

John Quincy Adams and American Conservatism

Sean Mattie

IN *THE CONSERVATIVE MIND*, John Quincy Adams appears as a flawed, failed conservative. Though he “felt the pressing necessity for conservative principle in the conduct of American affairs,” Adams “never quite discovered how to fix upon it.” This is a serious judgment, given how much of Adams’ life and attention was dedicated to conducting American affairs. As ambassador, senator, secretary of state, president, and, finally, congressman (not to mention as minister plenipotentiary for the Treaty of Ghent, and legal counsel in the *Amistad* case), Adams had considerable influence on American politics during the first half-century of the Constitution. Furthermore, Adams left behind many public addresses, private letters, and notes that not only declare the principles behind his actions, but also assert the principles of American national life. To Kirk, though, these only reveal his flawed conservatism:

His immense Diary is the best window upon the thought of his age in America, his scientific diligence advanced American learning, and his aspirations for developing national character were eloquently noble. But as a

conservative thinker, he was insufficient; as a conservative leader, unfortunate.¹

Although Kirk dissects Adams personally (he faults Adams for turning a rigorous honesty into stern self-righteousness), he focuses on two political causes taken up by Adams—nationalism and anti-slavery—to argue how “certain innovating beliefs” confused and weakened him *as a conservative*. As president, Adams proposed extensive internal improvements at federal expense, the sale of public land only sparingly and at premium prices, protective tariffs, federal support for scientific advancement, and a national university—all to promote a national republic.

To Kirk, however, such “consolidating federalism” demonstrated Adams’ overconfidence in both the power of legislation and the possibility of human improvement; Kirk declares, “by proper employment of the revenues and moral leadership possessed by the general government, [Adams believed that] human nature might be raised to perfection in America.” Furthermore, Adams’ opposition to slavery—a leading item on his agenda during his late congressional career—brought him too close to abolitionism, according to Kirk. In flirting with this “emotional and radical movement” of the 1830s and 1840s, Adams failed to moderate it or to broaden the “narrow and intol-

SEAN MATTIE is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Ave Maria College, and before that he taught for several years at Hillsdale College. He was a Richard M. Weaver Fellow during his Ph.D. studies at the University of Dallas.

erant humanitarianism” of its leaders. Throughout his portrait of Adams, Kirk contends that what prevented Adams from repudiating political innovation or immoderation was his own overconfidence—Adams’ cherished belief that “a pious and energetic statesman may move mountains.”²

Kirk also writes about Adams, “He sensed that his duty was the conservation of America’s moral worth; he knew his age for a time of transition.”³ Here, Kirk suggests that the task of an American conservative, especially an American conservative statesman, is to recall—not to invent—the country’s principles, and to apply and defend them in the flux of human opinion and material circumstances. In his long and active public life, lived in extraordinarily dramatic times, Adams fulfilled this intellectual and political commission better than Kirk recognizes, but also in terms that Kirk *should* have recognized. Kirk holds that conservatism lies in “belief in a transcendent order, or body of law, which rules society as well as conscience,” and in support for “custom, convention, constitution, and prescription” as the sources of a “tolerable civil social order.” Conservatism accepts that society must alter to endure, but this transition must entail “prudent change.” Accordingly, conservatism is defined by its opposition to radical ideas and enthusiastic, immediate programs to perfect human nature in the rearrangement of society.⁴ Yet Adams subscribed to and acted on behalf of all of these conservative propositions.

In this essay, I want to examine some of the leading speeches and deeds of John Quincy Adams in order to demonstrate how his thought and action were directed to the conservation of the “civil social order.” I will proceed in two parts. The first will be a study of Adams’ view of the character of America as a domestic political community. The second will explore Adams’ understanding of America’s char-

acter as a nation among nations, i.e., its principles of foreign policy.

I

Perhaps the greatest example of Adams’ understanding of America’s character as a political society is the Fourth of July Oration he delivered in 1821, while secretary of state. The occasion, of course, compelled him to reflect on the Declaration of Independence and the Revolutionary War as the foundation of the American people. Independence and revolution are a curious basis for a people, however, as both would seem to undermine the unity and continuity necessary for a people to exist and to possess an identity. Adams in this speech argued that the Americans’ separation from Britain was consistent with the organic development of political society in America. During the one hundred and fifty years prior to the Declaration, the Americans as British colonists bound themselves to each other by covenant and “social compact,” growing to “the maturity of political manhood” by the time of the Declaration.⁵ Adams describes this growth toward American nationhood not in terms of a rationalistic program suddenly imposed on the people, but in terms that Kirk would appreciate, as the expression of the true order of a human society:

It is a common Government that constitutes our *Country*. But in *that* association, all the sympathies of domestic life and kindred blood, all the moral ligatures of friendship and of neighborhood, are combined with that instinctive and mysterious connection ...which binds [persons]...to the spot of our nativity, and the natural objects by which it is surrounded. These sympathies belong and are indispensable to the relations ordered by nature between the individual and his country.⁶

To Adams, these conservative grounds explain how the separation with Britain occurred naturally. The feeling of patriotic attachment “can never exist for a

country...never seen.” Over “succeeding generations,” Americans transferred their patriotism “from the land of which they have only heard, to the land where their eyes first opened to the day.” Thus, by the time of the American Revolution, the sympathies “most essential to the communion of country” and “most indispensable to the just relation between sovereign and subject” did not exist, and could not have existed, between the British Government and the American people. “The connection was unnatural,” Adams asserted. According to “the moral order, no less than...the positive decrees of Providence,” the ties to Britain should have been dissolved.⁷ Parliament’s overbearing taxation of the Americans during the 1770s prompted a “resistance” that was not “rebellion.” Political abuse by Britain was simply the effective cause to declare an American independence that had already grown “organically.”

Adams believed that what was to be conserved from the Declaration of Independence—the “interest” of the document for Americans that came after it—was “the principles which it proclaims.” The Declaration was the first solemn statement by a nation that “the only *legitimate* foundation of civil government” is “the unalienable sovereignty of the people.” In principle, the Declaration repudiated the “lawfulness” of “all governments founded upon conquest” and articulated a consent-based, republican standard for legitimate government. Yet to Adams, this was not an expression merely of the will of the American people (or of the framers of the Declaration of Independence). Instead it was a public announcement of a “transcendent truth” about politics:

So long as government shall be necessary to the great moral purposes of society...so long as it shall be abused to the purposes of oppression, so long shall this Declaration hold out to the sovereign and to the subject the extent and the boundaries of their re-

spective rights and duties, founded in the laws of nature, of nature’s God.⁸

Although the Declaration’s principles speak to the foundation of rightful government, and although Americans accepted those principles, radicalism did not follow, nor did revolutionary violence become a legacy of the American War of Independence. Adams observed that declaring independence “left the people of this Union collective and individual without organized government.” Although Americans were in a “state of nature,” they were not in a state of “anarchy.” On the contrary, Adams held, “the people of the North American Union and of its constituent states,” being “associated bodies of civilized men and Christians,” were ordered by—among other things—the “laws of God,” “beneficent laws and institutions” adopted from Britain, “habits of hardy industry,” and “pure and virtuous morals.” Still, their urgent tasks were to cement a common union, organize civil and municipal governments in the states, and form friendly, commercial relations with foreign nations. Adams argued that in each of these practical matters, Americans relied on both their orderly habits and the Declaration’s principle of republican government.⁹ The result was, particularly in the adoption of the Constitution, a decent and just civil social order.

To Adams, the Declaration’s principles were not an abstract ideology, alien to American society and American traditions. Adams observed that part of their significance lay in their applicability and suitability to the American situation thus far. The American people, already politically mature, fought for and established the Declaration’s principle of the “social contract” as the “real, solid, and sacred bond of the social union.” Adams argued for an intimate, vital connection between the Declaration’s republican principles, on the one hand, and the conservation and continuity of the American civil so-

cial order, on the other:

Five and forty have passed away since the Declaration was issued by our fathers; and here are we, fellow citizens, assembled in the full enjoyment of its fruits, to bless the author of our being for the bounties of his providence, in casting our lot with this favored land; to remember with effusions of gratitude the sages who put forth, and the heroes who bled for the establishment of this Declaration; and, by the communion of soul in the reperusal and hearing of this instrument...to recognize them as eternal truths, and to pledge ourselves, and bind our posterity, to a faithful and undeviating adherence to them.¹⁰

In his Fourth of July address, Adams presented American national life as a social continuum of republican liberty, the principles of which were established by the Declaration of Independence. The national task at all times, then, is to conserve that civil social order by conserving those principles.

Like the Fourth of July address, Adams' presidential inaugural address of 1825 contains a historical and principled account of American national life. Though Kirk portrays Adams here as succumbing to an innovative nationalism (the inaugural is probably Adams' best-known statement of his program for national improvements), Adams defined his task and intentions through a respectful, even reverent, appeal to history.

In that history, spanning the previous thirty-six years, the Constitution had been the source of the welfare, freedom, and happiness that the country had enjoyed. Though he described the Constitution as a "social compact," Adams recognized a larger historical and moral context for the American people than social contract theory. The Constitution was the consummation of the "first formation of our Union" begun in 1774 with the Continental Congress, and of its second stage, the Declaration of Independence. Adams even discussed participation in the Con-

stitution using terms resembling Edmund Burke's "contract of eternal society"¹¹:

We now receive it as a precious inheritance from those to whom we are indebted for its establishment, doubly bound by the examples which they have left us and by the blessings which we have enjoyed as the fruits of their labors to transmit the same unimpaired to the succeeding generation.¹²

Again, Adams' viewed his task—and that of his fellow-citizens—as the preservation of republicanism under the Constitution.

Within Adams' own lifetime, this task had been carried out in extraordinarily dramatic and difficult circumstances that challenged the American civil social order. It is worth recalling that for Kirk, the French Revolution was the most important movement of modernity, violently inaugurating a series of radical theories and social transformations. For Adams, too, it was "the wars of the French revolution," commencing precisely as government under the U.S. Constitution took effect, that had bedeviled American political life during its vulnerable infancy. In his inaugural address, he called the country's attention to how these wars caused the United States to suffer the "wrongs and injustice of other nations," eventually leading to America's involvement in the War of 1812. The French Revolution and its aftermath also "excited a collision of sentiments and of sympathies" that "kindled all the passions" of domestic parties—Republican and Federalist—and "embittered" their conflict.

The greater part of Adams' nationalism in his inaugural address is not the activist domestic agenda that Kirk identifies as dangerously consolidating and innovating—as Adams noted, this agenda had commenced already under the Monroe Administration and could be traced back to Washington's Administration. Rather, it is Adams' intent to bury partisanship and emotional attachment to foreign

powers, which had divided and disturbed the country, and to replace such immoderation with Americans' unified, deliberate support for "our political creed." Adams' definition of this creed is traditional, not novel. It held that

the will of the people is the *source* and the happiness of the people the *end* of all legitimate government upon earth...the best security for the beneficence and the best guaranty against the abuse of power consists in the freedom, the purity, and the frequency of popular elections...the General Government of the Union and the separate governments of the States are all sovereignties of limited powers, fellow-servants of the same masters, uncontrolled within their respective spheres, uncontrollable by encroachments upon each other...a rigorous economy and accountability of public expenditures should guard against the aggravation and alleviate when possible the burden of taxation...the military should be kept in strict subordination to the civil power...the freedom of the press and of religious opinion should be inviolate...the policy of our country is peace and the ark of our salvation union....

From the Fourth of July and inaugural addresses, the nationalism of Adams is nothing more, but nothing less, than an understanding of American union—its civil social order—in its republican, moderate character. For Adams, conscious of American history as well as of American principles, preserving this union was as great a task as any plan to perfect it.

II

The other aspect in which one may evaluate John Quincy Adams as a conservative is in his foreign policy views and actions. His greatest political achievements came as secretary of state. But in *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk speaks only barely of this dimension of Adams (the chapter mentions his "sympathy for the spirit of liberty throughout the world"), focusing instead on his domestic agenda. How-

ever, conservatism ought to address the external principles as well as the internal composition of the civil social order. No society exists in splendid isolation, and innovation in and transformation of society may come more powerfully from without than from within. There is not only the danger of injury or conquest by a foreign power; there is also the threat that a nation's particular foreign engagement may introduce hostile elements into the nation, or may cause it to split into parties or factions.

Contemplating and dealing with foreign affairs from his teens onward, Adams recognized the importance of a sound foreign policy for the survival of the United States. From the settlement of the Peace of Paris in 1783, the country was in a delicate geopolitical situation, surrounded in the New World by the imperial holdings of England, France, and Spain. America's situation grew only more precarious with the tumultuous wars of the French Revolution, begun in 1793 and not concluded for another two decades. Even after the Treaty of Ghent, ending the second war with Britain in forty years, the United States still had to settle its northern border with British Canada and its southern border with Spain. Furthermore, anti-colonial revolts in Spanish territories in the Western Hemisphere (also a consequence of the wars of the French Revolution) created an unstable situation, not only because of the sympathy such movements evoked in America, but also because other colonial powers were interested in increasing their influence in those territories and thus in the neighborhood of America. This volatility ultimately led to the last great foreign policy crisis before the Civil War—the separation of Texas from Mexico, the United States' annexation of Texas, and America's subsequent war with Mexico.

This era was a profound "time of transition," in which the national character of America was defined by maintaining

the independence for which it originally fought and even extending its political system. As senator, secretary of state, president, and representative, John Quincy Adams was at the political center of this maintenance and growth. This process—i.e., Adams' foreign policy—was on the whole conservative. Though he argued and acted to preserve America's independence or sovereignty, Adams also sought to preserve "America's moral worth"—its justice and republican principles under the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The policies that reveal this core of his commitment are: continental expansion; the Monroe Doctrine, including the United States' attitude toward new republics in the hemisphere; and the controversy about Texas.

Continental expansion as a policy enabled the United States to contain the empires of European powers in the New World, and even to push those powers away from the United States. The policy began suddenly, with President Jefferson's peaceful acquisition of Louisiana by purchasing it from a desperate Napoleon in 1803. To Jefferson, the United States' possession of New Orleans was necessary for national security, and the acquisition of the vastness of Louisiana gave America the further security of territory on both the west and the east of the Mississippi River.

A United States senator at the time, Adams agreed with Jefferson, declaring in the Senate that the acquisition was "of the highest advantage to us."¹³ Adams voted to ratify the acquisition as a legitimate exercise of the treaty power under the Constitution. However, Senator Adams did vote against several congressional bills to legislate over the existing inhabitants of Louisiana. As did Jefferson with respect to the acquisition itself, Adams doubted whether the Constitution allowed Congress to pass laws binding a separate people.¹⁴ Not only was there no specific power granted to Congress,

the action seemed to contradict "the principle that by the laws of nature...and of God, *no people has the right to make laws for another people without their consent.*"¹⁵ As a remedy, Adams introduced a constitutional amendment to authorize Congress to incorporate into the Union inhabitants of territories acquired and to pass laws for them. Though the amendment failed, it illustrates Adams' attempt to conserve America's moral principle during a time of profound transition in the country. Adams intended to preserve America's republicanism even as the country expanded for its own security.

The next great episodes of continental expansion were more deliberate than fortuitous, and they displayed the prudence of Adams, then secretary of state. The first was the Convention of 1818 with Britain, followed by the Transcontinental Treaty with Spain in 1819. In the former, Adams settled several divisive issues remaining from the Treaty of Ghent, including the U.S.-Canadian boundary. The terms of the agreement "shut the British off from northern access to the Mississippi River" and opened Oregon to settlers from both nations.¹⁶ In the case of the Transcontinental Treaty, Adams sought Florida in order to secure the United States' southeastern border. Adams had correctly calculated that Spain could not continue to hold Florida, given the revolutions Spain had suffered in its Latin American empire. However, Adams also obtained the cession of both Florida and Spain's claim to Oregon and the Pacific coast, in return for the United States' recognition of Spain's claim to Texas. These two diplomatic victories, which did not involve compromises in the republican character of the country, preserved the United States by increasing its territorial strength and reducing the influence of strong European states on the continent.

As secretary of state in the Monroe Administration, Adams' other great contribution to a conservative American for-

ign policy was his influence in crafting the Monroe Doctrine. Delivered by Monroe as part of his 1823 annual message to Congress, it proclaimed maxims to order the turbulence in the Western Hemisphere—the demise of old empires like that of Spain, and the renewed interest in the continent by Russia, England, and other European nations. The United States reaffirmed its traditional neutrality in “wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves” and promised not to interfere with “the existing colonies or dependencies of any European power.” However, security for the U.S. would not allow renewed colonization on “the American continents” by any European power; Monroe declared, “We should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.” Speaking on the significance of the Monroe Doctrine, President Adams argued that it was a more assertive restatement of the traditional Washingtonian foreign policy of neutrality and political separation from Europe—now an admonition more to European powers than to American citizens.¹⁷

The Monroe Doctrine’s opposition to European colonization, and its support for the independence of the new Latin American nations in the 1820s, formed the first great test of whether American foreign policy would become a revolutionary internationalism such as the visionaries of the French Revolution promoted. On this matter, Adams was decidedly conservative in his approach. He declared that Americans’ (and his) sympathies and good wishes naturally extended to any people attempting to overthrow a tyrannical government and establish one based on the consent of the governed. However, Adams was reluctant to have the United States recognize any of the new Latin American republics until they had won their independence and could govern themselves in an orderly

manner, as the U.S. itself had. Even then, he would maintain the traditional Washingtonian policy of extending to them only commercial relations on equitable terms, not alliances.¹⁸

Adams recognized that the universal principle of republican liberty, enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, might have inspired a universal crusade, particularly by the United States. A key aim of Adams in delivering his famous Fourth of July oration was to moderate such humanitarian excesses, which were a distinct temptation, given recent political independence movements in Latin America and Greece. He argued that the priority of maintaining America’s republican character necessarily limited America’s actions on behalf of other nations’ liberty:

Wherever the standard of freedom and Independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.... She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from *liberty* to *force*.¹⁹

Another significant aspect of Adams’ foreign policy was his opinion on the annexation of Texas. As with all continental expansion, the incorporation of Texas was a matter of foreign policy that would directly affect the domestic character of the union. As noted above, Adams had favored the peaceful acquisition of territory in North America—particularly territory contiguous to the Union—in order to make the United States more

secure in its own neighborhood. During his negotiation of the Transcontinental Treaty, Secretary of State Adams had sought Texas from Spain, but that nation would not agree to cede it. During his presidency, Adams had also attempted without success to acquire Texas by treaty from Mexico, which had revolted from Spain in the early 1820s. In 1836, Americans who had settled in Texas since its independence from Spain declared and won Texas' independence from Mexico. From the late 1830s through the mid-1840s, the acquisition or annexation of Texas was a leading political issue in America, but Adams had become one of the most vehement opponents of it in the House of Representatives. He argued that his dramatic reversal derived from the new significance of Texas for America's domestic character and, indirectly, for its peace on the North American continent.

According to Adams, Texas was a "wilderness, with no population, or at least no American population" when he attempted to acquire it. Furthermore, the Mexican government had abolished slavery there. Because the Americans who had settled in Texas brought slavery with them and thus would have advanced the slavery interest in American politics, Adams would "never" consent to the United States' annexation of Texas; only if slavery were abolished there would he agree to Texas' joining the union.

Adams opposed the institution of slavery on moral principle—as a violation of human beings' inalienable right to liberty, and as incitement to a spirit of mastery dangerous to republican politics in America.²⁰ Kirk observes this moral opposition approvingly in *The Conservative Mind*, yet criticizes Adams for being seduced by the radicalism of abolitionism. But Adams' public argument about Texas allowed him to make clear his respect for traditional political limits on how the national government might address slavery in America:

Congress has no power to meddle with it.... I would leave that institution to the exclusive consideration and management of the states more peculiarly interested in it, just as long as they can keep it within their own bounds.²¹

To Adams, the problem was that the advocates of Texas annexation—in Congress and in Texas—would have made slavery a national matter. Texas annexation represented a double danger, domestic and foreign, of attempting the "dismemberment of Mexico, and the annexation of an immense portion of its territory to slave representation of this Union."²²

Although Adams' apparent assumption that Texas was then still politically part of Mexico is questionable, history proved Adams correct in arguing that annexation would make Texas' dispute with Mexico into America's fight. Texas did enter the Union as a slave state, and the policy toward slavery in the federal territories acquired in the Mexican War further inflamed partisan conflict between free and slave states in America.

Adams' stance on Texas proved to be a political failure. However it, like his complex response to the Louisiana Purchase, illustrates how his foreign policy sought to conserve not only America's existence in the world, but also America's "moral worth" against a dangerous innovation. In the case of Texas, Adams believed, the country made a change that was neither prudent nor principled.

III

A scrutiny of John Quincy Adams' words and deeds across his broad public life shows him to be a more successful conservative—as a thinker and as a leader—than Kirk presents in *The Conservative Mind*. However, in his articulation and defense of the American civil social order, Adams understood his task in terms remarkably congruent with Kirk's own understanding. Thus, Kirk's contempo-

rary audience—conservatives today—can learn much from Adams.

Adams' most fundamental lesson is that the civil social order in America depends on the American regime. This regime reflects the American belief in both transcendent order and in prescription. As the Declaration of Independence and Adams recognized, the "laws of nature and of nature's God" establish permanent principles of justice and legitimacy in American politics. The divine endowment of equal inalienable rights allows the American people to be sovereign over their government, but not over the rules of public morality, which require respect for those rights. Natural justice and convention combine in the Constitution, which to Adams is *the* political prescription that shapes the habits of Americans. The Constitution's formal provisions and procedures limit government's power and promote deliberation and moderation in American politics. Although formed by popular consent, the Constitution has become authoritative and magisterial in the rightful expression of popular desires. As Adams argued, the Declaration and the Constitution—transcendent law and organic law—are the legacy of Americans as a moral and free people. To Adams, this is what ought to be conserved.

Adams also teaches that if law—be it moral law or written prescription—is

truly to govern persons, then they must uphold it in the flux of human opinions and human events. Conservatives today live in an age of rapid change and uncertainty—politically, socially, and intellectually. Adams also lived in turbulent times, when political pressure from without and within disturbed America's unity and identity. His varied responses over his long public career illustrated prudence's firmness of principle and flexibility in action. For Adams, prudence or practical wisdom is how conservatism is effective. It depends on broad and deep knowledge of America's fundamental laws, but also a keen awareness of which present opinions, institutions, and policies would support them. Like Adams, conservatives must also know the art of public speaking and be able to advocate the good society and the right action intelligently and movingly.

Few of today's conservatives will attain John Quincy Adams' remarkable combination of erudition and experience. Nonetheless, they all can study the American regime of the Declaration and Constitution, and the various attempts to preserve it in the currents of American history. As Adams' career indicates, this education in American public life shows both the seriousness of morality and the limits of the human power to effect the good. It is an education in conservatism.

1. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, Seventh Revised Edition (Washington; D.C., 1995), 231. 2. *The Conservative Mind*, 233-235, 239. 3. *The Conservative Mind*, 234. 4. *The Conservative Mind*, xv, 8-9. 5. John Quincy Adams, *An Address Delivered at the Request of the Citizens of Washington; on the Occasion of Reading the Declaration of Independence, on the Fourth of July, 1821* (Washington, D.C., 1821), 10 [Hereafter "Address"]. 6. *Address*, 14 (emphasis in original). 7. *Address*, 14-15. 8. *Address*, 21-22. 9. *Address*, 27. 10. *Address*, 22-23. 11. Adams would agree with Burke's quintessentially conservative argument that as society cannot obtain its ends of "virtue" even in many generations and thus the political commu-

nity is truly a partnership "between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born." Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis, 1987), 85. 12. *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. 2, ed. James D. Richardson (New York, 1897-1917), 860 [Hereafter "Messages"]. 13. *Writings of John Quincy Adams*, Vol. 3, ed. Worthington C. Ford (New York, 1968), 20 [Hereafter, "Writings"]. 14. In a letter to Senator John C. Breckinridge, Jefferson observed, "The Constitution has made no provision for our holding foreign territory, still less for incorporating foreign nations into our Union." *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York, 1987), 494-497. 15. *Writings*, Vol. 3, 29 (em-

phasis in original). **16.** Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad, 1750 to the Present*, Second Edition (New York, 1994), 78. **17.** As Adams declared in an address to the House of Representatives, March 15, 1826:

Reasoning upon this state of things from the sound and judicious principles of Washington, must we not say that the period which he predicted as then not far off has arrived; that *America* has a set of primary interests which have none or a remote relation to Europe; that the interference of Europe, therefore, in those concerns should be spontaneously withheld by her upon the same principles that we have never interfered with hers, and that if she should interfere, as she may, by measures which may have a great and dangerous recoil upon ourselves, we might be called in defense of our own altars and firesides to take an attitude which would cause our neutrality to be respected, and choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, should counsel. (*Messages*, vol. 2, 904.)

18. Letter to Richard C. Anderson in *Writings*, Vol. 7, 441-486. **19.** *Address*, 29. **20.** As Adams wrote in 1820, after a conversation with John Calhoun about slavery:

[Slavery promotes] perverted sentiment—mistaking labor for slavery and dominion for freedom. The discussion of this Missouri question has betrayed the secret of [slaveholders'] souls. In the abstract they admit that slavery is an evil, they disclaim all participation in the introduction of it, and cast it all upon the shoulders of our old Grandam Britain. But when probed to the quick upon it, they show at the bottom of their souls pride and vainglory in their condition of masterdom. They fancy themselves more generous and noble-hearted than the plain freemen who labor for subsistence. They look down upon the simplicity of a Yankee's manners, because he has no habits of overbearing like theirs and cannot treat negroes like dogs. It is among the evils of slavery that it taints the very sources of moral principle. It establishes false estimates of virtue and vice: for what can be more false and heartless than this doctrine which makes the first and holiest rights of humanity to depend upon the color of the skin?... (*The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845*, ed. Allan Nevins [New York, 1928], 231-232.)

21. *Congressional Globe*, 27th Congress, 2nd Session (April 1842), 429. **22.** *Address of John Quincy Adams to His Constituents at Braintree, September 17, 1842* (Boston, 1842), 12.