ISSN: 2632-4091 History *of* Classical Scholarship 16 October 2020
Issue 2 (2020): 159–179

Cicero's Image in America and the Discovery of *De Republica*

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Abstract

The discovery by Cardinal Angelo Mai in 1819 of extensive portions of Cicero's De Republica *aroused great interest in the United States. Within a decade Americans had published an edition of the Latin text and the first English translation of the new work as well as numerous articles about its contemporary relevance. This paper analyzes how conservative intellectuals found in* De Republica *support for their critique of democratic trends in American politics connected with the popularity of Andrew Jackson, whom they viewed as a potential military dictator like Julius Caesar. Also highlighted in the article is the tension between this traditional approach to the reading of a Ciceronian text and the historicizing tendencies of the new German philological scholarship that was beginning to make itself felt in the United States in the 1820s.*

Keywords

Cicero, De Republica*, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Mixed Constitution, Conservatism*

The paper is the last work of David Wiesen (May 27, 1936 – August 16, 1982), and is published here with the permission of his family. David was educated at Harvard University, receiving his Ph.D. in Classics in 1961. He taught at Swarthmore, Brandeis University and was at the time of his death Professor of Classics and Dean of Humanities at the University of Southern California. David was best known for his work on Latin satire, particularly on Juvenal, and his edition of Books 8–11 of St. Augustine's *City of God* in the Loeb Classical Library (1965) and his important monograph, *St. Jerome as Satirist* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1964). This paper, however, belongs to a different strand of his scholarship, the study of the Classical Tradition in Early America. Like many American classicists, David's interest in this subject was inspired by the bicentennial of the American Revolution. What distinguished his studies on the classical tradition in the United States was his interest in how Americans used classical texts to discuss fundamental issues in American intellectual history including:

the place of Ancient History in education,[1] racial thought,[2] and slavery.[3] In this paper — which survives as a typescript of 23 pages of text and 11 of notes — he uses the reaction of American intellectuals to the discovery of Cicero's *De Republica* to trace changes in how Classical texts were read in the United States between the late eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century.

David's work belongs to the beginnings of serious scholarship on the Classical Tradition in the early United States. Scholarship has expanded significantly since this paper was written, so a full bibliography would be impossible. For persons wishing to follow up the themes discussed in this paper, however, the following studies would be useful. Still fundamental is the pioneering work of Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit, 1984). For the classics in eighteenth century America in general, see Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994). The fullest treatment of the Classics in early nineteenth century America is Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009). The Classics in nineteenth century American education is treated in Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life 1780–1910* (Baltimore, 2002) and *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca, 2007). Important studies of Rome in American popular culture are Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Chichester, 2009), Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlotte, 2009), and Maria Wyke, *Caesar in the USA* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2012). Margaret Malamud also has provided a lucid analysis of the role the Classics played in the abolition controversy, *African Americans and the Classics: Antiquity, Abolition and Activism* (London, 2019).

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[1] David S. Wiesen, "Ancient History and Early American Education," in Susan Ford Wiltshire (ed.), *The Usefulness of Classical Learning in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1977), 53–69.

[2] David S. Wiesen, "The Contribution of Antiquity to American Racial Thought," in John W. Eadie (ed.), *Classical Traditions in Early America* (Ann Arbor, 1976), 191–212.

[3] David S. Wiesen, "Herodotus and the Modern Debate over Race and Slavery," *The Ancient World*, 3 (1980), 3–16.

CICERO'S IMAGE IN AMERICA AND THE DISCOVERY OF *DE REPUBLICA*

"The traffic between Rome and those who would use her has been very heavy for a long time," a noted critic has written, "carrying freight of many directions at many levels of purpose."[4] To political theorists, for instance, from the revival of learning until the nineteenth century, Rome was the great magazine whose ample stores supplied the ideas, the vocabulary, and the models of virtue and vice that clarified and enriched discussions of the art of government. The pages of Livy provided the Renaissance with the raw material from which political theory was spun. The early eighteenth century found in Tacitus a strong ally against arbitrary government. Cicero's works, however, were so varied and rich that each period found in either the orator, or the practical statesman, or the theorist of government valuable sources of information and inspiration — rhetorical, stylistic, philosophical, and historical. For each age there was a different Cicero. The purpose of the present work is to contrast the Cicero familiar to Americans of the revolutionary era with the Cicero of a half-century later, at the time when the newly discovered text of *De Republica* reached the shores of America. We will be able to see, in the reactions of Americans to this long sought work, how intimately bound up classical reading was with contemporary issues, and how the uses to which Cicero's texts were put provide a valuable guide to changing views of the debt owed by the present to the past. We will also be able to understand better the process by which familiarity with the classics ceased to be a concern of literate men in general in early nineteenth century America and became the possession of an elite with a special outlook on their times.

Among British libertarian political writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, those classical republicans and Radical Whigs whose works were to shape decisively the ideology of the American Revolution, no individual model from history was more thoroughly admired than Cicero. An early Commonwealthman, Henry Neville, in 1659 publicly declared a preference for reading Cicero over the Bible, for which irreverence he was nearly expelled from Parliament.[5] In the

[4] Robert Adams, *The Roman Stamp* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and New York, 1974), p. 24.

[5] *Two English Republican Tracts*, ed. by Caroline Robbins (Cambridge, 1969), p. 9.

preface to his *Discourse on Government* Algernon Sidney named Cicero as a primary "assertor of liberty." The pages of Trenchard and Gordon's *Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*, those treasuries of libertarian ideas, celebrated Cicero as the paradigmatic opponent of arbitrary government.[6] The Abbé de Vertot, whose account of *The Revolutions that Happened in the Roman Republic* was one of the favorite history texts of the eighteenth century Englishmen, called Rome the "nurse of freedom" and Cicero its intrepid defender.[7] The advocates of civil freedom, in their efforts to promote a system of government whose sanctions were not drawn from revelation, had recourse to three secular bases of authority: nature, reason, and experience — the political experience of mankind as embodied in history's record. To support and illustrate these principles, classical literature in general provided an incomparable repository of fact and theory. But of all individual writers, Cicero was the most useful.[8] In *De Legibus*, Cicero had passed on to European thought the Stoic doctrine of the law of nature above that of any government, the law upon which the rights of mankind were founded.[9] Secondly, Cicero had managed in his own life to combine an active career of political leadership with philosophic studies that brought the force of reason to bear on moral and political issues. As for experience, had any political leader faced more varied dangers, from corrupt aristocrats, unruly mobs, and power-mad tyrants?

The British libertarian tradition was very rapidly transmitted to America and widely appreciated there from the Hanoverian succession until the Revolution, and a revolutionary Cicero was part of the import.[10]

[6] *The English Libertarian Heritage*, ed. by David L. Jacobson (Indianapolis, New York, and Kansas City, 1965), pp. 72, 206, 258; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthmen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 19, 291–92; Zera Fink, *The Classical Republicans* (Evanston, Ill., 1945), pp. 5–8, 26, 193. Fink seems unaware that *De Republica* was not available in the seventeenth century.

[7] On the adaptation of ancient history by the Radical Whigs, see H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1965).

[8] For the influence of Cicero on modern thought, see Tadeusz Zieliński, *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte* (3rd ed., Leipzig and Berlin, 1912); Bruno Weil, *2000 Jahre Cicero* (Zurich and Stuttgart, 1962); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 23–26. The subject has never been fully treated.

[9] See Benjamin F. Wright, *American Interpretations of Natural Law* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), p. 5 ff. The natural law tradition was mediated chiefly through Grotius, Pufendorf, and Burlamaqui. See M. Reinhold, "Eighteenth Century American Political Thought," in Robert R. Bolgar, *Classical Influences on Western Thought, AD 1650–1870* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 226–27.

[10] Bailyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–44.

Thus while school boys in the colonies continued to study Tully's *Offices* and *Ends*, among the wider literate public the image of Cicero, defender of Liberty, took shape, made up of the following pieces: the great public speeches of denunciation, i.e., the *Catilinarians* and *Philippics*, certain key passages of *De Legibus*, and Plutarch's *Life* — all of which material was passed through the shaping hands of Whig interpreters, the most important of whom was probably Conyers Middleton, a Cambridge trained classicist with close ties to the circle of radical Whigs. Middleton's panegyrical biography of Cicero published in 1741 did much to create the picture of Cicero as the exemplar of "all those generous principles that tend to exalt and perfect human nature; the love of virtue, liberty and all mankind."[11]

Among the enemies of British oppression in America, reverence sometimes approached apotheosis, as in the speech of the eloquent Boston clergyman Jonathan Mayhew, a leading opponent of the Stamp Act. "Though Cicero," he declared in 1763,

> did not fall at last as a martyr directly for true religion; yet he fell as one of the most glorious advocates of liberty that the world ever saw. An honor next to that of suffering martyrdom for religion, comprising within it the love of liberty, and of one's country; and the hatred of tyranny and oppression.[12]

Like Mayhew himself, Cicero was, or could be portrayed as, a respectable revolutionary, a man of the Establishment who yet fought against oppressive government for good ends, not to subvert the constitution, but to restore its authentic form. He was thus worthy to be added to the eighteenth century's canonical list of civil libertarians — a list that bound an ill-matching assortment of ancient writers to modern republicans:

[11] Middleton, *op. cit.*, Preface, pp. xxxi–xxxii. See Meyer Reinhold, *The Classical Pages* (University Park, Pa., 1975), pp. 199, and 49–62; Caroline Robbins, *Commonwealthmen*, pp. 291–92; John Schutz and Douglass Adair, *Spur of Fame* (San Marino, Ca., 1966), p. 44 (J. Adams on Middleton); Charles F. Mullet, "Classical Influences on the American Revolution," *Classical Journal*, vol. XXXV (1939), pp. 96–97. For characteristic references to Cicero in patriots of the revolutionary age, see *Some Political Writings of James Otis*, collected by Charles F. Mullet, *University of Missouri Studies*, vol. IV (1929), pp. 32, 53; James Wilson, *Works*, ed. by Robert G. McCloskey (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), vol. I, pp. 145 and 239. C. Stephen Botein, "Cicero as a Role Model for Early American Lawyers," *Classical Journal*, vol. LXXIII (1978), pp. 313–21.

[12] Charles W. Akers, *Called unto Liberty. A Life of Jonathan Mayhew* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 133. For the Enlightenment, classics was secularized religion.

Plato, Demosthenes, Cicero, Milton, Sidney, Locke, and Hoadley.[13] How completely Cicero had been drawn into the orbit of ideological founders of American liberty is revealed by Thomas Jefferson. Writing in 1814 and looking back to the age in which the philosophy of revolution took shape, Jefferson denied that the Declaration of Independence had been plagiarized from Locke and stated that its authority rested in "the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or *in the elementary books of public right*, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc."[14] Jefferson's tribute to Cicero as a representative of the complex of Enlightenment ideas from which sprang assertions of political independence and of human rights brings to a climax the concept of Cicero as champion of liberty.

After the winning of independence, the minds of American statesmen turned, naturally, to problems of building the new government, and here Cicero had little to contribute. The concept of the mixed polity — in which the elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy were so commingled as to check and balance one another — was so widely known to the eighteenth century as to be a commonplace, familiar both through classical writers, Polybius above all, and through the many theorists, e.g. Machiavelli and Montesquieu, who had praised it as the ideal of permanence and stability.[15] The fact was known and applauded that Cicero had also written a work idealizing the mixed state, as embodied in the Roman constitution of the mid second century B.C., a dialogue put into the mouths of the most cultivated people figures of those times; but this work, *De Republica*, was lost, except for the final section, "The Dream of

[13] See Mayhew, *The Snare Broken* (2nd ed., Boston, 1766), p. 43. The canon varied somewhat. Thus Adams added Livy and Harrington, but did not include Demosthenes or Milton. See *Novanglus*, in *Works*, vol. IV, p. 15.

[14] *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Memorial Edition (Washington, D.C., 1905) vol. XVI, pp. 118–19; cf. Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (New York, 1978), pp. 62–63; Garry Wills, *Inventing America, Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, N.Y., 1978), p. 172. Which work of Cicero could be called an "elementary work of public right" is debatable, but if Jefferson had any one treatise in mind, it is probably *De Legibus* in which the concept of natural law is set forth more fully than in any other Ciceronian work known to Jefferson.

[15] Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, pp. 71 ff.; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (New York, 1969), pp. 152 and 197–255; Gilbert Chinard, "Polybius and the American Constitution," *Journal of the History of the Ideas*, vol. I (1940), pp. 38–58; Edwin Miles, "The Young American Nation and the Classical World," *Ibid*. vol. XXXV (1974), pp. 260–61; Stanley Pargelis, "The Theory of Balanced Government," in *The Constitution Reconsidered*, ed. by Conyers Read (New York, 1938), pp. 37–49; William B. Gwyn, *The Meaning of the Separation of Powers* (Tulane Studies in Political Science IX, New Orleans, 1965).

Scipio," a vision of the afterlife of the virtuous statesman. Only fragments of the rest, buried as quotations in the work of later writers, survived for those who wished to consult Cicero on the design of the new government. One such consultant was that tireless ransacker of classical texts, John Adams, whose plea on behalf of a mixed polity in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions* was published in 1787 and was much circulated at the Constitutional Convention. In this work, Adams went to the trouble of quoting some of the larger fragments of *De Republica*, extracted from the pages of the grammarian Nonius and from St. Augustine.

"Cicero asserts," writes Adams,

> *statuo esse optime constitutam rempublicam, quae ex tribus generibus illis, regali, optimo, et populari, modice confusa*, in such peremptory terms the superiority of such a government (sic)... that the loss of his book upon the republic is much to be regretted.... His decided opinion in favor of three branches is founded on a reason that is unchangeable; the law... can be of sure protection, for any course of time, in no other form of government.[16]

In Adams' appeal to Cicero, we can already see how the image of the Roman statesman is beginning to acquire a conservative cast, because one of the purposes of the balanced polity is to hold democratic forces in check and because a mixed constitution seems to presuppose the existence of a special class of the wise, rich, and good for whom a prominent place in the state must be found. Adams had intended his *Defence* as a solution to the problem of how to fit the elite class into a republican constitution in such a way that it would not hinder the operation of government. But the work was widely interpreted as an apology for aristocracy and even monarchy — not surprisingly, since the very notion of a permanent and classical political system carries with it a hatred of the mutability associated with the democratic element in the state.[17]

[16] Adams, *Works*, vol. IV, pp. 294–95. Adams quotes from *De Rep*. II. 23. 41 found in Nonius, pp. 342, 39. Other passages cited are from Augustine, *City of God* II. 21 (*De Rep*. II. 42. 69 and Proem to Book III) and Letter 138. 10 (*De Rep*. I. 25. 39). It is likely that Adams did not hunt these down himself, but took them from a collection of fragments, such as that of Carlo Sigonio, published in 1559. In a letter to Jefferson in 1813, Adams suggested that *De Rep*. was worth all the other works of Cicero, and the following year he expressed regret at the loss of the work. See Lester J. Cappon, *The Adams–Jefferson Letters* (New York, 1959), pp. 351 and 438. Adams had always been an ardent champion of mixed government.

[17] See Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972), p. 24; G. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, pp. 580–92. When John Taylor of Carolina wrote his refutation of Adams' *Defence*, published in 1814, he took particular

Indeed, that colony in which radical and "leveling" ideas of the revolutionary era found fullest expression, namely Pennsylvania, opted to reject the mixed consultation by establishing in 1776 a unicameral legislature, on the ground that in America there was no rank above freeman whose special needs had to be consulted.[18]

But the fathers of the Constitution were, for the most part, deeply suspicious of unlimited democracy, and they built into the document that finally emerged from their hands a far more elaborate system of checks and balances than the theorists of the mixed government could have foreseen.[19] The federal Senate, "an anchor against popular fluctuations," as Madison called it, was the chief contribution of the theory of mixed government.[20] Yet it was understandable that with the increased trend toward the democratization of American society and government, particularly with the ouster of the Federalist party from the presidency in 1801, men of liberal persuasion would come to regard the classical ideas of balance, order, and stability as reactionary — a misguided attempt to force immutability on a society that was constantly and naturally in flux. For conservatives, on the other hand, mixed government remained a grand, nostalgic principle, to which they could look back longingly as they perceived with horror the rise of men without family, breeding, or education, who threatened to overthrow the old ideals of a government run by gentlemen of wealth, wisdom, and goodness.

It was of course Federalists chiefly who viewed with dismay the retreat of a deferential society before Jeffersonian egalitarianism.[21] Often using their knowledge of antiquity, they prophesied in the darkest tones the coming reign of King Mob. Thus, Fisher Ames, the epitome of the extreme Federalist, looked back to antiquity for his political lessons. The Federalists were for him the modern analogues of the upholders of the

aim at the notion of the mixed constitution, wherein aristocracy was an inevitable part: *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the U.S.* (New Haven, 1950), pp. 35–93.

[18] G. Wood, *Creation of the Am. Rep.*, pp. 226–37.

[19] See Roy N. Lokken, "The Concept of Democracy in Colonial Political Thought," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Series 3 (vol. XVI, 1959), pp. 568–80. G. Wood, *Creation of the Am. Rep.*, pp. 222–26.

[20] *Federalist Papers* 62 and 63; G. Wood, *Creation of the Am. Rep.*, pp. 206–14.

[21] On the attitudes and behavior of the Federalists under Jefferson, see David H. Fisher, *The Revolution of American Conservatism* (New York, 1965) and Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970).

Republic in Cicero's day.[22] The Jeffersonian faction were the Caesarians appealing to the mob, but aiming at a tyranny of Virginians over all. "The orations of Cicero," Ames wrote, "proved feeble against the arms of Mark Antony," and so the upholders of the republic were likely to go down before demagogues, operating upon the passion of the lowest element.[23] When the people of Rome "chose the *most able* and *eminent* men, who were patricians…" their liberties flourished. The tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus began the rule of violence, "and even the shadow of liberty was lost."[24]

Ames is the paradigm of the classically educated patrician who would in an earlier age have used his knowledge to defend liberty, but who now found in his erudition useful weapons against the forces of change. Rome connoted no longer freedom, but order. A revised image of antiquity emerges in the contrasting attitudes of this arch-Federalist and of Thomas Jefferson. Just at the time when opponents of democracy began to look back to the ancient concept of balanced government and to exalt classical education, Jefferson, whose classical credentials were unimpeachable, lost confidence in his long held view that antiquity had much to teach America.[25] This double shift was only part of a very large and complex question about the role of elitism, tradition, stability, and humanistic education in a rapidly expanding republic, and the implications of these issues were bound to be felt long after the Federalists had disappeared as a political party.[26] A man's attitude toward the concept of "classical" was not a bad guide to where he stood of contemporary questions. A love of the past, faith in its political warnings, fear of vanishing standards, were marks of the man at odds with his age and fearful of the direction that America was taking.

Naturally, then, it was conservative circles above all that were immediately excited by the discovery in 1819 of large portions of *De*

[22] On Ames, see Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York, 1927), vol. II, pp. 271–80 and Winfred Bernhard, *Fischer Ames* (Chapel Hill, 1965).

[23] *Works of Fischer Ames*, ed. by Seth Ames (New York, 1854, repr. 1971) vol. II, p. 383.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 249.

[25] "But so different was the style of society then among the Romans… from what is now and with us, that I think little edification can be obtained from their writings on the subject of government." *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. XV, pp. 65–66.

[26] See L. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, esp. chap. 4, "Salvaging the Classical Tradition"; Louis P. Simpson, "Federalism and the Crisis of the Literary Order," *American Literature*, vol. XXXII (1960), pp. 253–66; Meyer Reinhold, "The Silver Age of Classical Studies in America, 1790–1830," in *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Else* (Ann Arbor, 1977), pp. 181–213.

Republica, the long-lost work celebrating the virtues of balance in government and society. Cardinal Angelo Mai, the Vatican librarian, had found the dialogue on a palimpsest, imperfectly erased beneath a text of St. Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalms*. Two years before he published his discovery, news of it reached America and was announced, somewhat incorrectly, in the literary journal *Port Folio*:

> It is said that the whole of Cicero's treatise *De Republica* of which we have only a few fragments, has been lately discovered in the Ambrosian library at Milan, by the celebrated D'Angelo Majo.[27]

The character of the journal that carried this notice is significant. Founded by the extreme Federalist, and admirer of the classics, Joseph Dennie, to combat revolutionary doctrines, *Port Folio* was the spokesman of the conservative, intellectual elite of the Northeast.[28] The magazine had very close ties to the family of John Adams, who himself had written for it, one of whose sons, Thomas Boylston, had been its business manager, and another, John Quincy, the journal's chief contributor.[29] To complete the circle of associations, both John and John Quincy Adams were lovers of the classics, who tended to look to antiquity for personal models, and particularly to Cicero. To their ambitious youth, Cicero symbolized the brilliant actor upon the political stage, while to their later years he was the great statesman whose gifts and patriotism, like theirs, had been poorly rewarded.[30]

To see the significance *De Republica* carried for the Adamses and other cultured Americans of the early 1820's, we must briefly sketch the relevant political background. The death of the Federalist Party about 1815 had of course not meant the end of political conservatism or cultural

[27] *Port Folio*, vol. XXXIV, 4th series (1820), p. 261. The error in locating the discovery in Milan was natural, since Cardinal Mai had until recently been in charge of the Ambrosian Library.

[28] On Dennie's upholding of classical models as the final authority for American writers, see Randolph C. Randall, "Joseph Dennie's Literary Attitudes in the *Port Folio*, 1810–1812," in *Essays Mostly on Periodical Publishing in America*, ed. James Woodress (Durham, 1973), pp. 66, 88.

[29] See Walter John Morris, "Politics and Literature: The Adams Family and the *Port Folio*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Series 3, vol. XXIII (1966), pp. 450–86.

[30] On John Adams and Cicero, see Schutz and Adair, *Spur of Fame*, pp. 5, 44, and 139; Stephen Botein, "Cicero as a Role Model", pp. 316–18. On John Q. Adams and Cicero, see his *Memoirs*, ed. Charles F. Adams (Philadelphia, 1876), vol. VIII, p. 243; Samuel F. Bemis, *J. Q. Adams and the Union* (New York, 1965), pp. 193–94. John Quincy Adams delivered an ardent panegyric of Cicero in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1810), vol. I, pp. 132–38.

elitism.[31] Many New Englanders who had been absorbed into the Republican Party during the "Era of Good Feeling" remained "cultural Federalists" in public life when Jefferson's party began to break up into factions as the election of 1824 approached. Two of the leading contenders for the presidency were men who in background, experience, and personality represented the opposite extremes of American life, Secretary of State John Quincy Adam and General Andrew Jackson, Senator for Tennessee. Though Adams had been virtually expelled from the ranks of Federalists in 1808 by his Massachusetts constituents when he favored the Louisiana Purchase, he was the very model of the cultural Federalist. Of Puritan descent, born to a prominent family, educated in classics at Harvard, widely travelled and familiar with the royal courts of Europe, a renowned expert on classical rhetoric who had been the first holder of the Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, a man of unusually formal and old-fashioned manners, Adams was the embodiment of Boston culture.[32] To that world, General Jackson summarized the crudity and violence of the New West. Jackson seemed to many to have the makings of a demagogue; and what was perhaps worse, he was believed, at least by those who did not know him, to be no gentleman.[33] Many thought what Adams was to state explicitly when invited to attend a ceremony at Harvard conferring an honorary degree on Jackson. "As an affectionate child of our alma mater," he told Josiah Quincy, "I would not be present to witness her disgrace in conferring her highest literary honors upon a barbarian who could not write a sentence of grammar and hardly spell his own name."[34]

[31] On the fate of the Federalist Party, see Shaw Livermore, Jr., *The Twilight of Federalism* (Princeton, 1962).

[32] On Adams and the Federalists in 1824, see Livermore, *op. cit.*, pp. 270–72. If anyone cared to examine Adams' political principles, they would discover that in the anonymous *Letters of Publicola*, published in 1791, he had attacked Paine's *Rights of Man* and the democracy of revolutionary France. He always projected an image of undemocratic aloofness, and was widely held to be a hater of democracy.

[33] Livermore, *op. cit.*, p. 156; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1946), p. 38.

[34] John Q. Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. VIII, p. 546. President Quincy agreed but did not think Harvard could snub Jackson when they had given a degree to Monroe. Jackson was thought, perhaps correctly, never to have read any secular book completely except the *Vicar of Wakefield* and a story was circulated that he did not believe the earth was round. See Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America* (Homewood, Ill., 1969), p. 191. The Bostonian belief that Jackson was a western wild man did not die easily. See Arthur B. Darling, *Political Change in Massachusetts 1824–48* (Cos Cob, Conn., 1925), p. 67.

While many Federalists saw in Jackson's popularity a way of their returning to political power, cultivated New Englanders who still treasured the old values of an ordered social system in which the people would play their part by electing their betters to office, could hardly accept the tendencies that Old Hickory represented.[35] To them the newly discovered work of Cicero seemed like a tract for the times. The rapid appearance of an edition of *De Republica*, proudly proclaiming itself *Editio Prima Americana* scarcely a year after Cardinal Mai's first publication, suggests that interest in the work was more than merely academic.[36] Even a casual reader could find, in the dialogue, a marked dislike for democracy and a terror of the ochlocracy and tyranny into which it must inevitably decline. In Book I, Cicero, speaking in his own voice, mentions as an argument adduced by some philosophers against the wise man's participation in politics "the mad, uncontrollable attacks of the rabble."[37] Later in Book I, adopting the persona of Scipio Africanus the Younger, Cicero designates democracy as the least desirable form of unmixed polity, since equality is wicked in raising to office the good and bad without distinction.[38] This is so even in an ideal democracy when the people are still responsible and controlled. But when the people turn into a lustful mob — and every democracy has this tendency, the mob can no more be checked than the raging sea or flames.[39] Cicero continues with a paraphrase of Plato's terrifying description of extreme democracy in his *Republic*.[40] There is no limit to freedom; magistrates flattering the mob, abolish all privilege and distinctions; the father fears his son and the son scorns his father; teachers fear and flatter their pupils; the young pretend to the gravity of age, while the aged descend to playing the games of the young so as not to seem hateful, etc. Such is the license to which every democracy is prone when not checked by monarchical and aristocratic forces. At length, there arises from the monstrous populace a champion to lead them against their former rulers; he curries favor with the people and ultimately enslaves them.[41] One practical way to prevent this catastrophe is to favor

[35] On Federalists' attitudes towards Jackson, see Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy. New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961), pp. 4–9; Livermore, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–60.

[36] The edition was in reality a reprinting of Mai's work without the learned introduction.

[37] *De Rep.* I. 5.9. The translations from Cicero are my own, from the text of Konrad Ziegler (Leipzig, 1958).

[38] *Ibid.*, I. 26. 52. Cf. I. 27. 43; I. 34. 53.

[39] *Ibid.*, I. 42. 65.

[40] Plato, *Republic* 562C ff.; Cicero, *De Rep.* I. 43. 66 ff.

[41] *De Rep.*, I. 44. 68.

the election of the better element by maintaining a property qualification for suffrage, as under the Servian constitution, of which Scipio clearly approves.[42] Under this, while no one was deprived of the franchise, the greatest weight was attached to the votes of those propertied persons who had the greatest stake in the community.[43]

Admiration of Rome's ideally balanced constitution was natural for America's educated elite when the horrors of the French Revolution resembling Cicero's description of society gone mad always loomed before the conservative mind as the ultimate symbol of democracy. As the election of 1824 approached, when all but six states allowed popular choice of presidential electors and almost all had dropped property qualifications for voting, it seemed important to reassert the old principles of order and deference.[44] This is clearly the intention of the first American reviewer of *De Republica*, writing anonymously in *Port Folio* for 1823.[45] "*De Republica*," he asserts, "ought to be received with gratitude, both as a precious boon in hand, and a happy omen of what hereafter may be expected from similar sources." These fragments seemed to him,

> to have emerged at the present juncture almost providentially to admonish all parties of those first principles of policy: that as, on the one hand, legitimate power can not long be retained without wise concessions to the will and judgement of the people... so, on the other hand, the popular will and judgement, if they be not moderated and directed by the councils of those whose station in life, intellectual attainments, and virtues, entitle them to the name of "principles" can be productive only of confusion and misery.[46]

[42] *Ibid*., II. 22.39–40.

[43] *Ibid*. On Cicero's political philosophy in *De Rep*., see Friedrich Solmsen, "Die Theorie der Staatsformen bei Cicero," *Philologus*, vol. LXXXVIII (1933), pp. 326–41, reprinted in *Das Staatsdenken der Römer*, ed. Richard Klein (Darmstadt, 1966), pp. 315–31 and Karl Buchner, "Die beste Verfassung", in *Studien zur römischen Literatur*, vol. II (Wiesbaden, 1962), pp. 25–115, with bibliography on p. 36. Also, Richard Heinze, "Ciceros 'Staat' als politische Tendenzschrift," *Philologus* vol. LIX (1924), pp. 73 ff.

[44] On the attempt of the New York Federalists to prevent the transformation of a Republic into a Democracy by elimination of the property qualification for suffrage, see Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (Stanford, 1957), pp. 181 ff. The chief opponent of democracy was Chancellor Kent, classicist and lover of Cicero. See John T. Horton, *James Kent. A Study in Conservatism* (New York and London, 1939).

[45] Vol. XV, pp. 510–16.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 516.

To emphasize the point, the reviewer translates and quotes the passages that he finds most interesting. The greater number of these contain an anti-democratic element. For instance, he cites a brief passage on the decline of kingship into tyranny, with a much longer warning against the extreme democracy's reign of terror (*De Republica* I. 42). Cicero's version of Plato's ridiculing attack on ochlocracy is cited with approval. The reviewer's conclusion is a reaffirmation of the principle of mixed government and a warning against giving more weight to the people than to their natural leaders. These principles, he asserts, are known to all. "But it is one thing to know this, and another to hear Cicero starting up in the Vatican from a sleep of near two thousand years, and proclaiming it afresh to the world."[47] It would have been deemed vulgar to apply these thoughts directly to the political contests of the day, but any contemporary readily could have seen the figures of Mr. Adams and General Jackson in the pages of this commentary on Cicero.

If it seems surprising that the reviewer neglects all other aspects of *De Republica* — overlooking even the work's favorable view of monarchy — we must remember that in the 1820's, classical texts were just beginning to be regarded in America as objects of scholarly inquiry and not merely as sources of edification.[48] The older method was to take what was pleasing and to leave the rest; only gradually did attention focus on a work itself, as a product inseparable from a particular intellectual milieu. We can see these two attitudes in tension if we read a second review of *De Republica* published in 1823, in *North American Review*, the other elite journal, with a circulation confined mainly to New England.[49] The reviewer is familiar with the new scholarship on early Roman history then being done in Germany by the great Niebuhr, and he devotes much of his article to the question of the reliability of Cicero's account of the regal period. But the reviewer's own political views manifest themselves beneath the scholarship, and they are particularly interesting because of his identity and connections. The writer was Alexander Everett, a young and brilliant classical scholar, the brother of the Harvard classicist and distinguished orator Edward Everett.[50] Alexander was a close associate of John Quincy

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] On the emergence of American scholarship under German influence, see Carl Diehl, *Americans and German Scholarship 1770–1870* (New Haven and London, 1978).

[49] Vol. XVII, pp. 33–69. The review is ostensibly of the editions of Mai and Villemain, but is really a review of the work itself.

[50] Everett graduated first and youngest in his Harvard class. See *Dictionary of American Biography*, *s. v.* The review was published anonymously but its authorship is revealed in the index to *N. Am. Rev.*

Adams, having been his private secretary in 1809–1811, and was soon to be appointed by him minister to Spain. Yet Everett gave evidence of his later political defection to the Democratic Party by being a luke-warm admirer of mixed government. Under the influence of *De Republica*, he had composed in 1821 a curious dialogue set in Elysium between Benjamin Franklin and Montesquieu on the ideal state in which the shade of the Founding father raised serious doubts about the necessity of the three classical elements in government and denounced the idea that an aristocracy promotes stability.[51] The same misgivings are sometimes reflected in Everett's essay on Cicero. After some remarks on the timely discovery of a work that addresses contemporary issues so directly, he continues:

> If a compound form of government be better than any of the simple ones, merely as a compound, it must be because it is supposed to combine the advantages of all three. But for the same reason it must also be supposed to combine their disadvantages and thus the argument would make out the form to be at the same time the best and worst of all.[52]

If such doubts about the necessity of political balance mark Everett as the embryonic traitor to the conservative cause, other elements in the review are more characteristic of the Boston patrician. In an interesting digression, Everett compares the composition of the Roman Senate and American Congress. Because American officials tended to be continuously re-elected, their long terms are comparable to those of Roman senators, an admirable source of stability in the state. The American Senate would be further strengthened, he believes, if ex-presidents would consent to serve in that body, like ex-consuls at Rome.[53]

Another Ciceronian passage in which Everett takes particular interest is the attribution of the origin of society to a natural instinct in man and not to a social contract, a doctrine of Epicurean origin that reeked of Rousseau and the French Revolution.[54] Sure of his readers' learning,

[51] *N. Am. Rev.* vol. XII (1821), pp. 346–65.

[52] *N. Am. Rev.* vol. XVII (1823). Everett seems to have been hoping for a stronger justification of the mixed constitution than Cicero supplies. In his book *America or a General Survey* (Philadelphia, 1827), p. 80, Everett declares mixed government to be inferior to America's representative democracy.

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 53. On the attitude of American conservatives to Rousseau's *Social Contract*, see Paul M. Spurlin, *Rousseau in America 1760–1809* (University of Alabama, 1969), p. 69.

Everett inserts long Latin quotations, including one (*De Republica* I. 17) extolling the importance of liberal learning in the public man — an idea that is in essence aristocratic. Everett's shifting between such elitism and more democratic views reveals the wavering and ambivalence that later led Adams to characterize him as a "reed in the wind."[55]

The election of Adams to the presidency in 1825 was not entirely reassuring to New England conservatives, since Jackson had received the largest number of votes, though not a majority, and Adams had been elected in the House of Representatives with the help of Henry Clay, the candidate who had come in fourth. The fury of Jackson's supporters at this outcome meant that Adams' whole administration was a preparation for the next campaign, the most scurrilous in American history up to that time. While Adams saw himself in the role of Cicero, the President's friends began to regard Jackson as Caesar aiming at tyranny.[56] Clay, in explaining his support of Adams, made use of a Roman comparison that was to be a trademark of Whig oratory. He could not, said Clay, support a military chieftain and thus "give the strongest guarantee that the Republic will march in the fatal road which has conducted every republic to ruin."[57]

Some of the tensions of the campaign of 1828 are reflected in a translation of *De Republica* that appeared the following year, by one G. W. Featherstonehaugh. The translation is inaccurate and clumsy, but the "critical and historical" introduction blends ancient history and current politics in an illuminating fashion. The nostalgia of Cicero, who glorifies the constitution of the previous century, is matched by the nostalgia of the American who mistrusts the new democracy. With nice ambiguity, Featherstonehaugh expresses the hope that his labor on Cicero has succeeded in pointing out the immediate causes of the ruin of the noble republic.[58] His discussion of *De Republica* wanders far from the subjects and focuses chiefly on the conflict between Cicero and Caesar. The military commander emerges from the author's pen as a violent and

[55] *Memoirs*, vol. IX, p. 39. Cf. A. Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, p. 174.

[56] In the years after he left the presidency, John Quincy Adams seems to have become obsessed with Cicero. See his *Memoirs*, vol. VIII, pp. 243 ff. While the enemies of Jackson saw the General as Caesar, his friends surrounded Old Hickory with recollections of Cincinnatus, the idealized Roman farmer-soldier. See John W. Ward, *Andrew Jackson, Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955), pp. 42–44.

[57] John S. Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (1911; repr. Archon Books, 1967), p. 352. See Edwin A. Miles, "The Whig Party and the Menace of Caesar," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, vol. XXVII (1968), pp. 361–79.

[58] *The Republic of Cicero trans. from the Latin with a Critical and Historical Introduction* by George W. Featherstonhaugh (New York, 1829), pp. 6–7.

godless perjurer, a man eager for unlimited power, with a wife who was not above suspicion of moral corruption.[59] Could a reader in 1829 have failed to apply this description to their own General, whose violence of temperament were the constant object of unfavorable publicity and whose wife had been widely slandered as adultress during the recent campaign?[60] "It is most painful," cries Featherstonehaugh about the fall of the Roman Republic, "to look back upon... the degradation of such a people; corrupted and ruined by the blind admiration of that falsest of all idols, military glory."[61] Against such evil forces stood Cicero, leading the respectable elements of Rome "with but little other support than the satisfaction of being engaged in the noblest of causes, the maintenance of regular government."[62] If John Quincy Adams ever saw this work, he must have taken pleasure in the implied comparison. Featherstonehaugh points out another passage which he claims to be particularly relevant to his own times: Cicero's discussion in Book I whether the wise man should brave the violence of the vulgar to enter politics. The present large-scale experiment in popular government, he claims, raises this precise issue, and he leans toward Cicero's view that in bad times above all, the good and noble must come forth to help the state.[63]

Though Featherstonehaugh's work was favorably reviewed in the *Christian Examiner* for 1829, it was much less well received in another quarter. The 1829 edition of *Southern Review*, Charleston's answer to the elite Northern literary periodicals, carried an article on *De Republica* written by one of the country's most learned classicists, Hugh Swinton Legaré, a distinguished lawyer and authority on civil law, who was later to serve as United States Attorney General.[64] After sharply condemning Featherstonehaugh's work as confused and totally devoid of merit, Legaré sets off on a lengthy and erudite essay on Cicero that is worthy of attention from several points of view. The work shows the high ambition of an American scholar to rival the accomplishments of contemporary European learning without his being able, however, to put aside the notion that classical texts are timeless repositories of moral and political truth.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 10–13.

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 11. On the charges against Mrs Jackson in the campaign, see J. S. Bassett, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 21–22.

[64] Reprinted in *Writings of H. S. Legaré*, vol. II (Charleston, 1845), pp. 216–53. There is an interesting appreciation of Legaré by Joseph Story, a great admirer of Cicero, who celebrates Legaré's virtues in words taken from Cicero's *Brutus*. See *Life and Letters of Joseph Story*, ed. by William Story (London, 1851), vol. II, pp. 452–77.

Legaré dilates upon palimpsests and upon the hopes of finding new classical works by their decipherments. There follows a learned discussion of the accuracy of archaic Roman history, with reference to the researches of Niebuhr, and an elegant and accurate sketch of the Roman state at the time when *De Republica* was written. Impressive as is this learning, more striking still is the identification that Legaré feels for the world of the second century B.C., when Rome exhibited "the happiest instance that is found in the annals of any nation, of a union of unsurpassed military glory with the stern morals of a primitive, and the graces of a polished age."[65] Cicero's interlocutors are above all gentlemen of the highest principles and philosophic dignity, the very kind that were growing rarer in Legaré's own society.[66] When Legaré comes to treating this mixed constitution, he delivers the expected attack on extreme democracy, adorned with copious references to the horrors of the French Revolution. Yet he is realistic enough to see that traditional aristocracy would have excluded professional men like himself.[67] Again, the reading of *De Republica* had provoked an American with high social pretensions to ask the question, what is an American elite and how does it fit into the structure of a republic? Legaré had an eminently American answer: the balance wheel of the polity is to be "the soundest and healthiest part of every community... the great middle class of moral, substantial people, below ambition, above a bribe, too virtuous to do wrong wilfully, too wise to be easily imposed upon."[68] Legaré is thinking of course not of tradesmen or shrewd investors, but of lawyers like himself with scholarly interests and public ambitions, the closest replica of Cicero and of Cicero's interlocutors that America could produce.

As a man of lofty social pretensions, a classicist, a disliker of democracy, Legaré was of course an anti-Jacksonian (he was later to be a Whig), gripped by the same nostalgia for an orderly, deferential society felt by northern conservatives who found *De Republica* attractive and useful.[69] Legaré was a perfect example of a southern cultural Federalist. For men like him who felt themselves born too late, forced by the times to compete against the pushy, clever, commercial sort who was on the rise in the Jacksonian age, the classical world was a glowing ideal, and classical

[65] Legaré, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

[66] See the assessment of Legaré in William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee* (New York, 1961), pp. 53–60.

[67] Legaré, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 250.

[69] See Linda Rhea, *H. S. Legaré* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1934), pp. 188, 193; cf. W. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 146. On antidemocracy and the Whigs, see Louis Herz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955), pp. 189–213.

studies an escape into a fortress where few could follow. Men of this stripe continued to show an interest in *De Republica* long after the initial excitement of its discovery had waned.

As long as fifteen years after the *North American Review* had published its first discussion, that journal found occasion to return once again to the Roman notion of an ideal state in a review of *De Republica* and other works of Cicero newly edited for America. The author was a certain H. R. Cleveland.[70] Much of this review is an extended panegyric of Cicero as the ideal orator and statesman, inspired by patriotism and free from all sordid motives, the kind of leader, the author implies, that America could badly use. Of all ancient writers, Cicero is most closely connected to the present. Were he to come to life today, he would appear "the perfect gentleman though suddenly placed in a scene so new, so trying, so full of wonders."[71] Cleveland seems to be the only American commentator to note the presence in Cicero's state of an idealized ruler called the *moderator* or *rector rei publicae*, a kind of philosopher king whose political role is difficult for the modern reader to reconcile with the ideal of a mixed constitution.[72] Cleveland sees the problem, but affirms that rotting institutions could never be rescued by a single man, but only by a return to a polity of balanced social order, which concept stirs him to a spirited attack on democracy.

> There was nothing in [Cicero] of that vague, dreamy, boyish notion of equality of conditions, and popular infallibility, which is so ridiculous and disgusting in the radicals... at the present day. He never so much as says fine things about liberty, and the death of tyrants, and the people's rights; he never declaims in this school-boy style, learned from the imaginative historian of the Gracchi, the Brutuses, and Cassiuses, and repeated with school-boy patriotism, by the blundering, self-named patriots of the present day. Even by the word republic, he does not mean a democracy, but he uses it throughout the treatise as simply signifying an organized state.[73]

[70] *N. Am. Rev.*, vol. XLVI (1838), pp. 20–55. An appreciation of the life and work of H. R. Cleveland, a teacher, Latinist, and gentleman-scholar, appears in *N. Am. Rev.* vol. LXIX, pp. 128–42. Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England* (New York, 1936), p. 165, states that Cleveland undertook the editing of Sallust. There is no evidence that he ever completed such a task.

[71] Cleveland, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[72] See the edition and translation of *De Rep.* by George H. Sabine and S. S. Smith (Columbus, Ohio, 1929), pp. 93–97.

[73] Cleveland, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

Here we can observe how completely the associations that gathered about Cicero in pre-revolutionary days have been reversed. The old Enlightenment iconography that joined Cicero to the Gracchi, Brutus, and Cassius as symbols of freedom and the people's rights is now explicitly rejected. A new Cicero stands forth for America: the enemy of popular licence and "Utopian visions of perfect equality, in condition, wealth, and power," the upholder of an ideal of changeless order, the symbol of frustrated reaction against the ideals of Jacksonian democracy as misperceived by those who felt threatened by those ideals.

On the other hand, perhaps Cicero had not really changed his symbolic value at all. In the eighteenth century, principles of balance and moderation were liberal appeals against arbitrary government, but in the nineteenth, they were conservative appeals against the rising democracy. In one sense, Cicero had ceased to be a liberal hero and had become a conservative one. In another sense, Cicero had not moved at all. Everything else had moved around him. The revolutionaries used him to represent of their desire for change; and so did their sons and grandsons.

At the end of Jackson's presidency an article appeared in the *American Quarterly Review* which purported to be an account of the President's Farewell Address, but was in reality an unrestrained attack on democracy.[74] Parts of the attack are cast in terms of analogies between antiquity and the present. Polybius had foretold that the Republic would fall when checks and balances were forgotten and the people came to know their power; when the mixed state of the American Constitution was replaced by democracy, ruin was inevitable. Had not Cicero stated the timeless principle the author asks, in *De Republica*, when he said: "*Moribus antiquis res stat Romana virisque*."[75] Though anti-democracy was politically dead by the 1830's, it lived on in the elite literary journals and in southern manor houses, an attitude cultivated by men devoted to the classics, who found in ancient literature, Cicero above all, nourishment for their sentimental pessimism and a model against which to compare the declining present. We would easily mock these reactionary visionaries for their bookish lack of realism; yet they were asking serious questions about America's future. In an age of swift social change when Americans were ever more absorbed in money-making and material things, what future was there for an older ethic of honor, tradition, gentility, service to the state?[76] If an elite alone could safeguard the spiritual and intellectual heritage on which the nation was founded, who

[74] *American Quarterly Review*, vol. XXII (1837), pp. 53–57.

[75] *De Rep.*, Book V. 1. Cicero is quoting the poet Ennius.

[76] Cf. W. R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

would safeguard that elite? Cicero's *De Republica* was discovered just in time to show those who were trained to look to antiquity for lessons, the model of an orderly state, wisely governed by men of breeding, philosophic interests, and untainted patriotic zeal.

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