the Montagnards saw in Genêt nothing short of the head of the international wing of the "Girondin conspiracy" to reinstate the French monarchy. Had he complied with their recall order, Genêt might have shared the fate of the Girondist deputies who were guillotined on October 31<sup>st</sup> as the Terror began. The US Federal government believed this would be the case, so they granted Genêt asylum, and he retired to upstate New York to become a gentleman farmer.

This sequence of misunderstandings, secret meetings, and political events set off a flurry of competing representations in the press. In these stories and reports, a young and brash ambassador's undiplomatic outburst was presented as a potential threat to the American federal government's sovereignty, provoking references to guillotines, conspiracy, and violent rebellion. To determine whether the Genêt Affair qualifies as the new republic's first moral panic, however, we must consider what a moral panic is and how – or perhaps whether – it can be explained.

## Moral Panics – A Brief Overview

The representation and circulation of Genêt's actions in the early national press provides a case study for thinking about the role of the press in moral panics. Certainly, newspapers and their printers manned the moral barricades throughout this season of iterative rumor. For example, the Philadelphia *National Gazette* supported Genêt through the summer and into autumn. During the meetings in which the Cabinet debated how to best request Genêt's recall, that paper ran a poem in which Washington and Supreme Court Justice James Wilson were guillotined. On the other side of the panic, New York legislator William Willcocks, in a letter to the *Diary* reprinted in Charleston's *State Gazette* issue of November 19<sup>th</sup>, compared Genêt to Cataline, the Roman Senator who attempted to overthrow the consul in 63CE with an army of peasants and disaffected veterans. The association between Cataline's army and Genêt's supporters among American anti-federals – not to mention the whiskey rebels in Pennsylvania – would have been obvious to Willcocks' readers.<sup>7</sup> What is not obvious is why the events of the summer of 1793 and Genêt's role in them should have resulted in such wild speculation about the possibility of violent revolution.

Use of the term “moral panic” in sociology and criminology research theory dates to the early 1970s, when Stanley Cohen published his widely influential book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Within it, Cohen used the term to describe the reasons, mechanisms, participants, and outcomes of what he perceived to be a massively overblown public and media reaction to incidents of youth violence in Britain in the late 1960s.<sup>8</sup> Working within a broader tradition of deviancy studies, Cohen developed what has become known in moral panic scholarship as the

<sup>7</sup> “From the Diary,” *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, Nov. 19, 1793. In fact, Willcocks began his letter thus, in a send-up of Cicero's famous address before the Senate on the Cataline issue: “Quosque tandem Catalina, abutere patientai nostra. / How long O citizen, wilt thou abuse our patience.”

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1972), 9-224.

“processural” model of moral panics, sometimes also called the British tradition.<sup>9</sup>

Of all the agents responsible for and participating in a moral panic, Cohen singled out the mass media as the primary driver behind an episode of moral panic. His focus on the agents of a panic and the courses it might take constitutes his most lasting impact on the field of moral panic theory and study. The mass media is crucial to the creation of the other key component of the processural model: the “folk devil.” Folk devils are created at the nexus of sensational journalism, public anxiety, and social control systems; quite often, Cohen argued, the public’s anxiety is over something unrelated to the folk devil, and the people driving social control systems are concerned with something bigger and beyond the folk devil itself. Once a folk devil has been identified, however,<sup>10</sup> further reporting of incidents distorts public perception of the reality behind both the “deviant” behavior and those participating in it until the folk devil itself becomes a sort of nightmare version of the person or group of people it is meant to represent. Journalists then begin to report on incidences of this “deviant” behavior using the folk devil as an interpretive lens, often to the point of fabricating details of news stories out of thin air in order to satisfy expectations about how folk devils are assumed to act.

Were this study attempting to “apply” moral panic theory to the Genêt Affair, we might begin by identifying Genêt himself, as well as Pennsylvania’s “whiskey rebels” as folk devils. We would look for rhetoric in which an accurate depiction of persons and events is replaced by a stereotypical one. We would also look for the “true” source of the panic. A defiant ambassador ought not to be a cause for great concern, but he could become such if he is seen as emblematic of foreign threats to federal sovereignty. Evidence of this could be found in such comparisons as Willcocks’ framing of Genêt as Cataline, as well as in comparisons drawn between “Citizens”

9 Chas Critcher, “Moral Panic Analysis: Past, Present, and Future,” *Sociology Compass* 2/4 (2008): 1128-31.

10 Some example folk devils include: witches in Renaissance Europe and Puritan New England, Communists in Hollywood during McCarthyism in the 1940s and 50s, and rock and roll music fans in Britain in the 1960s. Certain counter-cultures in this last group were the subject of Cohen's study.

and “whiskey rebels” and other, earlier revolts in living American history, such as Daniel Shays’ rebellion. But Genêt, “Citizens,” whiskey rebels, and so forth cannot be folk devils by definition because defiance is not deviance or fiendish behavior. That said, the folk devil concept does provide a way in which we can comprehend the specific coinages and historical allusions used by the early American political press in the Genêt panic if we trace the iterations of the images and allusions that were used to represent him. For example, rather than turn Genêt into a folk devil himself, the press frequently compared him to a pre-existing, historical folk devil in Cataline. In doing so, the fear over demagoguery and popular uprisings that Rome expressed in its histories was grafted onto Genêt. This amplified the significance of anything he said or did, to the point that his opponents began reading their own fears over popular uprisings into reports about him. Whether the comparison was merited would depend on who was drawing the comparison.<sup>11</sup> By keeping an eye out for such “revivals” of history’s folk devils in this era’s rhetoric, we can begin to understand how the moral panic over Genêt’s actions began and sustained itself.

After Cohen, sociologists used his work to interpret a variety of similar social scares and possible panics. They refined, expanded, and critiqued the theory, culminating in a book first published in 1994 by Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda titled *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*. These two scholars argued for what scholarship now calls the “attributional” model of moral panic, sometimes also called the American tradition.<sup>12</sup> The differences between the two traditions are largely a matter of placement of stresses: the British on the *who* and *how* and the American on the *if*, *when*, and *why*. One might also say that the British strain is more concerned with the “moral” dynamics of the concept while the American

<sup>11</sup> My own understanding of Cataline’s place in Roman history owes much to Mary Beard’s *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, particularly its opening chapter, which is devoted to the Catalinian conspiracy.

<sup>12</sup> Critcher, 1131-34.

strain is more concerned with the “panic” dynamics. Goode and Ben-Yehuda draw from social constructionism theory to argue that certain episodes in history and contemporary life can be classified as moral panics if specific conditions are met.<sup>13</sup>

The most important of these conditions in terms of its impact on moral panic theory and criticism is what Goode and Ben-Yehuda term “disproportion.” An episode of public and political anxiety or outrage, they argue, can only be termed a moral panic if participants in the episode – the press, the public, politicians, law enforcement, and action groups – express fear, anxiety, hatred, or condemnation toward the panic’s subject at levels that are far beyond any reasonable response to the threat posed. A response is labeled disproportionate if there is no credible threat, if the threat has since diminished, or if anxiety directed at the object of the panic draws attention away from more dangerous threats.

As with folk devils, disproportion seems to be a promising way to apply moral panic theory to the Genêt Affair. Genêt may have been raising French privateers in American ports and thus theoretically could have turned his guns on American shipping and thereby threatened federal sovereignty. But he only raised four ships in Charleston and appears to have commanded no more than ten at any given time – hardly a menace even to a nation without a navy, as America was at the time. Furthermore, Genêt and the French were not the only foreign power raising ships in American harbors: Great Britain was also doing so and in greater numbers. The British were undoubtedly the bigger threat to federal sovereignty, yet their shipraising only became an issue insofar as it could be used rhetorically to argue in favor of Genêt or against the idea of Washington’s Proclamation having any teeth.

Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s concept of disproportionality, however, relies on a person or

13 Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1-167. The final third of the text (168-250) contains three case studies performed by the authors.

group's understanding of probability rather than on the dynamics of personal and public communication. If a threat is so unlikely that public fear about it appears irrational, then that response can be regarded as "panic." Yet fear which seems irrational after the fact might not have been irrational in the midst of things, when the supposedly panicked person had little reliable information from which to form a judgment. This process can repeat itself as well: what may have once been prudent can later appear to be folly, only to appear prudent once more as facts and instances accumulate. Persons involved in a panic may have been aware of things at the time which have since dropped from sight or been underestimated. Historians may have more or different facts, but will never have all of the facts. Improbable events do still occur, and historical consensus does change. Given the present state of knowledge about events that occurred in 1793, one might hesitate to describe responses to the Genêt Affair as disproportionate or irrational.

One major problem in using disproportionality to identify a moral panic, therefore, is the assumption that a contemporary observer or later historian can obtain sufficient knowledge of the facts of a case to determine whether the panicked response is or was, in fact, "proportionate." The news distribution landscape of 1793 caused information to arrive sporadically, piecemeal, achronologically, and often without context. In such an environment, people were forced to fall back on such interpretive lenses as personal and political viewpoints, historical knowledge, and, above all, prudence. These all may prove to have been misguided in retrospect but may not have been irrational at the time—at least not in the sense that the label "disproportionate" implies. Moreover, people in the throes of panic may and often do save themselves by virtue of that very panic; catastrophic events pan out in such a way that the panicked behavior was justified. Yet disproportionality discards this common-sense observation, as disproportionality can only be

determined after a moral panic has come and gone. The new Americans of 1793 may have been justified in suspecting that Genêt could cause greater problems if left alone.

As with folk devils, the concept of disproportionality can be refined by combining it with an iterative and historical approach to moral panics and with the ideal of prudence, which relies more on the wise application of experience and memory than does mere rationality. Given the then-recent events of the post-Revolutionary period, was fear of a potential uprising a “proportionate” response to Genêt’s defiance? And how did the reiteration of his appeal threat in the popular press affect public perceptions of possible danger? The Revolution was still very much in living memory in 1793, and the whiskey rebels had been quick to revive the “taxation without representation” rallying cry. Daniel Shays had struck such fear into the confederation government that his rebellion had led directly to the states calling the Constitutional Convention. Comparisons in the press between such men and Genêt – whether positive or negative – would point toward the effects of iteration on disproportion. In cases in which little factual information is available, the difference between prudence and panic becomes muddy as people attempt to reason out a solution by applying historical knowledge – especially examples from antiquity, such as Cataline – and political leanings as lenses rather than, or in addition to, assessing the facts at hand.

A final major contribution to the development of moral panic theory was Stuart Hall et al.’s 1978 study of mugging and public reaction in England, which added Gramscian hegemony theory to Cohen’s model to explain the role of ideology in the creation and effects of moral panics.<sup>14</sup> Hall’s work helped to reinforce what might be called the “culture clash” aspect of moral panics: panics are typically not about the literal behavior being demonized, but rather

14 Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, (London: Macmillan, 1978). Goode and Ben-Yehuda address this ideological focus in their book and are emphatic in their claims that moral panics are not governed by personal or party politics.

about the implications of that behavior and the threat it poses, real or imagined, to established society. For this reason, among others, scholarship in the British tradition sometimes refers to moral panics as “crises of capitalism”: moments when the protectors of the status quo attempt to strike back at what they perceive as the slow erosion of dominant values. Hall et al.’s work presaged later scholarly efforts that would produce hybrid models of moral panic to explain how the disparate levels of influence that panic agents hold over public discourse shape the beginnings and course of a moral panic.<sup>15</sup>

The notion that a moral panic might operate with something like hegemonic force accords with a common-sense understanding of panic, in which individual judgment is carried away by the collective expression of emotion that might, in turn, be directed by people in positions of power. In the case of the Genêt Affair, such emotions would be rooted in political differences. This version of the theory helps explain why a person with a high degree of information regarding Genêt’s actions – a Cabinet member, for example – might still have chosen to publish panicked rhetoric in the newspapers. He might have done so because he was genuinely panicked, or because he saw an opportunity to further his political agenda; these positions are not mutually exclusive. Once again, the iterative approach to moral panic is instructive: by seeing what sorts of allusions observers and participants made when invoking historical memory to establish proportional – or even deliberately misleading – comparisons, we can begin to untangle the role politics played in the Genêt panic.

These three elements – folk deviling, disproportionate reaction, and hegemonic force – will be primarily attended to in this study, as other aspects of these models do not translate well onto the media landscape of the early American republic. They have thus been unaddressed.

<sup>15</sup> See Brian V. Klocke and Glenn W. Muschert, “A Hybrid Model of Moral Panics: Synthesizing the Theory and Practice of Moral Panic Research,” *Sociology Compass* 4/5 (2010): 295-309 for more in this vein.

Therefore, even though this study is not attempting to prove that the Genêt Affair constitutes a moral panic, we are nevertheless working from a hybrid model which uses these three elements along with an iterative approach – that is, one based on rhetoric, information networks and types, and public and private memory – as opposed to approaches outlined in existing models and theories.

## Characteristics of American Newspapers in 1793

What did the Genêt Affair *look like* to an observer? Now that we have established an historical timeline and discussed what a moral panic is according to sociological theory, we should consider what a newspaper looked like and how news circulated in 1793. All American newspapers of the 1790s, regardless of circulation or frequency of publication, shared the following characteristics:

- four pages of material, printed on broadside paper;
- occasional two-page “extraordinary” issues printed either alongside the standard run or on off-days, usually due to a surplus of newsworthy material;
- text arranged in four or five columns;
- advertisements, given a separate section of the paper;
- a mix of what we would now call “news reports” and “editorials;”
- attempts to credit source(s) of information;

Today, the term “newspaper” connotes a daily publication, but this was not true of newspapers in the early American republic. Anything exhibiting the characteristics listed above was called a “newspaper” regardless of print frequency. Newspapers were printed one or more times over the course of a week and were distinguished from magazines, which were printed in the octavo format and appeared monthly or quarterly. Most of the newspapers discussed in this study followed a bi-weekly publication schedule.<sup>16</sup> Printers in this period also experimented with what Frank Luther Mott calls the “village weekly,” in which a paper in a major city such as Boston or

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it goes without saying, but newspapers were never printed on Sundays due to observations of the sabbath. In fact, this is just about the only universal characteristic of early American press practices. Not even daily papers in port cities broke this practice.

Richmond would circulate according to its normal schedule – daily, bi-weekly, etc. – but would also publish a weekly summary issue which was sent to surrounding towns.<sup>17</sup>

As a rule, American newspapers in the 1790s did not possess the same level of organization and accreditation as contemporary newspapers. There was a clear distinction made between advertisements and other printed material; reprints of government documents or reports – recently passed laws, executive decrees, etc. – were also clearly demarcated. But what we would now call “news reports” appeared alongside and intermixed with what we would now consider “opinion pieces,” while the news itself was a grab-bag of reprinted articles from American and European papers and letters to the printer from correspondents. There were no reporters, news agencies, or foreign bureaus – “news” came to printers in the form of manuscript letters, oral reports, and reprinted material from other newspapers.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, what constituted “news” in the early American republic was much closer to what we would now call to “rumor” because there were limited opportunities for vetting. For example, letters reprinted in newspapers might come from the printer's personal associates, from anonymous writers, or from government officials. This led to inconsistent, unclear, and certainly uncodified rules for what was reprinted from other papers, how it was credited, and where it appeared in a given issue. Sometimes, reprinted articles were published on the front or second page of a paper with a heading indicating the source of the article, which was typically another newspaper; this was especially true of political essays written under pseudonyms. Other times, reprinted articles were published on back pages, sometimes under a heading reading “From a

17 For more details concerning village weeklies and other periodicals, see Frank Luther Mott, “The Party Press: Early Period 1783-1801,” *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 260 Years: 1690 to 1950* (New York: MacMillan, 1950), 135-38.

18 And even then, the amount and type of material that a given printer contributed to his own paper varies considerably. Furthermore, while reporters, etc. did not yet exist as we understand them today, a forerunner to the freelance journalist did exist, exemplified by such men as James T. Callender and William Cobbett; Thomas Paine could also be viewed as such in his early career.

Correspondent.” Often, however, these items appeared without any heading except a reprinted sentence or two from a cover letter enclosing material, itself often clipped from another journal and then sent to the printer for publication.<sup>19</sup>

That said, some papers, especially those in New England, attempted to sort and digest “news” material. For example, the two major Boston papers circulating in 1793, the *Columbian Centinel* and the *Independent Chronicle*, featured sections titled “From Last Night’s Mail” or something similar, under which would run printed excerpts from correspondents’ letters, uncredited socio-political quips and observations, specifically requested reprints of other papers’ materials, and so forth.<sup>20</sup> We might read this as a forerunner to the op-ed section of a contemporary paper. A more common practice was the organization of overseas news into its own block. The heading “European Intelligence” was commonly employed in such cases, with articles organized by city of origin and given dates of original publication or postage. Articles in this section of a newspaper were typically reprints of articles from European papers or brief summaries thereof, though reprinted letters and letter summaries also appeared with less frequency. These articles arrived from overseas as whole newspapers, often passing through the hands of merchants before making it to the printers.<sup>21</sup> Some newspapers, especially those published in port cities such as Boston and Charleston, would state the ship and captain who had brought the newspapers over, their port of departure and how many days out of said port they were, and how up-to-date the European newspapers were.<sup>22</sup> This section of an American

19 Furthermore, major newspapers and political organs were nationally distributed, so most of what gets reprinted in this fashion is clipped from nearby town papers. Today we would call this “signal boosting.”

20 New England newspapers in this period tended to be the best organized and the most diligent with regard to organization and accreditation, certainly more than their counterparts in the Middle and Southern states. I have no ready explanation for this, though I speculate that New England’s universities were a major cause; scholarly citation practices may have rubbed off on the Boston printing class in some fashion, whether through training or mimicry.

21 Which is to say, the part of the correspondent system where printers would run brief requests in their papers for things like information on current events or specific articles from other American newspapers did not exist. See Appendix A.6 for an example of such a request.

22 Much more rarely was credit given to European papers by name; often a news report in the “European Intelligence” section would start by saying “A British paper reports” or something to that effect.

newspaper typically appeared on the second page of a given issue, but again, there was no consistent rule. With little exception, advertisements appeared on the last page of a paper in a space set aside for them. The final page was also usually the repository for miscellanea. Poems, jokes, stock prices, ship arrivals and departures, noted weddings and deaths, and more appeared either directly before the advertisement section or strewn throughout it. Non-political news also tended to appear here, usually of a medical or agricultural variety. The closest thing to contemporary crime news was advertisements offering rewards for captured criminals.

Reports about the Genêt Affair thus appeared in the newspapers amid a swirling mass of other news and information, some of which is obviously important for understanding reactions to the misadventures of the French ambassador. To put that another way, when studying the Genêt Affair through the lens of moral panic, we must keep in mind what else was going on in the world at the time and the events that would have been reported alongside it. Such historical events included:

- the ongoing war between the First French Republic and various European powers, instigated by the Girondin government in France;
- the proclamations of the National Convention concerning the fall of the Girondin government, the arrest of many of its members, and the ascendancy of Robespierre's Montagnards in the last days of May;
- the public debate over America's neutrality in the context of the European war;
- the controversy over foreign navies raising privateer ships in American harbors, cruising on America's coasts, and bringing prizes into American harbors;
- the ongoing Haitian slave rebellion and the refugee crisis sparked by the June 20th burning of its capital of Cape-François;

- the related “*Jupiter* Affair” of late July and early August;
- the August 1st battle between the French and British frigates *Ambuscade* and *Boston* just beyond New York harbor.

Naturally there were a great many historical events bearing on the Genêt Affair, but these in particular were reported simultaneously with news of and debates over Genêt’s appeal threat. If a moral panic did indeed occur in some way that concerned Genêt, it would have begun in such an information landscape, with the related news feeding the panic as much as or more than Genêt’s own actions did.

Finally, reporting and printing in this time period was heavily influenced by the time it took for people, and thus news, to travel between major cities and across the Atlantic ocean. Travel between cities in the new United States took anywhere from a few days to more than a month, depending on the cities in question and the transportation method, and crossing the Atlantic was a six-week journey under the best conditions.

## **The Effects of Time and Space on Reports of the Citizen Genêt Affair**

Responses to news were obviously shaped by the juxtaposition of items appearing on the pages of newspapers, but also by the shifting intervals required for the iteration of information across media divides – oral, manuscript, and print; by physical spaces; and by the social divides that separated different groups of people. The issue of “time lag” is integral to this study for a variety of reasons. To begin with, time lag affected Americans living in different parts of the young nation in different ways. Time was simply not thought of in the same way in a merchant port and in a planter community.<sup>23</sup> “Merchant time” was regulated by the comings and goings of ships and fluctuations in the price of goods. Something was always occurring, and news of new laws and regulations, wars and treaties, ship and land confiscations, and natural disasters had an immediate effect on commercial markets. Where business transactions tended to occur at fixed times – e.g. when rents and contracts came due – “planter time” had more to do with the cyclical vagaries of seasons and harvests. Since the value of land was much less sensitive to news than the value of commodities, weeks and months might pass without incident, causing time to appear to slow down, and missed opportunities in a given season could always be made up the next year.

These differences in time perception cause the different regions of the early American republic to be susceptible to moral panics in different ways. Merchant versus planter time is not a strictly regional distinction, as port cities existed all along the early American coast. Nevertheless, the close proximity and dense populations of New England farms, villages, and port cities made merchant time more common in that region, whereas the size and distribution of plantations and the relatively small number of port cities made planter time more common down South.<sup>24</sup> In general, life under merchant time was more fluid and more adaptable to change and

<sup>23</sup> These general observations on regional perceptions of time are based primarily on the publishing schedules of the various newspapers analyzed in this study, as well as their advertisement content.

<sup>24</sup> Naturally, Charleston, South Carolina serves as a stark counter-example in the South.

strange occurrences than life under planter time, which was more predictable and more stable, but also more vulnerable to catastrophe and less capable of dealing with new circumstances. Early Americans living according to planter time might thus have been more susceptible to moral panics.

However, one other way these time differences might drive a moral panic stems from regional differences in population density. Because northern farms and population centers were closer together, their residents had better access to newspapers, meaning information could move more quickly and be seen and heard by more people in less time. Since moral panics are tied to the distribution of information, they may have instead been more likely to originate in the northern and eastern parts of the United States, where commerce flourished and bad news traveled quickly. Rumors and incomplete or misleading information were universal, but panicked reactions to the Genêt Affair do seem to have had a marked regional component.

Time lag was the driving factor behind the context problem discussed above. For the most part, information was printed as it arrived at the printer's office. Six-week-old news from Europe would often appear alongside week-old news from another town. Depending on how much news a printer had at his disposal, it was also possible for a story to languish in the office for several days before appearing in the paper. In some such instances, the printer would run a small notice stating that the office had received a story and apologizing for not having the time or space to print it immediately.<sup>25</sup>

A side effect of this time lag is that the distinctions between public and private knowledge became considerably blurry. In the correspondence system, printers would often receive, through the "private" channel of letters, knowledge that was public in one city but unknown in another. Depending on the day it was received and the paper's publishing schedule, that

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix A.7 for an example.

knowledge might remain “private” in the printer’s possession for anywhere from several hours to a few days. During this interim period, however, the printer might do any number of other things with the information: he might set his plates and then forward the information to another correspondent; he might write letters to other people in reaction to the information; or he might read his correspondent’s letter aloud to friends, family, or colleagues in settings both domestic and public.<sup>26</sup> When considering moral panics in the context of the early national United States, it is important to remember that what was “known” concerning a given event in a given place was not the same as what was “published” concerning the same event in the same place, especially with regard to who knew it and when they did.

This helps to explain the temporal and spatial dissemination of reporting around Genêt’s appeal threat, as well as other events occurring simultaneously, that might have driven a possible panic. Reports of the *Ambuscade/Boston* battle serve as a useful point of reference for calculating the time required for information to circulate through the American press during the Genêt Affair. A brief description of the battle is necessary.<sup>27</sup> On Thursday, August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1793, the French frigate *Ambuscade* fought and won a battle against the British frigate *Boston* just outside of New York Harbor. Several days before, Capt. Courtney of the *Boston* had parlayed with the US revenue cutter *Vigilant* and demanded that the captain of that ship deliver a message to Capt. Bompard of the *Ambuscade*, then sitting in New York Harbor, that he would wait in the area for ten days for the *Ambuscade* to sail out and join battle. He added that if Bompard refused, Courtney would advertise his cowardice to the best of his ability. News reports after the battle

<sup>26</sup> This is speculative and should be taken as such. It is beyond the scope of this project to determine the exact casual rumor-mongering methods and habits of newspaper printers during the Genêt Affair, or during this period in general. Such would require a great deal of “private” letter-reading and date comparison, which I may undertake in a future version of this study.

<sup>27</sup> The following account is based on July/August, 1793 newspaper reports of the battle’s events; any discrepancies between this account and an historical account should be seen in this light, especially with regard to dates.

would state that Courtney had sailed down from Halifax in Canada specifically to fight the *Ambuscade*.

The Philadelphia *National Gazette* reported on July 31st that it had received a letter out of New York dated July 29<sup>th</sup> which contained a copy of the threats exchanged between the two ships and which had allegedly been printed in the coffee-house books in the city on the 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>28</sup> Despite being a bi-weekly paper, the *National Gazette* did not report on the battle again until August 7<sup>th</sup>, which allowed ample time for news of it to reach Philadelphia.<sup>29</sup> On that day, the newspaper ran three different articles relating to the battle, including a detailed account claiming that Capt. Courtney of the *Boston* had had his head taken off by a cannonball during the exchange.<sup>30</sup> On August 10<sup>th</sup>, the *National Gazette* reprinted a piece from the *New York Journal* reporting that Capt. Bompard had presented his ship's colors to the Tammany Society of New York, a Jacobin club.<sup>31</sup> On August 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, it reprinted stories out of other New York papers and from correspondents reaffirming some of the details of the battle, such as Capt. Courtney's direct challenge to Capt. Bompard and his supposed purpose of sailing from Halifax specifically to fight the *Ambuscade*.<sup>32</sup> The paper would continue to use the battle as a source of political doggerel through the end of the month; the great majority of their articles concerning it ran on the third page.

Philadelphia's other major paper, the *Gazette of the United States*, seemed much more reluctant to report on this battle. The issue of August 3rd reported both that the battle had

28 *National Gazette*, July 31, 1793.

29 While this claim relies mostly on the number of articles the *NG* ran on the 7<sup>th</sup>, it must be said that the Readex database from which I have been working lacks a copy of the August 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the paper. However, given the dates of reprints from New York papers in the August 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *NG* and that it takes at least a couple days for information to reach Philadelphia from New York, I am confident that the August 3<sup>rd</sup> edition would have little relevant material, if any.

30 *National Gazette*, August 7, 1793.

31 *Ibid.*, August 10, 1793.

32 *Ibid.*, August 17, 1793.

occurred and that Genêt had heard of it, though he was not mentioned by name.<sup>33</sup> On August 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, the paper printed accounts of the battle that were similar to what the *National Gazette* had reported on the 7<sup>th</sup>, then simply dropped coverage entirely.<sup>34</sup> News of the battle also traveled up to Boston and down South at the usual rates: it took about a week for news out of New York to appear in Boston papers, and slightly longer for it to appear in Richmond and Charleston papers.

This brief case study establishes the August 1793 “news cycle” as lasting about two to three weeks. Roughly speaking, this is the time it took for information concerning a given event to reach the major population centers of the nation, as well as the time it took for an event to occur, be reported, and then be confirmed through later reporting. Any given newspaper reader in America in 1793, regardless of location, would have had to wait at least several days before any newspaper story was confirmed by later reporting. For example, in the case of Capt. Courtney’s challenge, we have an event which occurred on July 28<sup>th</sup> in New York that was then reported in a Philadelphia newspaper on July 31<sup>st</sup> and confirmed through follow-up correspondence printed on August 14<sup>th</sup>.

Aside from providing context to other news in the month of August, 1793, the *Ambuscade/Boston* story allows us to better track the propagation of material more relevant to Genêt, such as John Jay and Rufus King’s letter confirming the appeal threat. Rumors of Genêt’s appeal threat had been appearing in New York City and Philadelphia newspapers in pseudonymous political essays throughout late July, but the Jay and King letter represented a shift in information type: what once was a rumor was now a fact tied to a specific document endorsed by federal government officials. Furthermore, Jay and King stated in their letter that,

<sup>33</sup> *Gazette of the United States*, August 3, 1793.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, August 7 and 10, 1793.

upon returning to New York, they had been asked about the rumors specifically because those rumors had come out of Philadelphia.<sup>35</sup> This complicates our understanding of who knew what and when with regards to the appeal threat.

Tracking the iterations of the Jay and King letter itself is fairly easy. The letter first appeared in the New York *Diary* of August 13<sup>th</sup> bearing a date of August 12<sup>th</sup> and addressed to “Messrs. Printers.”<sup>36</sup> From there, it reached Philadelphia in time to be printed in the August 17<sup>th</sup> issues of both the *Gazette of the United States* and the *National Gazette*.<sup>37</sup> Knowledge of the letter’s existence reached Boston by or before the same date, as indicated by an article in the *Columbian Centinel* of August 17<sup>th</sup> referencing the letter, though the *Centinel* would not reprint it until their next issue of August 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>38</sup> The *Independent Chronicle* reprinted the letter in its August 19<sup>th</sup> issue, beating the *Centinel* to the punch by becoming the first Boston newspaper to publish the text of the letter.<sup>39</sup> In the South, the *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* of Richmond published the letter on August 21<sup>st</sup>, with one of its competitor papers in Fredericksburg running it the next day.<sup>40</sup> Finally, the *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* of Charleston published it on August 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>41</sup>

Like the *Ambuscade/Boston* rumors and confirmations, the Jay and King letter moved outward from New York City at a predictable pace, but unlike those reports and reprintings, it was based on information from outside of New York City itself. With the *Ambuscade/Boston* story, the dissemination of information tracked closely with its publication, and the information was always public. By contrast, information behind the Jay and King letter was disseminated by

35 *Diary*, August 13, 1793.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *National Gazette*, August 17, 1793; *Gazette of the United States*, August 17, 1793.

38 *Columbian Centinel*, August 17 and 21, 1793.

39 *Independent Chronicle*, August 19, 1793.

40 *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, August 21, 1793; *Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser*, August 22, 1793. These were weeklies at this time, unlike their New England and Pennsylvanian counterparts.

41 *Charleston Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, August 26, 1793.

both private and public channels, traveling by different messengers and arriving at different times. Likewise, the August 17<sup>th</sup> *Columbian Centinel* article referring to the Jay and King letter indicates that news of the letter's contents had reached Boston – or at least certain people in the city – separately from the letter itself, which implies that the *Centinel's* printing house may have learned by some other means than the newspapers of Jay and King's plan to print their letter.

Like information, opinions were subject to the vagaries of iteration, and through iteration might become events in their own right. An example of this can be found in the essays written around this time by New York state legislator William Willcocks.<sup>42</sup> It is worth tracking the dissemination of three letters written by Willcocks in early August about the events of the Genêt Affair because Willcocks responded to his detractors in a way that instigated discussion, and this discussion itself became a possible source of moral panic over Genêt.

Willcocks' three letters, originally published in the *New York Daily Advertiser* on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>, appeared prior to the publication of the Jay and King letter.<sup>43</sup> The August 2<sup>nd</sup> letter was the first to be reprinted outside of New York City: it appeared in Philadelphia in the *Gazette of the United States* of August 14<sup>th</sup>, one issue before that paper's reprint of the Jay and King letter. Willcocks' letters of August 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> were reprinted in the August 17<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> issues of that paper, respectively. The *National Gazette* did not reprint Willcocks' letters, but reacted to them in its August 17<sup>th</sup> issue in a letter signed "Alcanor" that appeared on the same page as the Jay and King letter<sup>44</sup>

However, Philadelphia printers were not the first to "hear" about Willcocks and his letters. News of the letters' existence had reached Boston by or before August 10<sup>th</sup>, as the

42 This is the spelling I have chosen to use, based on his own signature, but certain articles and scholarship used alternative spellings; see e.g. Donald H. Stewart, "Target: American Foreign Policy," *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 160-62.

43 *New York Daily Advertiser*, August 2, 5, and 6, 1793.

44 *National Gazette*, August 17, 1793.

*Columbian Centinel* of that day ran a request asking subscribers for a copy of “a [spirited] address of William Wilcox, Esq. one of the legislature of New-York, on the subject of Mr. Genet and his Secretary's interference in the political concerns of the United States.”<sup>45</sup> The paper reprinted Willcocks' first letter on August 14<sup>th</sup>, the same date as the *Gazette of the United States* and a full week before its reprinting of the Jay and King letter. In the same issue, the *Centinel* also ran a brief article stating that its had received Willcocks' August 6<sup>th</sup> letter but were unable to print it.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the *Independent Chronicle* ran an apology for not including a copy of Willcocks' August 2<sup>nd</sup> letter in that day's issue, but on August 19<sup>th</sup>, it ran both the August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> letters as front-page news.<sup>47</sup> The Jay and King letter appeared on the third page. In the South,<sup>48</sup> Willcocks' letters of August 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> were printed the same day as the Jay and King letter in the *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* of August 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>49</sup> The next day, the *Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser* printed both Willcocks' first letter of August 2<sup>nd</sup> and the Jay and King letter.<sup>50</sup>

Willcocks' three letters were all public knowledge in New York City at least a week before the Jay and King letter appeared, yet because of delays in publication and dissemination, they became attached to the news cycle initiated by the publication of the later letter. This detail is crucial to determining whether a moral panic was provoked by the Genêt Affair and who was panicking. Avoiding moral panic requires observers to both receive information and to put it in the proper context. Anxious observers could misidentify information types and the implications

45 *Columbian Centinel*, August 10, 1793.

46 *Ibid.*, August 14, 1793.

47 *Independent Chronicle*, August 19, 1793. This issue was the first in the *IC*'s new bi-weekly format.

48 An explanation for this brevity: the microfilm records at UVa are sadly incomplete, and what they contain is still better than what is in the Readex database.

49 *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, August 21, 1793.

50 *Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser*, August 22, 1793.

of those differences, which could lead them to misinterpret the information itself, thus causing them to panic.

Where Willcocks had been responding only to rumors, the news conveyed by the Jay and King letter – that Genêt had indeed threatened to appeal directly to the American people for vindication of his actions – amplified the seeming importance of his letters. The Jay and King letter moved the rumors of Genêt's appeal threat out of the realm of speculation and private knowledge and into the realm of fact and public discussion. Furthermore, Jay and King were national figures while Willcocks was a local one, at least until his opinions began to be reiterated in the context of new information, when printers had to recognize that his essays were worth printing. Had his letters appeared sooner, they might have blunted the effect of the Jay and King letter, but being reprinted when they were – whether as the result of distance, publication schedules, or editorial choice – they tended to bring matters to a head. It was also significant that Willcocks published over his own signature at the same time that news of Genêt's appeal threat was moving from private to public discourse. Why Willcocks' letters would raise the emotional temper of the debate is best addressed by considering the personal and political characters of the newspapers circulating information and opinion in the early American republic.

## Political Slants of Newspapers Covering the Citizen Genêt Affair

All newspapers in this period exhibited a degree of political preference we would find familiar today. Much as a “conservative” or “liberal” paper today will tend to linger on certain events which either fit editors' conception of how the nation ought to be run or which cast their political foes in a bad light, newspapers in 1793 were prone to selective and subjective reporting of events. This played into possible moral panics in self-evident ways, as readers of various newspapers acquired information selected and contextualized in accordance with various kinds of bias. In the case of Genêt and his appeal threat, these biases changed the very content of the news itself, as the people disseminating the news were often intimately connected to the people making the news, and this, combined with the personal characters of those people, determined to a large degree what was and was not printed.

As Mott notes, most newspapers in this era were favorably disposed toward federal government; thus we can call them “pro-federal” in some way.<sup>51</sup> But “federalism” could differ in both kind and degree. For example, John Fenno and Benjamin Russell, printers respectively of the Philadelphia *Gazette of the United States* and the Boston *Columbian Centinel*, were both undeniably pro-federal printers in 1793. However, this had different implications in each case. Fenno had been summoned to the capital by men within the nascent federal government to print a newspaper which spoke for that government. His paper was “pro-federal” in the sense that it supported the federal government at a philosophical level, and this was often displayed in praise for specific actions of that government.<sup>52</sup>

Conversely, Russell founded his paper independently in 1784. He was not only a Revolutionary War veteran but a stalwart supporter of George Washington, almost to the point of

51 Mott, *American Journalism*, 121-22. Note, however, that Mott is discussing the state of the American press during the elections of 1796 and 1800; I am working backwards from that to infer that, if anything, there were even fewer anti-federal newspapers in 1793.

52 See Appendix B.12 for details of Fenno's methods of praise.

hero-worship.<sup>53</sup> His paper was “pro-federal,” not because he had been commissioned to bolster the new government as Fenno had, but because he supported the federal government at a personal level, and this bled over into support at the conceptual level. In the South, Augustine Davis appears to have taken both a personal and political approach in running the *Virginia Gazette* network, endorsing Washington while also supporting the government in general. Regardless of approach or even underlying politics, however, pro-federal printers were united in their support for the Constitutional system.

On the other side of early national politics, anti-federalism took any number of permutations depending on the location of the paper, the history of its printer, and his or her personal opinions of the early movers and shakers within the federal government. For example, Philip Freneau of the Philadelphia *National Gazette* was anti-federal in the strictest sense of the term: he was summoned to Philadelphia by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison specifically to run a newspaper critical of the federal government, and he took this commission to heart. He loathed Washington, and he attacked the federal government at any level, however and whenever he saw fit.<sup>54</sup> What was “fit to print” was whatever painted the federal government or its members in the worst light.

By contrast, Thomas Adams of the Boston *Independent Chronicle* took a more truly principled and pro-French stance in his anti-federalism. He frequently reprinted the declarations of the National Convention in his paper, as well as long political essays espousing the “Rights of Man” according to French republicanism.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Greenleaf of the New York *Journal*

53 See Mott, *American Journalism*, 131-32 and Appendix B.27 for more details.

54 This animosity was apparently mutual. According to Berkin, 107, Freneau would hand-deliver multiple copies of the *National Gazette* to Washington’s office on the days it ran. One such incident during the Cabinet meetings on how to deal with Genêt, when Washington saw the poem mentioned above wherein he was sent to the guillotine, sparked a rare loss of temper from Washington.

55 I am inclined to agree with Mott’s claim that the Boston papers typically did their best to remain above the fray of newspaper politicking, making a stark contrast with the mudslinging that went on in Philadelphia.

exemplified yet another form of anti-federalism, a strain which stood against banks, money speculation, and the champions thereof, with Alexander Hamilton as its boogeyman. This was the New England and merchant-focused parallel to the more familiar agrarian anti-federalism practiced in the South. Describing the broad coalition of anti-federals as anything more specific – as “Democrats,” “Jacobins,” or especially “Republicans” – is not useful, as these terms had different meanings and rhetorical purposes depending on who employed them. Nevertheless, the anti-federal coalition did not let their differences of political opinion keep them from putting up a united front against the Washington administration and its interpretations of the Constitution.

Given the correspondent system in place in the 1790s, we can assume that these men, regardless of personal politics, were well connected to their respective state governments, the larger federal government, and major lawyers, merchants, judges, clergymen, and other significant figures in their cities of operation. Tracing specific instances of this is beyond the scope of this project, but we can infer a great deal from the other occupations of these men during this time. Since Jefferson and Madison invited Freneau to Philadelphia to run a newspaper, for example, we can infer he had their ear, especially considering that Jefferson hired Freneau as a translator for the State Department. The same could be said of John Fenno and such “federal-men” as Alexander Hamilton and Henry Knox.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Fenno was a Boston schoolteacher before running the *Gazette of the United States*, and he answered the summons to run a pro-federal paper while carrying several letters of recommendation from prominent Boston federalists, so we can assume he was connected within that circle as well. Augustine Davis was the official printer of Virginia state documents; he must surely have known a great number of people in the Virginia state government network either personally or professionally.<sup>57</sup> Similarly,

<sup>56</sup> In fact, Fenno must have known Hamilton to some personal degree, since he asked Hamilton for a sizeable loan to cover his paper’s considerable debt and keep it from failing. See Mott, *American Journalism*, 123 for details.

<sup>57</sup> *Encyclopedia of Virginia*, s.v. “Augustine Davis,” accessed April 4, 2018, [https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Davis\\_Augustine\\_c\\_1752\\_or\\_1753-1825](https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Davis_Augustine_c_1752_or_1753-1825).

printers in New York City likely knew major merchants, stock brokers, and so forth; the same could be said for Charleston and Baltimore. We can think of each of these men and their newspapers as a nexus for various conduits of information, nodes at which information often mutated as it moved from the private to the public space and was given political spin. Any candidate cases for moral panic in this era would inevitably be traced back to such men to some degree; they would be a moral panic's engineers under the British model.

For our purposes, these political stances and personal networks help explain the sorts of content that newspapers ran in their attempts to inform the public about Genêt's appeal threat while still advancing their political agendas. Not only would printers want to run stories which fit their political leanings, but those same leanings might determine the sources from which they could draw for information. If moral panics are driven by both the types of information entering public discussion and the time that information takes to move from one place to another, then these networked means of gathering and selecting information began that process.

To put this more concretely, we can compare the ways in which these newspapers approached the stories discussed in the previous section. The reporting of the *Ambuscade/Boston* battle is noteworthy primarily because of its apparent similarity to much of what was already being reported in the papers in the preceding months. Regardless of political slant, newspapers in the summer of 1793 consistently included brief reports of merchant ships being taken by privateers off American shores and towed to American ports. In some sense, then, the *Ambuscade/Boston* story is just another minor episode in a larger privateering controversy.

What made the *Ambuscade/Boston* story different from these other reports was who cared about it and reported on it frequently, and who did not care about it and downplayed its

significance, either by reporting “against” it by way of political essays or by ignoring it entirely. For Freneau at the *National Gazette*, the story served as ready-made anti-federal propaganda; it was the “real story” of August, and on top of the news reports of the battle itself, he also ran reports of toasts given in “Citizen” Bompard’s name and doggerel written celebrating the death of Capt. Courtney. For Fenno at the pro-federal *Gazette of the United States*, the battle was simply another news story that he had to pay slightly more attention to due to the attention it was generating. By August 10<sup>th</sup>, he had finished reporting on it and was already moving back to the appeal threat. This pattern of biased reported was reiterated, though in a more refined fashion, in the Boston papers.

The characteristic bias of these newspapers is more readily apparent in the typographical devices used to present the Jay and King letter, a crucial document in the reporting of the Genêt Affair. Some of the print iterations of the letter were more dramatic than others. We can also glean much from what stories were selected to run beside the letter and from items printed in response to the letter’s publication.

FOR THE DIARY:

MESSRS. PRINTERS,

CERTAIN late publications render it proper for us to authorize you to inform the Public, that a report having reached this City from Philadelphia, that Mr. Genet, the French Minister, had said he would Appeal to the People from certain decisions of the President; we were asked, on our return from that place, whether he had made such a declaration—we answered, THAT HE HAD, and we also mentioned it to others, authorising them to say that we had so inform'd them.

JOHN JAY,  
RUFUS KING.

New-York, August 12.

In this first image from the New York *Diary* of August 13<sup>th</sup>, we see a small but discernible degree of emphasis placed on certain words.<sup>58</sup> Of particular note is the phrase “that he had” given in small caps, which draws the reader’s attention to the letter’s purpose: to confirm the rumors that Genêt’s appeal threat had occurred. The initial capitalization used in the phrase “Appeal to the People” serves a similar purpose.

In an objective news space,<sup>59</sup> we would expect to see this letter reprinted in this exact format in other newspapers; barring that, we would expect it to be quoted in such fashion that the original meaning and emphasis were kept intact. Such was not the case in 1793. Below, respectively, are versions of the Jay and King letter as they appeared in Freneau’s anti-federal *National Gazette* of Philadelphia and Russell’s pro-federal *Columbian Centinel* of Boston.

58 Politically, the *Diary* appears to be pro-federal but relatively even-handed, and I infer from this that whatever document its printer Samuel Loudon received must have included similar, if not identical, emphasis markers.

59 I mean a news space such as ours today, in which news outlets claim to strive for accuracy and objectivity in their reporting, rather than the news space of 1793, in which partisan spin was the assumed norm.

NEW-YORK; August 13.

From the DIARY.

Messrs. Printers,

Certain late publications render it proper for us to authorize you to inform the public, that a report having reached this city from Philadelphia, that Mr. Genet, the French minister, said that he would appeal to the people from certain decisions of the President; we were asked, on our return from that place, whether he had made such a declaration; we answered, that he had, and we also mentioned it to others, authorizing them to say that we had so informed them.

JOHN JAY,

RUFUS KING.

New-York, August 12.

From the NEW-YORK DIARY.

Messrs. Printers,

CERTAIN late publications render it proper for us to authorize you to inform the public, that a report having reached this city from Philadelphia, that Mr. Genet, the French Minister, said he would "Appeal to the People" from certain decisions of the President; we were asked, on our return from that place, whether he had made such a declaration — we answered, THAT HE HAD; and we also mentioned it to others, authorizing them to say that we had so informed them.

JOHN JAY  
New-York; August 12. RUFUS KING.

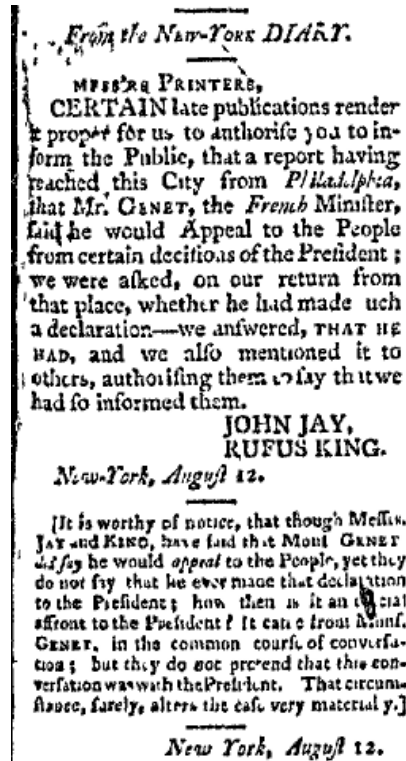
The credibility of the above gentlemen is not in question. The result, therefore, stated by Mr. Genet, is established — and whether it was to our beloved PATRIOT personally, or to THE PEOPLE of the United States, and to their Government, its unjustness such is the fact — and will call for an equal punishment from the Executive Council of France.

In the *National Gazette*, all emphasis has been scrubbed, suggesting a desire to downplay the content and significance of the letter. Relatedly, Freneau saw fit to run the letter on the bottom-right corner of the second page of the August 17<sup>th</sup> issue, after two long political essays and a brief list of maritime news.<sup>60</sup> Russell, by contrast, ratcheted up the emphasis: along with keeping almost all of the original capitalizations intact, he added some of his own and opted for a great deal of italicization and a set of quotation marks around the crux of the letter.<sup>61</sup> Of particular note is the emphasis placed on “French” in the phrase “French Minister,” as well as the full capitalization of Genêt’s name. Russell very clearly wanted his readers to associate the ideas of Genêt, France, and an “appeal to the people,” while Freneau simply did the bare minimum to inform his readers that the letter had been published in New York.

60 *National Gazette*, August 17, 1793.

61 The quotation marks, however, are emphasis markers, and not an attempt to claim that the words within them were directly said by any of the parties involved (Jay & King, their source, Genêt himself, etc).

The reprints themselves represent the initial responses to the Jay and King letter. Along with changes in emphasis, some papers added commentary directly under the letter. Compare, for example, Russell's commentary in the above image to Adams' commentary in his *Independent Chronicle*.



In terms of typographic edits, this version clearly sits between the original and Russell's highly reworked version. These differences of emphasis may have prompted some members of the public to react to Genêt's actions with moral panic in response to what they perceived as anxiety felt by their newspapers' printers.

Russell and Adams' printed reactions distill the broad pro- and anti-federal responses to Jay and King's letter which ran in the papers throughout the rest of the month. For the pro-federal side, John Jay's position as US Supreme Court Chief Justice and Rufus King's as a United States Senator meant that their word was bond, and that whoever had provided their information could be trusted. Furthermore, any threat of any kind made against the federal

government was not to be brooked. To the anti-federal side, these considerations amounted to nothing, and they immediately demanded to know where and when, as well as to whom and through what medium, the appeal threat had occurred.

Essays and anonymous correspondence published in subsequent issues of these papers follow this pattern quite closely. For example, on the front page of its August 21<sup>st</sup> issue, the anti-federal *National Gazette* ran an essay signed “Juba” in which the author argued that concern over the supposed appeal threat was absurd, on the grounds that Genêt could not have meant anything by it beyond taking the issue before Congress.<sup>62</sup> On its second page, that paper ran two more anonymous items stating respectively that the Jay and King letter was worthless without follow-up information, and that Jay and King’s names alone did not constitute proof of the threat’s occurrence. Sometimes the paper took a more satirical approach, exemplified by a letter from “An Anti Gallican Federalist” which ran in the August 24<sup>th</sup> issue.<sup>63</sup> These and like essays were reprinted in other anti-federal newspapers such as the *Independent Chronicle* during the rest of August, running alongside essays on the same subject written specifically for that paper.

On the pro-federal side, the *Gazette of the United States* ran articles which argued that, with the appeal threat confirmed, the problem now was what to do about it. Front-page essays by “Nestor” and “Helvidius” appeared in the August 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> issues of that paper. They argued that Americans should object to French privateering in a general sense; “Nestor” went so far as to coin the term “Geneteens” in his August 24<sup>th</sup> essay, in a possible early attempt to establish Genêt as a folk devil.<sup>64</sup> “Nestor” also accused Genêt and his secretary Pascal of publishing political essays in American newspapers and tied the appeal threat to these publications.<sup>65</sup> The *Columbian Centinel* reprinted these essays and ran similar ones.

62 *National Gazette*, August 21, 1793.

63 *Ibid.*, August 24, 1793.

64 *Gazette of the United States*, August 24, 1793.

65 *Ibid.*, August 21, 1793.

Of particular note, however, are a pair of essays that appeared in the August 24<sup>th</sup> *Gazette of the United States* and the August 14<sup>th</sup> *Columbian Centinel*, signed, respectively, “Catiline” and “Cataline.” Both were satirical essays lambasting the pro-French, anti-federal cause and the rhetoric its supporters employed; the latter author went so far as to extol the “Godlike” Genêt and to implore his readers to do the same. By employing this reference to the historical Cataline, the would-be Roman revolutionary, the essays’ pseudonymous but presumably pro-federal authors drew a connection between the anti-federals and treason. This sort of rhetoric best characterizes the debate over Genêt’s appeal threat. It also points toward moral panic, as these and similar writers were clearly trying to associate Genêt with an historical folk devil.

Before moving into discussing that rhetoric, we should note that iterations of William Willcocks' letters followed a similar pattern with respect to the political characters of the newspapers in which they appeared. Once his letters appeared in papers outside of New York City, they sparked specific responses which either endorsed or attacked him. The pro-federals held him up as an example of a sensible response to the appeal threat and considered it a welcome sign that people were willing to attack Genêt under their own names. The anti-federals, on the other hand, derided Willcocks as a hypocrite and accused him of being motivated by personal animosity towards Genêt rather than by political disinterest. However, the rhetoric of both Willcocks’ letters and the responses to them are more integral to our understanding of them than the politics of those letters and responses, as well as our understanding of moral panic.

## **The Rhetoric of the Citizen Genêt Affair**

In the newspaper debates over Genêt's appeal threat, printers and public contributors used politically charged words and historically evocative pseudonyms to characterize themselves and their opponents. This practice of iteration over an historical time-scale fueled a sense of moral panic by using the power of association to bring the memory of prior events, ancient or modern, to bear on the current situation.

The term "republican" and the various ways it was employed is central to the rhetoric surrounding the Genêt Affair. Both pro- and anti-federal writers and printers claimed that their side of the argument represented the "true" form of republican thought and politics, one which was irreconcilable with the other. For pro-federal writers, the Constitution and the federal system best embodied the ideals of not only the American Revolution, but also of republics going back to antiquity. For anti-federal writers, "true republicanism" stemmed from radical French political thought realized through the National Convention, supported by modern writers such as Rousseau, and undergirded by the philosophy of the natural Rights of Man. In fact, while both sides claimed to be the true American republicans, only the anti-federals would take up the term "republicanism" as a rallying cry. Similarly, they were more prone to use "republican" as a noun instead of an adjective and to claim to be "republicans," or sometimes even "democrats."

These characteristic uses of "republican" are strong indicators of the political slant of a given printer or writer during the Genêt Affair, as well as good predictors for whether or not that person could be said to be panicked by the appeal threat. The pro-federals feared that "republicanism" might lead to the sort of mob violence and civil strife which had characterized revolutionary French politics and perhaps ultimately to the collapse of the nascent federal system, and that Genêt's actions might instigate these outcomes. The anti-federals feared that the

federal system could be used to institute a new aristocracy in America, possibly even a monarchical form of government, whereby the federal state could suppress the natural Rights of Man.

Another term which follows the “republican” pattern quite closely is the use of “Citizen” as a title. Borrowed from French radicalism, the “Citizen” title might suggest, magnanimously, that a person was a true friend of the French cause both in France and abroad.<sup>66</sup> The title was used both self-referentially and as a title of address: William Willcocks signed his letters “Citizen Willcocks”; Genêt used the title for himself constantly; and letters written to anti-federal printers would often begin with addresses reading, for instance, “Citizen Freneau,” “Citizen Printer,” or “Fellow Citizen.” Though “Citizen” is not wholly interchangeable with “republican” as a noun, a newspaper reader could safely assume that anyone using the “Citizen” title sincerely – rather than satirically, as I will discuss below – was sympathetic to French republicanism.

Pro-federal writers did not abandon the word “citizen” during the Genêt Affair but refused to use it as a title or form of address for themselves due to its pro-French connotation.<sup>67</sup> In fact, the Genêt Affair appears to be the point in history at which anti-French thinkers, writers, and printers – and anti-Jacobin ones in particular – began to use the title pejoratively. For example, on August 28<sup>th</sup>, the *Columbian Centinel* ran a brief article from an unnamed correspondent wherein that writer sarcastically suggested that Genêt delay his tour of Massachusetts until September or October, as that was when the state courts would convene to try “Citizen Nutting,” an American man accused of serving aboard a French privateer.<sup>68</sup> The

66 Use of the “Citizen” title appears to perfectly mirror the same use of “Comrade” under the Bolsheviks in Russia and in Communist nations, but whether this is by the Marxists’ design or simple coincidence is unclear.

67 One possible exception would be pro-federal printers and writers still using the compound term “fellow citizens,” sometimes hyphenated, but they appeared to limit this use to the plural and almost never capitalized.

68 Genêt had begun touring the northern states at the beginning of August, starting with New York. Furthermore, he had already been involved in the court proceedings of at least one other American accused of serving aboard one of his privateers, Gideon Henfield, who was acquitted.

author reveals nothing about Nutting's possible politics or motivations for having served aboard said privateer; the very accusation of that service is evidence enough to assume French sympathies and to confer the "Citizen" title on him as a slur.

This pattern of repurposing political language for pejorative purposes extended to other terms and was not limited to the pro-federal side. Anti-federal printers and writers would often accuse pro-federals of being secret monarchists and would often throw "monarchist" and "aristocrat" around as insults in their publications. "Speculator" was used in like fashion, a reference to financiers, merchants, and other men who made their money on stocks and trade, rather than through business management or manual labor. Terms such as "stock-jobber" or "money-jobber" were also used as synonyms for "speculator."

These labeling patterns help explain the sorts of pseudonyms used in much of the political essaying from the time of the Genêt Affair and to reveal who was panicking over the appeal threat and why, though it needs to be said that neither inflamed rhetoric nor targeted use of pseudonyms is proof of panic in and of itself. In general, both pro- and anti-federal writers drew from antiquity, particularly from the Roman republic and empire, when choosing pseudonyms. They would also employ simplistic Latin terms, such as in the "Pacificus" essays published shortly before the appeal threat story broke.<sup>69</sup>

Some of these classical pseudonyms prove more useful than others for the purpose of uncovering panic. One anti-federal writer of note during the Genêt Affair chose to work under the name "Juba," a likely reference to King Juba I of Numidia, who reigned 60-46 BCE. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century "Juba" was particularly skeptical of the Jay and King letter, and of the appeal threat in general, and sought in his August 21<sup>st</sup> letter to the *National Gazette* to turn the debate around

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g. *Gazette of the United States*, July 3, 1793. The terms "Publicola" and "Agricola" – respectively "townsman" and "farmer" in Latin – also see a great deal of use in this period in general, though they are largely absent from debates over the Genêt Affair. English political nouns are also frequently used; numerous letters are signed simply "An American" or "A Democrat."

to a discussion of British privateering habits.<sup>70</sup> The “Juba” pseudonym is revealing in this context because the historical Juba I sided with Pompey against Julius Caesar in the Roman civil wars, thus making him a supporter of the Roman Republic.<sup>71</sup> Thus does our “Juba” wish to align himself with historical “republicanism,” thereby casting the anti-federal and pro-Genêt camp as the true heirs of the republics of antiquity. By extension, using such a pseudonym paints “Juba’s” opposition as a band of imperialist usurpers. In terms of panic, one could do little better to inflame one’s opponents. It also betrays a fear of popular despots, which the anti-federals believed Washington could easily become by aligning himself with their opponents.

On the pro-federal side, few did as much to menace the anti-federals as “Camillus.” This was likely a reference to Marcus Furius Camillus, one of the most successful soldiers and statesmen of the Roman Republic, who was given the title “Second Founder of Rome” in some histories.<sup>72</sup> The pseudonymous “Camillus” first appeared in the August 17<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Columbian Centinel*, in a long front-page essay wherein he responded to the sort of argument put forth by “Juba” by claiming that Genêt’s appeal threat must have been directed to people dissatisfied with the federal government and its operation. “Camillus” reasoning for this was particularly odd: he accused the *National Gazette* of encouraging Genêt to make such an appeal, and he claimed in his next essay of August 24<sup>th</sup> that Genêt’s address to an assembled crowd in New York City on August 1<sup>st</sup> was the *true* appeal threat sparked by the *National Gazette*’s advice.<sup>73</sup> Given the real Camillus’ history, such words were freighted with the weight of Roman justice and a hatred of the Gauls, as well as a fear of foreign invasion.

Who these men truly were must remain a matter of speculation, but we can offer possible candidates based on their rhetoric and the dates of their publications. “Juba” appears to have

<sup>70</sup> *National Gazette*, August 21, 1793.

<sup>71</sup> See Beard, *SPQR*, 264-91, for more details of the civil wars in this era of Roman history.

<sup>72</sup> See Beard, *SPQR*, 138 and 154-56, for more details on the (possibly mythical) Camillus’ career.

<sup>73</sup> *Columbian Centinel*, August 17 and 24, 1793.

stopped writing to the *National Gazette* by the end of August, though he had been active in July. He consistently argued that putting the issues of Genêt's privateering and appeal threat before Congress would have been the federal government's best course of action, rather than having the executive branch issue a neutrality proclamation. These facts and a slander charge made against Genêt's secretary Pascal in late July might suggest that the *National Gazette's* "Juba" was either Pascal or Genêt himself.<sup>74</sup>

With "Camillus," the matter is more complex. That name would reappear in newspaper essays defending the Jay Treaty in 1795, essays which turned out to have been written by Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton fits the basic profile of the real-life Camillus, a soldier and general turned statesman and defender of a nation against both foreign and domestic enemies, but so does Secretary of War Henry Knox, another Federalist in Washington's Cabinet. Hamilton also seemed to prefer publishing his anonymous essays in Philadelphia and New York; he had written the "Pacifcus" essays that appeared in the July issues of the *Gazette of the United States* as well as several essays under the name "No Jacobin" that appeared in New York papers in late July. Nevertheless, given similarities of style between "Camillus" essays and those of "Pacifcus," I would infer that "Camillus" is either Hamilton himself, or someone adept at imitating his style.

The accuracy of these speculations is less important than what attempts to unravel them reveal about the use of such pseudonyms. While only a few well-connected political insiders might know the truth of an essay's authorship, playing the guessing-game led other readers into a process of association that might confirm the reader as a member of a group that knew how to draw the right kinds of associations. Failing that, the pseudonyms contributed to a general sense of danger and confusion. Like the distortions of information caused by time-lag, spatial distance,

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix B.25 for more on Pascal's alleged slander.

juxtaposition of news stories, biased news sources, and the politically driven selective blindness of the newspapers themselves, misguided or vindictive inferences about who was behind various pseudonyms could feed a panic.

## The Citizen Genêt Affair: A Moral Panic?

If a moral panic did indeed occur at some point over the course of the Genêt Affair, it was engendered by the combination and synergy of the elements of the information landscape of 1793. Regional perceptions of time, personal and political bias in the newspapers and among readers, pseudonymous essay publication, and incendiary and targeted historical rhetoric set the stage for one or another sort of moral panic amongst the entire American public. A panic over Genêt himself was more probable amongst pro-federal citizens than anti-federal ones due to general pro-federal suspicion of France's radicalized revolution. Indeed, as news of Genêt's appeal threat went public, it sent the pro-federals into a textbook moral panic according to our hybrid model. The anti-federals, if they could be said to be panicked at all, were certainly not panicked over Genêt.

The *Ambuscade/Boston* story best illustrates how the effect of time and space on the circulation of news could warp readers' understandings of "current" events by affecting the proximity of news stories within the same issue or on the same page. As news of the *Ambuscade/Boston* battle was traveling up and down the eastern seaboard in early August, news of the collapse of the Girondin government in late May and early June, along with general details of the ongoing European war, was appearing in the papers alongside reports of that battle. Similarly, refugees from the Cape-François fire of June 20<sup>th</sup> were landing in American ports, particularly Baltimore, bringing with them wildly contradictory accounts of the fire – accounts which also made it into the newspapers alongside reports of the *Ambuscade/Boston* events.

The Cape-François fire itself is integral to understanding the propagation of the *Ambuscade/Boston* story and how it contributed the panic over Genêt's appeal threat. According to the newspapers of August 1793, one of the two men responsible for the fire, Admiral Joseph

de Cambis, was arrested aboard his ship *Jupiter*, possibly by the other man responsible, General Francois-Thomas Galbaud, or, if not by him, then by the crew of the *Jupiter*. Galbaud himself may have been arrested by his own men, but the newspaper reports in August 1793 were still sorting the story out; the terms “arrest” and “mutiny” were both used in reports. This event occurred in New York harbor in early August<sup>75</sup> and may have been the reason why Genêt traveled to the city, as Cambis was his brother-in-law.<sup>76</sup> Later, Cambis would be wounded while making an escape attempt, and newspapers would falsely report that an attempt had been made on Genêt’s life.<sup>77</sup>

For a printer such as Philip Freneau, the *Ambuscade/Boston* story and the combined context of the “*Jupiter* Affair” and the Cape-François crisis represented a perfect opportunity to propagandize the European war in support of the French cause. That battle not only made the British navy look weak and the federal government look foolish, it implied that the conflict was going to come to American shores whether Americans wanted it to or not. The pro-federal party feared conflict, and the success of the *Ambuscade* demonstrated that a militant France menaced both at home and abroad would not go away quietly. If an anti-federal printer wished to engineer panic among the pro-federal camp, he would be savvy to focus on such stories, as they would provide both a distraction from the appeal threat and an augmentation to it. Focusing on the *Ambuscade/Boston* battle could have made it seem as though large parts of the public simply did not care about Genêt’s appeal threat, since it was not being reported on or reacted to through essays. It could also have taken pressure off Genêt in the short term – thereby giving him and his

75 The August 14<sup>th</sup> *National Gazette* ran a reprint of a speech Galbaud made aboard the *Jupiter* on August 10<sup>th</sup>, while the August 8<sup>th</sup> *Independent Chronicle* ran a reprint of a letter sent to Genêt in late July wherein a brief explanation of the political side of the Cape-François uprising was given and Galbaud was condemned for his behavior.

76 The August 21<sup>st</sup> *Gazette of the United States* ran an “Extract of a letter dated New York, Aug. 19<sup>th</sup>” which stated this, and the August 31<sup>st</sup> *Columbian Centinel* ran a report confirming it.

77 See *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, September 11, 1793, for a correction of such a report.

American sympathizers more time to operate – while making France's general stance look stronger in the long term. This seems to have been the strategy of at least one anti-federal printer: Freneau kept the story of the *Ambuscade/Boston* battle alive nearly to the end of August, long after most papers stopped running it. If people in general were truly panicking over Genêt, his appeal threat, or France's possible military designs on the new United States, it may have been due to this sort of information distortion.

Even better than the *Ambuscade* story, the republication of the Willcocks letters illustrates how printers used journalistic conflict for political ends. Invested observers may have reacted to this with moral panic due to a false perception that their “side” of the issue was losing unity or advantage. Willcocks stated outright in his first letter that he believed in the French cause, and he continued to sign his letters with the “Citizen” title even after it had become clear that he opposed Genêt and his actions. For example, Willcocks wrote in his first letter of August 2<sup>nd</sup> that, assuming Genêt had threatened to appeal to the people, such an act constituted “incit[ing] them to insurrection, riot, and treason.”<sup>78</sup> In his next letter of August 5<sup>th</sup>, Willcocks outlined an 18-point “political bible” for Americans who wished to remain unswayed by party politics or sentiment, in which he called Genêt “pestilential” in point 13.<sup>79</sup> Willcocks’ ultimate point was that, regardless of personal political convictions, all Americans ought to be disgusted when non-Americans attempted to interfere with their politics or undermine the administration of our government, particularly when those non-Americans were in the United States as representatives of a foreign government. The pro-federals apparently saw in Willcocks a reasonable response to Genêt, even if he confirmed what panicked pro-federals believed to be true about anti-federals –

78 *New York Daily Advertiser*, August 2, 1793.

79 *Ibid.*, August 5, 1793.

that they might turn against Genêt, but never against France. That said, Willcocks seems to have aroused further panic on the part of anti-federals.

To the anti-federals, Willcocks was an American Edmund Burke, a political traitor.<sup>80</sup> Essays written in response to his letters were more concerned with attacking the man than his arguments. Directly after running Willcocks' August 2<sup>nd</sup> letter in its August 14<sup>th</sup> issue, the *Gazette of the United States* ran an essay from the *New York Diary* which attacked Willcocks on the grounds that it was inappropriate for such a man to speak out against Genêt in the papers, as Genêt was still ambassador at the time.<sup>81</sup> The *National Gazette* ran an essay signed "Alcanor" in its August 17<sup>th</sup> issue that attacked Willcocks for flipping sides; in its August 24<sup>th</sup> issue, it ran a New York letter and an article from the *New York Journal* which made similar accusations.<sup>82</sup> Their chief and most consistent concern was Willcocks' supposed hypocrisy, not his politics in and of themselves. Writers in the *Independent Chronicle* would take a less incendiary approach, merely dismissing Willcocks rather than attacking him.

Note the role reversal here. Though the pro-federal faction was ordinarily more given to panic, in this instance they did little more than reprint Willcocks' letters as if they regarded his anti-Genêt arguments as self-evidently true and wanted them to stand on their own without further comment. The anti-federals, ever slow to find fault with French actions, responded on this occasion with what might be described as a disproportionate reaction, attacking both Willcocks and his words. A lone state senator from New York having a change of heart concerning Genêt was hardly cause for concern, particularly since "Citizen" Willcocks declared

80 In the wake of the French Revolution, fear of popular uprising in Britain had led several prominent Whigs to align themselves with the Tories; one such Whig was Edmund Burke, who after attacking the French Revolution felt compelled to repeatedly defend the sovereignty of Europe's kings. See e.g. his *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, though those would not be published until 1796.

81 *Gazette of the United States*, August 14, 1793. Though the *Gazette of the United States* was the Federalist organ, John Fenno had an occasional habit of reprinting anti-federal writings, most likely so that pro-federal men could be informed about how their political enemies were attacking them.

82 *National Gazette*, August 17 and August 24, 1793.

that he opposed neither France nor her cause, but only Genêt and his supposed recklessness. The anti-federals' aggressive response to his letters may point toward a fear that people would read Willcocks' letters and agree with them, or it may have been inspired by the example of imported French newspapers that denounced the Girondins as closet monarchists. The differing, if mutually reinforcing, iterations of "Willcocks" in pro- and anti-federal newspapers – appearing after the Jay and King letter was made public – suggest that moral panic was taking hold.

The iterations of the Jay and King letter, meanwhile, demonstrate how differing information types and levels of available information affect whether and how moral panics occur. If we treat information as existing on a scale from the truly private to the truly public, then rumors complicate the transition of news from the private to the public, particularly if those rumors are ultimately based in fact. Facts are contingent upon one another in any situation, but this is supremely important in a situation as complicated as the Genêt Affair, in which knowing some of the facts but not others could greatly alter an observer's interpretation of the situation as it unfolded.

Jay and King's source for their August 12<sup>th</sup> letter was Alexander Hamilton, who, as "No Jacobin," had already been writing essays for New York newspapers that spread rumors of the appeal threat. However, during the Cabinet meetings in which the Washington administration decided how to have Genêt recalled, Washington had declared that the fact and details of the appeal threat were not to be released to the public out of concern that people would overreact to them. This was after Hamilton and Knox had advocated allowing some of Genêt's more incendiary correspondence with Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson to be published in the newspapers. Jefferson vehemently opposed this, ostensibly for the reason Washington gave, but also because of the implications for anti-federal politics. After all, the anti-federals loved Genêt,

but his secretary Pascal had just been caught writing political essays for American newspapers, and a confirmed appeal threat would only serve to prove in the minds of pro-federal men their worst fears and assumptions about anti-federal aims.

While these Cabinet meetings were going on, the appeal threat was mostly private information, known only to the members of the Cabinet, the two men from the Pennsylvania government who had reported it to them, and Genêt himself. It remained private information until it appeared in the *New York Diary* on August 13<sup>th</sup>. Given that it took a few days to travel from Philadelphia to New York City, as Jay and King claimed to have done just before publishing their letter, Hamilton must have told them about the threat at least several days before August 13<sup>th</sup>.<sup>83</sup> This was after Washington's decision to suppress the facts of the appeal threat, and before the Cabinet sent its letter to the French government to have Genêt recalled.<sup>84</sup> If such a thing occurred today, we would say that Hamilton leaked a state secret for political gain. This morass of facts known and unknown, circulated by undeclared sources, helped lead to panicked behavior from the pro-federal camp during the Genêt Affair, which peaked once the Jay and King letter was released.

In addition to the nature of newspapers in this period, several other factors played into the pro-federals' panic and explain why they and not the anti-federals were panicked by Genêt and his appeal threat. As has been discussed, the pro-federal camp positioned itself against French republicanism and saw it as a direct threat to Constitutional federalism and, by extension, American liberty. Under normal circumstances, we would expect this to lead to rational political arguments against French republicanism and in favor of federalism. And indeed we do see some of this in the newspapers, even during the appeal threat debates. For example, on August 28<sup>th</sup>,

<sup>83</sup> I estimate that Jay and King learned of the appeal threat from Hamilton around August 1<sup>st</sup>, though a thorough reading of Hamilton's correspondence with Jay and King could reveal the true date, assuming of course he did not tell them in person.

<sup>84</sup> See Sheridan, "The Recall of Edmond Charles Genet," 473-77 for the specific dates.

the *Columbian Centinel* ran a front-page essay signed “A Patriot of the World.” It was written in the style of an address before the National Convention in France and called upon the French people to establish a form of government as much in line with the American Constitution as possible.<sup>85</sup> To say that the pro-federal response to Genêt was wholly panicked would be inaccurate. Still, the “Patriot” essay represents the exception and was not typical of pro-federal reaction.

Personal political conviction, both among newspaper printers and their readerships, could and did lead to a willful interpretation of Genêt’s actions and the facts that had been made public about them, facts which were already distorted by the coloring medium of newspapers. At bottom, the pro-federal camp saw all revolutionaries in France as Jacobins eager to roll out the guillotines, and they considered pro-French Americans and the anti-federal camp to be their natural American counterparts. They simply wanted to believe the worst about France. It is understandable that the pro-federal camp would take Jay and King’s letter as ironclad proof of Genêt’s appeal threat.

The pro-federal camp included a greater number of men within the federal government and therefore a higher level of knowledge of what was truly occurring with regards to Genêt. But they did not know the extent of Genêt’s commission nor the decisions taken by Washington’s administration in response to his provocations. The pro-federal camp knew enough about Genêt and his appeal threat to understand there was cause for concern, but not enough to truly grasp the situation and see where it might lead. They also knew that, should their fears about Jacobinism in America prove true, their heads would roll when the scaffolds were erected. Moral panic ensued.

<sup>85</sup> *Columbian Centinel*, August 28, 1793.

The anti-federal lack of panic was equally rooted in recent political history. Where the pro-federals, responding to events unfolding in Paris, were prepared to believe the worst, the anti-federals, recalling the French contribution to American independence, were inclined to make a common cause with the revolutionary government. When the fact of the appeal threat was made public, they were not – Willcocks aside – inclined to panic because the news, as we might now say, did not fit their narrative. In the event that Jacobin-style civil unrest came to American shores, anti-federal men like Jefferson and Freneau believed they would be on the “right” side of it, despite being just as powerful as their pro-federal counterparts. Furthermore, the anti-federal camp was not nearly as well connected within the new government as the pro-federals, and the connections they did have were to such men as Jefferson, who held anti-federal convictions. They had a lower level of information on Genêt and his actions than the pro-federals, and even if they had had the same or more, they were primed to side with him anyway. Therefore, Genêt did not send them into a moral panic.

## **Conclusions and Ramifications**

As has been shown, numerous interdependent factors influenced the controversies stirred up by Edmond-Charles Genêt during the summer of 1793. Whether or not the events of that summer constituted a moral panic must depend to an extent on the kinds of information used to form a judgment. I have done my best to study the major newspaper reporting of the Genêt Affair as a contemporary newspaper reader would have done and then to convey what the situation would have looked like to such a person. When looked at in such a fashion, the Genêt Affair takes on a different character than that which history records. Readers of eighteenth-century newspapers experienced the sequence of events very differently than do readers of narrative history because the information they absorbed was untimely, incomplete, unreliable, and manifestly biased.

To begin with, the time it took for information to move across geographic regions, both in the states of the early American republic and back and forth between America and points abroad, meant that different sections of the public learned of events at different times. Events that occurred days or weeks apart, as well as reactions to them, would nevertheless appear alongside one another in a given issue of a newspaper and thereby influence how a person would read and react to them. Therefore, a great number of events unrelated to Genêt himself or his conduct nevertheless exerted influence on how the public perceived him and his actions. Complicating this issue are the differences in how time and space were conceived of in various regions of the early republic; differences in population density and information types also played a role. A newspaper reader's reaction to and opinion of Genêt and his actions depended greatly on these factors, which alone could possibly cause certain people within the newspaper-reading public to misinterpret news reports and react with panic.

While newspaper reports were iterating across this information space, the various political and personal opinions of both newspaper printers and their contributors added another layer of complexity to this intricate system. Printers and writers were prone to focusing on reports which favored their political views while discrediting those of their opponents. This affected not only which stories concerning Genêt's appeal threat a given newspaper would devote space to, but also the context in which those stories would appear; that is, which other pieces of news would appear alongside news of Genêt. In consequence, each newspaper presented a unique version of events surrounding Genêt, his appeal threat, and his general conduct in the summer of 1793. As a result, certain sections of the public were more primed for moral panic over Genêt's conduct than others. This had much to do with immediate journalistic matters, but also with much longer arcs, the iterations of the current news cycle mingling with invocations of ancient and modern history. Thus does the Genêt Affair become situated within the greater discourse of early America's trajectory: old concerns, as disparate in time as Daniel Shays and Julius Caesar, were suddenly returned to readers' minds and made freshly relevant by being tied to new concerns, such as the rise of the Jacobins and their "Citizen" friends in the new United States.

In such a situation, some observers and participants would have greater cause for concern than others; with this came a higher likelihood of falling into a moral panic. The patterns of incendiary rhetoric used during the Genêt Affair point to the broad pro-federal camp as being the prime candidates for moral panic at this period of history. They exhibited a greater willingness to point out folk devils both old and new, and Genêt himself became a folk devil for them by the end of the controversy. Their reaction to France's conduct, exemplified in Genêt, was disproportionate: Genêt did not have a large number of ships at his disposal, nor a large amount

of political clout in France or in America, and what he did have was eclipsed by that of Britain, which the pro-federal camp did not see as much of a threat. In sum, the pro-federal reaction to Genêt constituted some form of moral panic if we abide by the criteria outlined in the theory.

The hitch in all of this, of course, is that the pro-federal camp was right. Genêt did indeed threaten to go over Washington's head and appeal to the people; he did so in a malicious fashion; and he did have authorization from the National Convention to attempt to change American foreign policy and raise troops on American soil to achieve French goals in North America. In nearly every sense, he was exactly what the pro-federals feared he was: an agent of subversion sent by a hostile foreign power to undermine the authority of the federal government. He simply happened to be decidedly bad at it. In fact, the pro-federals believed Genêt was a threat because their political convictions filled in gaps in their knowledge, factors which, in another circumstance, would have led them to textbook moral panic. They were able to sustain this belief due to the information landscape in which they operated.

This points toward the major flaw in moral panic theory: it treats all historical events as independent from one another and as having predetermined outcomes. To put that another way, moral panic theory assumes that people observing a possible crisis as it unfolds can separate information from context – and even tell which is which – and so react rationally to the probable outcomes of the crisis. Moral panic theory then charts where certain sections of a population “misinterpreted” their available information, or were deprived of some crucial context which would have guarded against that misinterpretation.

This flaw could be amended if moral panic theory attended more to the role of iteration and memory in contemporary perceptions of events. This would allow theorists to see how previous historical and contemporary events engender the “here we go again” sense so conducive

to cycles of panic. Whether those events are causally or topically related to the potential panic episode is less important than the rhetoric used to discuss these events, whether the terms of that rhetoric are shared across discussions, and how those terms propagate through time and space. Moral panics cannot be assumed to occur in a vacuum.

An example of the rhetoric of the Genêt Affair echoing forward in time will illustrate this. In a 1796 monthly magazine, *The Political Censor*, the British journalist William Cobbett, then working in Philadelphia, described Genêt's journey through the South from Charleston to Philadelphia as "a kind of triumphal procession" by which the ambassador arrived in the American capitol "more like a viceroy or a conqueror than a foreign minister."<sup>86</sup> While Cobbett may have witnessed the event,<sup>87</sup> the historical accuracy of his description is of less importance than its implications for what was happening in May of 1796.<sup>88</sup> Writing as he was long after the Genêt Affair, Cobbett had the benefit of a broader scope of information from which to draw when writing his pamphlet. He discussed Genêt's behavior in order to lend credibility to an extract from a letter printed in a recent issue of the New York *Minerva*.<sup>89</sup> This letter's anonymous author claimed to have heard that the French government was considering sending a new minister, along with a fleet, to convince the American government to shift its trade alliances and to annul the recently ratified Jay Treaty between America and Britain. For Cobbett, writing in 1796, the Citizen Genêt Affair of 1793 provided evidence that the newly republican France would always attempt to meddle in American self-government regardless of which of France's factions held power.<sup>90</sup>

86 William Cobbett, "New Discoveries in Regions of Corruption," *The political censor, or, Monthly review of the most interesting political occurrences, relative to the United States of America* (Philadelphia, PA), May 1796, 230.

87 Cobbett was living downriver from Philadelphia in Wilmington, DE, when Genêt arrived in the city. For more on Cobbett's first few years in America, see William Reitzel, "William Cobbett and Philadelphia Journalism: 1794-1800," *Pennsylvania Magazine*, July 1935, 223-244.

88 Cobbett, 229-34.

89 Ibid., 229. The letter itself was published in the May 17<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Minerva*.

90 Ibid., 225-37. One might say he was "re-litigating" the Citizen Genêt Affair, to use modern parlance.

In another moment of “here we go again,” Cobbett not only returned to the Genêt Affair itself but to the same historical allusions, ancient and modern, that had been deployed three years before to contextualize the French threat to American sovereignty. For Cobbett, this context trumped facts. He dressed his assessment of the Genêt Affair in a blend of half-truths, inconsistently applied attention to details, and historical allusion. For example, Cobbett claimed that Washington’s neutrality proclamation was in place when Genêt landed in Charleston;<sup>91</sup> in fact, that proclamation was not issued until several days after Genêt’s arrival. There is the image of the ambassador’s “triumphal procession” through the Southern states and “conqueror” entrance to Philadelphia, an oblique reference to Roman “triumphs,” the lavish victory parades given and driven by Roman generals returning from successful campaigns. Finally, there is the ever-present “Citizen” euphemism, wielded earlier in the pamphlet to lambaste pro-French American congressmen such as James Madison and carried through to the second half of Cobbett's contextualization of the *Minerva* letter: a recounting of the correspondence between then-Secretary of State Edmund Randolph and his French counterpart, “Citizen” Joseph Fauchet, leaked to the press in 1795.<sup>92</sup>

Cobbett is significant because his reiteration of Genêt Affair-style rhetoric shows where that event sits in the greater development of America's political traditions. Even beyond newspapers and pamphleteers, Cobbett was not unique in his use of iterative rhetoric to contextualize radical French politics. Massachusetts congressman and essayist Fisher Ames referred to Genêt, as well as to Roman militarism, in similar fashion to Cobbett in both his personal correspondence and his political essays well into the first decade of the nineteenth

91 Ibid., 230.

92 Ibid., 234-37. The references to James Madison occur on pages 183 and 194. Interestingly, Fauchet was among the diplomats who replaced Genêt in early 1794, but had returned to France to serve as foreign minister.

century.<sup>93</sup> In 1790, Edmund Burke had mocked French political philosophers with an allusion to Don Quixote, the “metaphysical Knight of Sorrowful Countenance,” only to see the allusion turned against him and frequently repeated in caricatures and political squibs on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>94</sup> If moral panics are truly iterative, then we might draw a metaphorical parallel between them and waves on a sea shore. Every wave in the surf is a public concern, while the water itself is the sum of the public's memory of past concerns. Most issues – most waves – come and go, but the memory – the water – remains. A moral panic is the result of an offshore earthquake. Much like a tsunami, the energy of the panic races through the water and remains unseen until it suddenly swells up and crashes upon the beach, only to dissipate nearly as quickly. Nevertheless, it still changes the shape of the beach, and thus the shape of the water and the waves.

At any rate, the Genêt Affair was never truly about Genêt himself or his actions; it was about the sorts of people who would support him and stand against him, and how those people argued about and discussed the past and future of the nascent United States. The Genêt Affair alone did not cause Americans to form political parties, but it was nevertheless integral to that formation, as whether a given person was for or against Genêt tended to reflect that person's pre-existing political beliefs going back to at least the Constitutional ratification debates and going forward into the elections of 1796 and 1800.

The pro-federal camp, as noted above, was right about Genêt. And yet, the theory fits them like a glove. What use, then, is moral panic theory in its current form? Why not assess

93 See e.g. the following quote from his “Phocion” essays, first published in the *Palladium*, a New England Federalist newspaper, in 1801: “[France] has exerted her diplomatic skill to seize Louisiana, Florida, and Canada, and employed her Genets to enlist men in our back country to occupy them.” Text taken from *Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. Seth Ames, vol 2 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854), 172.

94 See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 93 for the quote in context. See e.g. Nicholas K. Robinson, *Edmund Burke: A Life in Caricature* (London: Yale University Press, 1996), 142 for an example of such a caricature.

types and degrees of moral panic in terms of behaviors, as opposed to the validity of claims made by panicked persons? Such would be of greater concern to journalists than to scholars of journalism, as journalists could spot panic markers and adjust their reporting accordingly. Even if we could point out folk devils in the media as they appear and determine disproportion through opinion polling or any number of other means – means unavailable to the early American press – how are we to tell moral panics apart crises if the only difference between them is that a moral panic’s imagined outcome never comes to pass? People are still panicking either way, and that is what truly matters.

Again, iterated rhetoric gives us a possible solution. If we observe someone writing political arguments that rely on highly charged and frequently iterated rhetoric – that is, if they rely on partisan terms rather than sound argument – we can infer some degree of inaccuracy in their writing. The appearance of such terms in other publications by other writers would show which terms have gained traction and which have not, and could point towards the scope of a possible episode of moral panic.

The anti-federal camp did, on occasion, point out that Britain posed a bigger threat than France in terms of naval power, but these warnings fell on deaf pro-federal ears. That itself may be the point at which the pro-federal reaction tipped over into moral panic. Still, no one could have predicted where Genêt’s actions would take him and America. A better saboteur might not have been found out a mere two months into his subversion campaign. How would America have looked in, say, 1795 or 1800 if Genêt had been a skilled operator? Recall that, among other things, he was caught trying to influence American political opinion through the newspapers; would John Adams have won against Thomas Jefferson in 1796 if Genêt had been caught later,

or not at all?<sup>95</sup> Conversely, Britain could have reacted in a much more “panicked” fashion to pre-revolution American conspiracies. As What would America look like if the members of the Stamp Act Congress of 1765 or the First Continental Congress of 1774 had been rounded up by British authorities and imprisoned or executed? Moral panic theory cannot answer these questions in its current state. At best, it can tell us when people were overreacting to what they believed was a cause of concern. It tells us little to nothing about when the “right” time to panic might be.

<sup>95</sup> This speculation assumes of course that the Girondins in France were not overthrown in the summer of 1793. I still find it worth considering on the grounds that, even if we keep the dates the same, a skilled Genêt would have had from April 1793 to February 1794 to do what he was doing, which is still a great deal of time more than he gave himself in reality.

## Contemporary Coda

My overarching concern goes beyond this study and moral panics entirely: what does all of this mean for American politics and media in 2018? If news and panic never happen in a vacuum, as this study argues, then scholarship does not either. Looking back, there appears to have been a great deal of moral panic over the past three years, from the beginning of the last presidential election cycle in the summer of 2015 until today. During and after that election, I found myself wondering if older media displayed the same sorts of vitriol and unwarranted panic I had observed then and continue to observe today. Since our current political moment is characterized by a fight over what our nation's future will look like, I wanted to know how bad that issue was at the beginning of the nation.

So, as I used to say when describing this project, I went looking for the American Founders' versions of "deplorables" and "Crooked Hillary." I found them, but what I discovered about the dynamics of political rhetoric and labeling in early America was more fascinating. For example, the "Citizen" title followed a similar dynamic to what we can observe with "deplorables" during the last election cycle. Once the pro-federals started using it as a slur, two things happened: a sub-section of the anti-federal camp doubled down on the term and used it proudly, and its use as a slur began to reveal more about the person using it than the person so labeled. To put that more concretely, William Cobbett giving the title to "Citizen Madison" said more about Cobbett's politics and journalistic mudslinging than it did about James Madison's politics or personal character.

However, that doubling-down is something I observed out of the fervently pro-Trump camp in 2016, particularly the alt-right coalition. In *Devil's Bargain*, a brief history of Steve Bannon and his involvement in the Trump campaign, author Joshua Green quotes Bannon

reacting to Hillary Clinton's "basket of deplorables" comment with pure joy, because he knew that she had suddenly given the factious American right a term to rally around. Despite any differences in what they stood for, they all stood against Clinton, and they were all "deplorables" for it. The term picked up traction almost immediately. It helped, of course, that elements of the right-wing media had spent the last quarter-century turning Clinton into a folk devil. I am now willing to believe that someone like Philip Freneau only truly cared about Genêt and what he was up to because attention to Genêt angered Washington and people within his administration.

Beyond this, the various reactions to Genêt's appeal threat and general conduct mirror certain recent events to an uncanny degree. A common argument out of contemporary political media is that there is no substantial difference between modern Russia and the old Soviet Union. The names and people and some of the power dynamics have changed, but the goal is ostensibly still the same: undermine Europe and the West in order to exert power over it. All Russian statesmen are still "Chekists," a reference to the Cheka, the original Soviet secret police organization and forerunner to the NKVD and thus the KGB. As time goes on, I begin to believe this more, but I would have scoffed at it until around early 2016. Yet I have heard people argue it for much longer, and the idea that the Cold War never truly ended so much as entered a new phase is beginning to dawn on the public at large. There are undeniable differences between the Soviets and modern Russia, just as there were undeniable differences between the Girondins and Montagnards and various other French revolutionaries. But the differences that matter to an observer who has aligned himself against such a faction are largely absent, as the outcomes of their respective actions tend to be similar. All French revolutionaries are Jacobins.

On the other side, consider reactions to the Mueller investigation. Right-wing skeptics demand ironclad proof of such things as "collusion," "obstruction of justice," "conspiracy," and

so forth. Those terms are in quotation marks because such skeptics work according to their own definitions of these terms as opposed to the legal or common currency versions of them. Proof of “conspiracy” for a right-wing pundit is nothing short of an authentic photograph of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin shaking hands over a signed contract wherein they have negotiated election rigging. This certainly does not exist, but much less obvious evidence is necessary in court to prove conspiracy.

Similarly, the anti-federals needed a much higher amount and type of proof to believe in Genêt’s supposed appeal threat than what the Jay and King letter provided. Nevertheless, I believe the general reaction out of the anti-federal camp was justified, and I believe some level of skepticism is healthy when dealing with such matters and with the question of how a citizen of a republic ought to react. Some level of objective proof is necessary before believing such a claim; two men’s signatures do not constitute that, even if those men are the SCOTUS Chief Justice and a US Senator.

Anti-federal reactions to the appeal threat also mirror ways in which observers of Mueller’s investigation attempt to fill in the gaps of information about the investigation and its subjects. Anti-federals consistently claimed that the appeal threat could not have happened, or could not have been as serious as the pro-federals claimed, if Washington’s administration was remaining officially silent about it. Had the appeal threat been worthy of concern, their argument went, Washington would have done something such as firing Genêt or publicly condemning him. The reality, of course, is that Washington had the information suppressed in order to minimize possible public disorder. With Mueller, both his supporters and his enemies in the pundit-sphere attempt similar logical leaps: “If X is true and we assume Y, then Z is likely,” etc. But the real reasons for Mueller’s actions are yet unknown, as is the truth of what he is investigating.

The final and most provoking parallel concerns how information enters the public eye and how we can use that to discuss the past and the present by putting them in conversation. Fairly early in this study, I latched on with both hands to the idea that Alexander Hamilton leaked a state secret for political gain during the Genêt Affair. I say that knowing full well that items which constitute “state secrets” in today’s world did not really exist in 1793. However, the true appeal in Hamilton’s actions for me lies in how they demonstrate that people within the American government are always willing to selectively release information for their own ends, and, if anything, we as a nation have actually grown more “honorable” concerning this sort of thing, or at least less willing to tolerate such political operators.

In the other direction, our contemporary news media landscape appears to me to be becoming more like the newspaper system of 1793, the chief difference being the number of participants. If a man living in 1793 could afford to operate a printing press and sent and received a lot of mail from the right sort of people, he could run a newspaper; there were no other requirements save a possible racial one, and his newspaper would be read almost exclusively by people who either could do the same themselves or knew someone who could. Today, if a person can afford an internet connection and signs up for any given social media program, he or she can create and disseminate news, and that news can be read by anyone else who meets these criteria, which means essentially everyone in America. News media both in 1793 and today are, in their own ways, more democratic than the monolithic media of the radio and television eras, and I believe this trend will continue despite the consolidation efforts of media corporations.

The ramifications this media situation has for history and how we communicate are even more strange. The Genêt Affair studied as an iteration of older concerns demonstrates that at

least one American political tradition exists which did not even want the Constitution or the federal government to begin with. Beyond that, both of America's original political parties – forerunners to our contemporary pair – grew more in opposition to one another than in support of any particular interpretation of the Constitution. These are not exactly new discoveries, but are worth revisiting now because of modern arguments over where our nation is headed, and because some of those arguments are based on a wholly false and mythological notion of our origin.

In other words, if American politics started in the throes of moral panic and events which look like moral panics, what does that say about American politics now? What does that say about how we publicly discuss politics? Negatively, it says we are inherently prone to overreaction, inherently vulnerable to fake news, and inherently given over to incendiary rhetoric. These issues are built into our political rhetoric at the levels of both terminology and habits of thought. It says that all American political issues are moral issues, meaning that all of American politics is conservative in the first sense that Russell Kirk meant.<sup>96</sup> Not even our most liberal “policy wonks” conduct politics as a Bentham-esque exercise in books-balancing. It says that the genteel centrism of American politics in the Cold War years was a fluke, and we as a people will always be at each others' throats over the very nature of America past, present, and future.

More importantly, however, the Genêt Affair shows that democracy prevailed despite all of this. Genêt's plotting, such as it was, was condemned after it was discovered and revealed. William Willcocks' reaction to rumors of Genêt's appeal threat became common consensus: Americans can hold whatever political convictions they choose, and American politics can be as dirty as we choose, but only Americans are allowed to participate. This, perhaps, is how we navigate our current crisis over campaign and election tampering. In a globally connected world

<sup>96</sup> Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing), 8.

such as ours, anyone in the world is free to discuss American politics, but only Americans can participate in the official political process. The time has come to codify a longstanding set of norms.

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## Appendix A

This appendix contains images of several news stories referenced in the body of the thesis text, along with identifying captions. All images courtesy of Readex's *America's Historical Newspapers* database.

1) From the *Boston Independent Chronicle* of May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1793, a translated address Genêt gave in Philadelphia on May 18<sup>th</sup> to crowds assembled to welcome him to the city.

Citizen Genet, Minister Plenipotentiary from  
the French Republic to the French citizens  
and descendants of Frenchmen, resident in  
Philadelphia.

THE principles and sentiments  
which have animated you, citizens, do  
equal honor to your heads and hearts,  
and leave no doubt of your patriotism.  
You have anticipated the intentions of  
the French Republic; her wish is to  
strengthen more and more the ties  
which connect her with the virtuous na-  
tion that has so justly deserved, by her  
generous conduct towards you, your  
attachment and gratitude. I will use  
my best endeavors to fulfil the inten-  
tions of the Republic, and am persuad-  
ed, that you will neglect nothing to  
prove to the citizens of the United  
States, that Frenchmen now consider  
them as brethren.

I shall take care, citizens, to com-  
municate to our fellow citizens in  
France, the address which you have  
just presented; and I beg you to ac-  
cept my thanks for the opinion which  
you have been pleased to entertain of  
my zeal and entire devotion to the  
cause of liberty and equality.

(Signed) GENET.

2) From the Boston *Independent Chronicle* of May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1793, a written address Genêt gave on May 20<sup>th</sup> in reply to an address given to him by the Citizens of Philadelphia.

Citizen GENET, Minister Plenipotentiary  
from the Republic of France, to the  
CITIZENS.

If gratitude be not acknowledged a virtue among despots, it is evidently such among freemen. Of this truth I have received abundant proofs on my journey from Charleston to Philadelphia. In every place the general voice of the people convinced me in a most sensible manner of their real sentiments and sincere and friendly disposition towards the nation which I have the honor to represent; and the advancement of that common cause which she alone supports with so much courage.

Citizens, your address has completed my satisfaction, and I assure you that the day your brethren in France shall receive it will be a day of gladness to them. This I anticipate, that from the effect it has had upon myself, it will have the same upon them from those wise and liberal sentiments, those just and excellent ideas which characterize it.

In my private capacity of a citizen, I am highly flattered with the favourable opinion you have formed of me and I promise to make every exertion in my power to render myself worthy of that good opinion and to justify the confidence my country has reposed in me. My conduct while among you shall be to the height of our national political principles—and unbounded openness shall be the constant rule of my intercourse with these wise and virtuous men into whose hands you have entrusted the management of your affairs. I will expose candidly to them the great objects on which it will be our business to deliberate, and the common interest of both nations, will I have no doubt be the compass of our direction: for without such a guide, what would become of both nations, exposed as we mutually are to the resentment, the hatred and treachery of all the tyrants of the earth; who, you may rest assured are at this moment armed, not only against France, but against liberty itself. GENET.

3) From the *Philadelphia Gazette of the United States* of August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1793, a letter dated New York, August 13<sup>th</sup>, from Genêt to George Washington.

NEW-YORK, Aug. 22.

NEW-YORK, 13th Aug. 1793.  
2d Year of the Republic.

Citizen GENET, Minister Plenipotentiary from the  
French Republic to General WASHINGTON,  
President of the United States :

S I R,

INTRUSTED in this part of the world with the interests and rights of the French people, as you are with those of the citizens of America, I have sworn to my country, and imposed it as a sacred duty on myself never to permit private considerations or other motives foreign from the general weal to impede me in what I conceived the line of duty. My conduct has accordingly been marked with all the energy and frankness which ever characterize a true republican. To you alone, through the Secretary of State, have I complained of the principles you have adopted, and remonstrated against decisions which have resulted therefrom. To you alone have I declared that the Federal government, far from manifesting any regard for our generous conduct towards this country—for the new advantages which we were offering to her commerce—or for the reiterated demonstrations of our real and disinterested friendship, were sacrificing our interests to those of our enemies, by their interpretation of the treaties which exist between us. To you have I represented without reserve that this conduct did not appear to correspond with the views of the people of America, with their desire to observe with fidelity their public engagements or with their affectionate regard for the cause of liberty, upon which their very existence and prosperity depend. Certain decisions of your tribunals and verdicts of your juries, added to the sentiments of your fellow-citizens publicly expressed,

might permit me without a crime to draw this inference.

Nevertheless certain persons, actuated by views which time will develop and despairing to attack my principles, have descended to personal abuse—in hopes of withdrawing from me that esteem which the public feel and avow for the representative of the French republic. They publish with great warmth that I have insulted you and that I have threatened you with an appeal to the people, as if you would permit any one with impunity to treat you with disrespect, or as if the slightest hint of an appeal, which, a magistrate deservng of his high office, should ardently desire, was to you the greatest offence I could offer.

It is become necessary, Sir, to dissipate these dark calumnies by truth, and publicity.—I dare therefore to expect from your candor and probity an explicit declaration, that “I have never intimated to you an intention of appealing to the people; that it is not true that a difference in political sentiments has ever betrayed me to forget what was due to your character or to the exalted reputation you had acquired by humbling a tyrant against whom you fought in the cause of liberty.”

A publication of your answer will be the only reply, which shall be given to those party men, who never fail to confound the individual with affairs of state, which they too often make use of as a pretext for their zeal and a reason for dastardly appearing under anonymous signatures.

As to myself, I have always openly declared what I thought, and signed what I had written, and if others have supposed they could advance my views, by newspaper publications and paragraphs they are much deceived.—A good cause needs no advocate.—Time and Truth will make it triumph in spite of its implacable enemies, and the present cold indifference of some who were its ancient friends.

I have the honor, &c.

4) From the Philadelphia *Gazette of the United States* of August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1793, a letter dated Philadelphia, August 16<sup>th</sup>, from Thomas Jefferson to Genêt in reply to Appendix 1.3.

Mr. JEFFERSON's Answer.  
Philadelphia, August 16, 1793

SIR,

THE President of the United States, has received the letter which you addressed to him from New-York, on the 13<sup>th</sup> instant, and I am desired to observe to you, that it is not the established course for the diplomatic characters residing here, to have any direct correspondence with him—the Secretary of State, is the organ through which their communications should pass.

The President does not conceive it to be within the line of propriety or duty for him to bear evidence against a declaration which, whether made to him or others, is perhaps immaterial, he therefore, declines interfering in the case

I have the honor to be with great respect,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

And most humble servant,

TH: JEFFERSON.

The Minister Plenipotentiary }  
of the Republic of France. }

5) From the Boston *Independent Chronicle* of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1793, an account of Genêt's arrival in Charleston, South Carolina on April 9<sup>th</sup>.

**ARRIVAL of the AMBASSADOR  
from FRANCE.**

**CHARLESTON, (S. C.) April 9.**

Yesterday morning the French frigate, *L'Embuscade*, commanded by citizen *Bompard*, mounting thirty six guns, and manned with three hundred seamen, appeared off our bar, where she came to anchor.

*L'Embuscade*, had a passage of forty five days from Rochfort.

This vessel was dispatched by the French Republic with M. GENET, Ambassador from the Executive Council of that nation, to the President and Congress of the United States.

Citizen *Bompard*, commander of *L'Embuscade*, is son to the Vice Admiral of the same name, now in the service of the French Republic.

This vessel's arrival, and the variety of speculations and conjectures on her destination and errand, fully occupied the public mind yesterday.—The studied secrecy and reserve of the officers and men, left sufficient room for the circulation of a number of reports, which were varied in rapid succession—lived their little hour, and then were heard no more.

6) From the Boston *Columbian Centinel* of August 10<sup>th</sup>, a request for correspondents to send a copy of William Willcocks' August 2<sup>nd</sup> letter, as well as other items.

**TO CORRESPONDENTS.**  
An *ipſe* address of *WILLIAM WILCOCKS, Esq.* one of the Legislature of *NEW YORK*, on the subject of *Mr. GANF* and his Secretary's interference in the political concerns of the United States. A piece from the *Apollon* correspondent, in answer to *T. P.* The proceedings of the *House of Assembly* on the letter of the *Mercantile* Secy of this town, are unavoidably admitted, this day, *1793* Edition in the last page; smells too much of the lamp of publication; but Revenge will be gratified *illud est quod non*.

7) From the Boston *Columbian Centinel* of August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1793, an explanation to correspondents / subscribers of the omission of certain material from that day's paper.

**TO CORRESPONDENTS.**  
We certainly think ourselves justifiable, in omitting the account for the *Sunday Rencontre* or of any reflections thereon—Not from fear, but from that duty which requires it of every man to endeavour, now, while *Despotism* reigns, to prevent confusion and alteration.  
The delicate lines of *MENANDER*, ought to have received a more conspicuous department than they have.

## Appendix B

This appendix contains biographical information on several major printers and statesmen who were directly involved in the Citizen Genêt Affair or connected to people who were.

### 1) Abijah Adams

Abijah Adams was the brother of Thomas Adams and was hired to the *Independent Chronicle* in 1799 as a bookkeeper. While the Sedition Act was still on the books during the Adams administration, he was charged with libel and convicted.

### 2) Thomas Adams

Thomas Adams was the chief printer of the Boston *Independent Chronicle* from 1784 until his death in 1799. Typically he worked with partners, but he was paper's sole printer during the Genêt Affair until Isaac Larkin joined the paper in the fall of 1793.

### 3) Benjamin Franklin Bache

Benjamin Franklin Bache was the founding printer of the Philadelphia *Aurora*. Aside from the slander charge made against him and Genêt's secretary Pascal by the Viscount de Noailles, his newspaper was of secondary importance during the Genêt Affair. After the *National Gazette* folded at the start of 1794, the *Aurora* would take up the torch of Anti-Federalist mudslinging. This led to Franklin Bache being physically attacked numerous times in the 1790s by angry Federalists for his criticisms of Washington, especially after Washington retired. He was also involved in a fistfight in the street with John Fenno in or around 1797, which Fenno reportedly instigated.

### 4) James T. Callender

James T. Callender was a Scottish immigrant who first rose to notoriety in America c.1792 for his pamphlet coverage of Congressional sessions. His major claim to fame is that he exposed Alexander Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds in his *History of 1796* pamphlet published in early 1797. After, he was forced to flee Philadelphia, and he was retained by Thomas Jefferson to continue pamphleteering in Richmond, VA; he worked for the Richmond

*Examiner* at the time as well. In 1800, he was tried and convicted under the Sedition Act for anonymous pamphlets he wrote in preceding years which were exposed and tied to him by William Cobbett. He died in 1803 by drowning in the James River, possibly due to a drunken accident, but some at the time suspected foul play.

### **5) Joseph de Cambis**

Joseph de Cambis was a Rear-Admiral in the French Navy in 1793 who, during the Genêt Affair, stood accused by his crew of bombarding Cape-François, then-capitol of the French colony in Haiti, and was confined to quarters aboard his ship *Jupiter*, which arrived in New York Harbor in late July. Why Cambis attacked Cape-François is of lesser importance than the fact that his men reviled him as an abolitionist and supporter of Haitian freedmen's rights. It is possible that the bombardment and subsequent fire in Cape-François was more the fault of Haiti's military governor General Francois-Thomas Galbaud, who was sent to relieve Girondist governor Léger-Félicité Sonthonax of duty and was also confined to quarters by the *Jupiter's* crew. Cambis was also Genêt's brother-in-law.

### **6) Francis Childs**

Francis Childs was the chief printer of the New York *Daily Advertiser* from 1787 to 1796. His paper was frequently reprinted by the anti-federal press, especially the Philadelphia *National Gazette*.

### **7) William Cobbett**

William Cobbett was an English immigrant and pamphleteer who fled England after exposing graft among officers in the English army while serving as one. He arrived in Delaware in 1793 and first attempted to publish Republican pamphlets by soliciting Jefferson for patronage. He started his Federalist pamphleteering with the *Political Censor* in Philadelphia in January, 1794, and became an overnight success. In March of 1797, he founded the daily paper *Porcupine's Gazette*; he frequently wrote and printed under the name pseudonym "Peter Porcupine." In 1799, he fled back to England after being sued for libel by Dr. Benjamin Rush and losing the case, incurring a \$5000 fine. Later in life, he would be elected to the House of Commons.

### **8) Thomas C. Cushing**

Thomas C. Cushing was the printer of the *Salem Gazette* in Massachusetts during the Genêt Affair. He was frequently reprinted by the pro-federal press, particularly the Boston *Columbian Centinel*.

### **9) Augustine Davis**

Augustine Davis was born in Yorktown, Virginia to unknown parentage in 1752 or 1753. He trained as a printer with the *Virginia Gazette* in Williamsburg before the Revolutionary War and rose to prominence as a major printer during that conflict. After the war, he founded the *Virginia Independent Chronicle* and later bought the *Virginia Gazette*; these papers transformed into his *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, which was the name of his paper during the Genêt Affair. Both during and after the Revolution, he served off and on as state printer for Virginia. He died in 1825.

### **10) Joseph Dennie**

Joseph Dennie was a major contributor to the *Farmer's Museum*, a magazine from Walpole, New Hampshire in this era, as well as the *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* of Elizabethtown, New Jersey. In the latter case, he worked and was published alongside William Dunlap and Charles Brockden Brown. He also founded the Port Folio in Philadelphia after working for the *Gazette of the United States* for a time. He was also a close friend of novelist and fellow *Museum* writer Royall Tyler.

### **11) William Duane**

William Duane was an editor and then printer of the Philadelphia *Aurora* who succeeded Benjamin Franklin Bache after he died of yellow fever in 1798. Though born in New York, Duane was removed to Ireland and raised there, effectively making him an immigrant; immigrants formed the anti-federal “base” in this era.

## **12) John Fenno**

John Ward Fenno was a Boston schoolteacher requisitioned by the Federalists to found the *Gazette of the United States* in New York City in 1789 as a party organ. He moved the paper to Philadelphia in 1791 when the government relocated there. In 1793, while covering the Genêt Affair, he petitioned Alexander Hamilton for a \$2000 loan to save his paper and used the money to make the *Gazette* a daily publication. In the aftermath of the Jay and King letter, he began systematically printing reports from across the nation of every town council meeting he could get his hands on who passed a resolution in favor of Washington's neutrality proclamation. This appears to be his way of countering the anti-federal charge that "The People" did not approve of the proclamation and saw it as federal overreach. In or around 1797, he started a fistfight with Benjamin Franklin Bache in the street over supposed slander that Bache had printed about him. He died of yellow fever in 1798 during an outbreak in Philadelphia.

## **13) Peter Freneau**

Peter Freneau, brother of Philip Freneau, served as South Carolina's Secretary of State from 1787 to 1795. Afterward, he purchased the Charleston *City Gazette*, where he served as editor and co-owner with Seth Paine. The pair also established the weekly *Carolina Gazette* three years later.

## **14) Philip Freneau**

Philip Freneau was the founder and printer of the Philadelphia *National Gazette*. He was of a French Huguenot family and graduated from Princeton with James Madison. He became famous during the Revolutionary War as a ship captain and a poet and satirist; at one point, he was captured and stuck on a prison ship. After the war, he became known as the "Poet of the Revolution." In 1791, Madison and Jefferson asked him to come to Philadelphia to found a paper opposite Fenno's *Gazette of the United States*. Jefferson also hired him as a translator in the State Department to give him "cover" for moving to Philadelphia. According to Frank Luther Mott, Freneau "did more than anyone else to make American political journalism a kind of Donnybrook Fair of broken heads and skinned knuckles." During the Genêt Affair, he directly supported Genêt even after news of the appeal threat became public in August of 1793. His

paper began to collapse by the autumn of 1793 due to yellow fever outbreak, Jefferson's resignation from the State Department, and piled up debts; it folded at the year's close.

### **15) Francois-Thomas Galbaud**

Francois-Thomas Galbaud was a General in the French Army in 1793 who was sent to the French Haitian colony to replace its governor, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, due to both French regime change and Sonthonax's handling of the ongoing slave uprising. He is the most probable candidate for who ordered the bombardment of the colony's capitol of Cape-François, and he was confined to quarters aboard the *Jupiter* along with Rear-Admiral Joseph de Cambis after the crew mutinied in the wake of the bombardment. In late August of 1793, after the *Jupiter* and its fleet had arrived in New York Harbor, the crew would mutiny again, and conflicted reports would state that either Galbaud or Cambis had attempted to escape and been wounded. This mutiny was also falsely reported as an attempt on Genêt's life, who was in New York City at the time attempting to deal with the fallout of Galbaud and Cambis' actions in Cape-François.

### **16) Thomas Greenleaf**

Thomas Greenleaf was the son of Joseph Greenleaf, a *Massachusetts Spy* contributor before and during the Revolutionary War. As such, Thomas learned printing in the *Spy's* shop under Isaiah Thomas. His major paper during the Genêt Affair, the *New York Journal*, is not the same paper as the pro-federal *Independent Journal* of New York in which the *Federalist Papers* were first published in 1787-88. In fact, Greenleaf had his press wrecked during the ratification debates by pro-Constitutionalists. In 1795, he founded in the *New York Argus*, a Republican and pro-Burr rag that he ran until his death by yellow fever in 1798; this paper consistently ripped off the Philadelphia *Aurora*.

### **17) George Goodwin**

George Goodwin was first a general employee and then later printer of the *Connecticut Courant* of Hartford. In 1777, then-owner and publisher Ebenezer Watson died, and his widow Hannah took over the paper and brought Goodwin in as a partner in the business along with her second husband, Barzillai Hudson.

### **18) Alexander Hamilton**

Alexander Hamilton was US Secretary of the Treasury during the Genêt Affair. A hardline and pro-merchant Federalist, Hamilton was Genêt's strongest and most outspoken enemy in Washington's Cabinet. During the Genêt Affair, he published numerous essays against both the French cause in general and Genêt's actions in specific. The most noteworthy of these were the "No Jacobin" essays of late July, which publicly discussed the rumors of Genêt's appeal threat as though they were true. In early August, he told John Jay and Rufus King that the appeal threat had indeed occurred, thereby leaking "proof" of the appeal threat to the public. Despite his animosity for Genêt, Hamilton allegedly came up with the idea of giving Genêt asylum after news of the Montagnard ascendancy and their demand of Genêt's arrest reached the federal government.

### **19) Barzillai Hudson**

Barzillai Hudson was an editor of the *Connecticut Courant* who married widowed owner Hannah Watson in 1779 and took over her portion of the business. He worked alongside fellow editor and co-owner George Goodwin to publish the *Courant* through the next three decades.

### **20) Thomas Jefferson**

Thomas Jefferson was US Secretary of State during the Genêt Affair and Genêt's strongest supporter – or at least his weakest critic – in Washington's Cabinet. Before this, in 1791, he and James Madison asked Philip Freneau to come to Philadelphia to run an anti-federal newspaper; he also hired Freneau as a translator for the State Department in order to pay him for running the paper. Because of this, Jefferson was always suspected of contributing material to Freneau's *National Gazette*, a claim he consistently denied. According to Turner, Jefferson was aware of Genêt's attempts to raise a militia of American frontiersmen to storm New Orleans with support from a French fleet and turned a blind eye to it. He would resign his Cabinet position in December of 1793.

## 21) Henry Knox

Henry Knox was US Secretary of War during the Genêt Affair. A Boston native, he befriended George Washington around the outbreak of the Revolutionary War and served as an Army officer during much of the war, rising to the rank of Major General. First a Consitutionalist and later a Federalist, he and Alexander Hamilton often reliably agreed on issues during their time in the Washington administration, particularly with regard to Genêt.

## 22) Isaac Larkin

Isaac Larkin was a Boston printer who worked with Thomas Adams on the *Independent Chronicle* for a time starting in late 1793.

## 23) Matthew Lyon

Matthew Lyon was an Irish immigrant born in 1749 who came to Vermont at 15 and fought in the Revolutionary War as part of the Green Mountain Boys. Afterward, he founded the town of Fair Haven, Vermont in 1783 and founded and briefly ran the *Farmer's Library* (later renamed the *Fair Haven Gazette*) and supplied most of its content; the paper lasted about a year in 1793-94. He was elected to Congress as a Republican for Vermont in 1797 after previous unsuccessful attempts. On two separate occasions, he fought with House Representative Roger Griswold of Connecticut on the House floor. The first incident, in late January of 1798, involved Griswold insulting Lyon for ignoring him and Lyon responding by spitting tobacco juice in his face. The second incident, about two weeks later in mid-February, occurred when Lyon issued a formal written apology for the first incident, and Griswold responded by attacking Lyon with his cane, at which point Lyon ran to a firepit and defended himself with a pair of tongs. Later, in October of 1798, Lyon was the first person tried and convicted under the Sedition Act for a letter critical of President Adams he wrote to Alden Spooner, then-editor of the *Vermont Journal*, which was published in Spooner's paper at the pressuring of Federalists. Lyon was arguably tried *ex post facto*, as the letter had been sent before the Sedition Act was passed but printed in the *Journal* after. Nevertheless, Lyon won re-election to Congress in 1799 while in jail serving his four-month sentence and is the only member of Congress in America to be elected while imprisoned.

#### **24) Louis Marc Antoine de Noailles**

Louis-Marie, Viscomte de Noailles was an army officer under Lafayette in the Revolutionary War who returned to France and served for a time in their Revolutionary government before fleeing the Jacobins in the early 1790s and settling in Philadelphia. His involvement in the Genêt Affair goes thus: On August 3rd, the *Gazette of the United States* published correspondence which discussed a conversation dated July 15th between the Viscomte de Noailles and Benjamin Franklin Bache, editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, the paper that would go on to replace the *National Gazette* after that paper folded. Noailles accused Bache of publishing slander against him and demanded to know the culprit, who turned out to be Pascal, Genêt's secretary. This story is referenced consistently by essayists writing during the appeal threat debates.

#### **25) Pascal**

Pascal was one of Genêt's secretaries during his tenure as French ambassador to the United States. He became the subject of public controversy during the Genêt Affair when he was accused of writing anonymous political essays in the American press critical of the federal government and espousing French republicanism. It is possible that he simply took credit – and thus the fall – for essays which Genêt himself actually wrote, or which Genêt asked him to write. “Pascal” is presumably his surname; his given name is indeterminate.

#### **26) Edmund Randolph**

Edmund Randolph was US Attorney General during the Genêt Affair. He generally espoused Republican politics and often agreed with Jefferson on policy matters but not to any reliable degree, and he remained rather neutral during the Cabinet meetings concerning the appeal threat and Genêt's recall. He would later serve as US Secretary of State and would resign in disgrace after certain of his correspondence with French ministers was leaked to the press.

#### **27) Benjamin Russell**

Benjamin Russell was a Revolutionary War veteran who founded the Boston *Massachusetts Centinel* in 1784. An ardent supporter of George Washington, he became an early champion of first Constitutional ratification and later Federalism. His paper became the

*Columbian Centinel* in 1790; said name change reflected growth in the paper's extra-state subscription and distribution. He turned against the French Revolution with the execution of Louis XVI and the Genêt Affair. He was noteworthy among early American printers for his practice of writing summaries of articles of news from foreign papers and printing these summaries in his paper, as common practice in this era was to simply cut and paste said articles.

### **28) John Swaine**

John Swaine was co-owner and printer of the New York *Daily Advertiser* with Francis Childs from 1789 to 1794.

### **29) Isaiah Thomas**

Isaiah Thomas was founder and editor of the Boston *Massachusetts Spy*, a major Patriot newspaper before and during the Revolutionary War. He trained a great number of the early American republic's printers, publishers, editors, bookbinders, and so forth, and is thus the closest thing to an archetypal American printer in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.

### **30) Benjamin Franklin Timothy**

Benjamin Franklin Timothy was the grandson of French Huguenot and Dutch immigrant Louis Timothee (later Lewis Timothy), who took over the *South Carolina Gazette* at the behest of Benjamin Franklin. Lewis' son Peter Timothy took over the *Gazette* at 14 after Lewis father died; Peter went on to become a South Carolina politician and died in 1782 after being imprisoned by the British. Peter was also a friend of Isaiah Thomas'. Benjamin Franklin Timothy's *South-Carolina State Gazette* is the descendent of his family's *South Carolina Gazette*.

### **31) Hannah Watson**

Hannah Watson was the wife of *Connecticut Courant* owner Ebenezer Watson who took over the paper when he died in 1777. She kept the paper running through the height of the Revolutionary War until she married widower Barzillai Hudson in 1779. She saw the *Courant's* paper mill burned down by Tory supporters in 1778 and successfully petitioned the state legislature for funds to rebuild it; this did not cause the paper to break its circulation schedule. She was the first woman newspaper editor in Connecticut and one of the first women newspaper

editors in America. Her paper is the direct forerunner to the *Hartford Courant*, America's longest continuously published daily paper.

### **32) Noah Webster**

Noah Webster was the founder of New York's first magazine, the *American Magazine*, in December 1787. He was also the founder and printer of the New York *American Minerva* newspaper, later simply the *Minerva*. He wrote much of the *Minerva*'s content, including a series of essays under the name "Curtius" defending the Jay Treaty. By 1798, he had "moved on" from the paper, but kept his money interest in it until around 1810.