

# ***Conspiracy in New England Politics: The Bavarian Illuminati, the Congregational Church, and the Election of 1800***

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After the American Revolution, the United States looked forward with shaky confidence toward a future of independence and prosperity. Problems emerged, however, when news of a German secret society surfaced. It threatened to destabilize the newly formed government, and tear the public away from its faith in the Church. To this day, the Illuminati conspiracy in New England remains one of the great examples of the power of the press, and the influence of Christian doctrine in eighteenth-century America. The widespread fear of Illuminati infiltration dominated many of the final years of the eighteenth century, ultimately culminating in the election of 1800. Within the context of said Christian fears and political anxiety, the ideal environment for the emergence of the Bavarian Illuminati scare arose in New England at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Adam Weishaupt graduated from the University of Ingolstadt in upper Bavaria in 1768, and earned the position of Chair of Canon Law at the University by 1773. Jesuit faculty had held the position for ninety years, and they disliked the liberalizing policies of the school's new elector, Johann Adam Ickstatt<sup>1</sup>. Upon Weishaupt's promotion to dean of the law faculty in 1775, members of the Jesuit

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<sup>1</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: Columbia University Press,

faculty protested both his salary and his “dangerous free thinking.”<sup>2</sup> Upset by this discrimination, the young dean decided to form a secret association, “...which, growing more and more powerful through the increase of its members and their progress in enlightenment, should be able to outwit the maneuvers of the enemies of reason not only in Ingolstadt but throughout the world.” Joined by four other members (all close friends), Weishaupt established the Order of the Illuminati on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1776<sup>3</sup>, giving himself the secret name of “Spartacus.”<sup>4</sup>

In truth, the Order began as his silent rebellion against the Jesuits, but grew into a much larger organization only a few years later. He structured the Order in a pyramid fashion, similar to the style used by Masonic lodges. Having lacked the financial backing to fund his membership, Weishaupt previously opposed the lodges but later joined the Order to be able to explore their organizational style, hoping to find inspiration for the structure of the Illuminati.<sup>5</sup> Members advanced from a Novice to Minerval or Illuminatus minor, and then Illuminated Minerval<sup>6</sup>. Novices completed required reading, along with keeping notebooks related to the fields they elected for special study.<sup>7</sup> They also wrote up reports that detailed information about their families, careers, enemies, as well as their own political opinions and

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<sup>2</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 148.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Gary R. Dyer, “Peacock and the ‘Philosophical Gas’ of the Illuminati,” in *Secret Texts: The Literature of Secret Societies*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts and Hugh Ormsby-Lennon (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 189.

<sup>5</sup> Guy Stanton Ford. Review of *Les Illumines de Baviere et la Franc-Maconnerie Allemande*, by R. Le Forestier, *The American Historical Review* 22, October 1916, 150.

<sup>6</sup> Alan Axelrod, *The international encyclopedia of secret societies and fraternal orders* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Guy Stanton Ford. Review of *Les Illumines de Baviere et la Franc-Maconnerie Allemande*, 149.

character flaws<sup>8</sup>, subsequently handing them in to their superiors. This not only provided a basis for evaluation by superiors, but also forced the member to trust the Order by revealing their secrets. As George Simmel writes, “the further development of every relation is determined by the ration of persevering and yielding energies which are contained in the relation.”<sup>9</sup> These secrets provided a way for the Illuminati to leverage this information against anyone who might have sought to harm them.

At the Minerval status, the member received a printed copy of the Illuminati statutes, and for the first time met a small number of other members. As an Illuminated Minerval, members participated in meetings that evaluated lower-ranking members.<sup>10</sup> These three primary grades then led to further ascension within the Order of the Illuminati. Very few members knew Weishaupt’s name, aside from a trusted group he referred to as his Areopagites, and many believed they joined an exclusive, ancient secret society capable of indulging their selfish ambitions, and revealing to them centuries-old knowledge and treasures.<sup>11</sup> Even correspondences occurred solely in code, with each member choosing a name similar to Weishaupt’s “Spartacus” pseudonym. Through the ideals of enlightenment and reason, the Illuminati ultimately desired to provide happiness to mankind by challenging the authority of established religions and governments.

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<sup>8</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 153.

<sup>9</sup> George Simmel, *The Sociology of George Simmel* trans. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 334.

<sup>10</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 156.

<sup>11</sup> Guy Stanton Ford. Review of *Les Illumines de Baviere et la Franc-Maconnerie Allemande*, 149.

In 1780, Baron Adolf Franz Friederich Knigge joined the Illuminati, ushering in new ideas about a more effective structural system for the organization, as well as establishing a strong link to Freemasonry in Germany. His ideas created more levels of advancement, but continued along the pyramid structure originally implemented by Weishaupt.<sup>12</sup> During the 1780s, the group expanded to almost three thousand members, often recruiting within Masonic lodges in Germany<sup>13</sup>. They also infiltrated both local and national governments, and attempted to recruit civil servants and even rulers, a seemingly conspiratorial tactic.<sup>14</sup> The appeal for young scholars and Masons to join the Illuminati lay in the idea that by joining, the “secret knowledge” of the group became their own. In a German society where any movements counter to the dominant ideology were seen as threatening, the appeal of a secret organization also related to the idea of a place to speak and think freely, sharing one’s ideals with others. Through the levels of progression, one learned more secrets, which, according to Simmel, determined the reciprocal relations between group members.<sup>15</sup>

After suspicions of anti-government activity circulated for months, the Bavarian government began investigating allegations of secret organizations. In October of 1786, German police searched the house of Xavier Zwack, a prominent leader in the Illuminati, and found hundreds of letters between Weishaupt and his Areopagites. Among the books and papers were tables explaining the secret symbols, statutes,

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<sup>12</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 163.

<sup>13</sup> Bryan Waterman, “The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (2005): 9-30.

<sup>14</sup> W. Daniel Wilson, “Weimar Politics in the Age of the French Revolution: Goethe and the Spectre of Illuminati Conspiracy,” *Goethe Yearbook* 5 (1990): 163-186.

<sup>15</sup> George Simmel, *The Sociology of George Simmel*, 345.

recruiting instructions, and initiation ceremonies<sup>16</sup>. Other searches followed, revealing some proof of fraud and intrigues completed by some members, and Weishaupt was removed from his position as law professor. The government ordered a disbanding of all secret societies across Germany, fearing widespread influence of organizations like the Illuminati.<sup>17</sup> By 1785, the association disbanded across Germany, and former members sought to distance themselves from the Order after the persecution of Weishaupt.

Illuminati papers were published in magazines, and enemies of the organization seized the opportunity to highlight the problems and threat of the now-defunct organization.<sup>18</sup> News and fear of this secret organization, however, continued to radiate across Europe, as people feared the massive threat to civil government and religion. Simply the idea that such an organization existed, let alone the thought of it gaining any power, terrified those who learned of it, rulers and citizens alike. Former enemies of the Illuminati did not believe that the organization truly disbanded, continuing to publish reports of underground activity in Europe's major cities, stirring controversy in an attempt to begin an Illuminati witch-hunt. In Paris, many suspected that Mirabeau, a French Revolutionary leader during revolution of 1789, brought Illuminism from Berlin into Masonic lodges in France. They believed he was communicating the message of the Illuminati to other revolutionary leaders including Condorcet, Lafayette, de Leutre and Fauchet. Those who believed this

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<sup>16</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 181.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Joseph Mounier, *On the influence attributed to philosophers, free-masons, and to the illuminati, on the revolution of France*, trans. J. Walker (London: W. and C. Spilsbury: 1801), 189.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Joseph Mounier, *On the influence attributed to philosophers, free-masons, and to the illuminati, on the revolution of France*, 192.

theory noted that the leader lived in Berlin for two years immediately preceding the Revolution, and often visited Masonic lodges there.<sup>19</sup> Early twentieth century Illuminati historian Veron Stauffer writes, however, “at every point this fantastic exposition suffered the fatal defect of a lack of historical proof.”<sup>20</sup> Despite the absence of evidence, several people continued the Illuminati tale of infiltration and conspiracy, indoctrinating their followers with the firm belief that Illuminati influence continued even after the disbandment of the organization. A professor at the University of Edinburgh, John Robison, published “*Proofs of a conspiracy against all the religions and governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and reading societies. Collected from good authorities*” in 1798. Within the book, he claimed the order never disbanded and had actually spread all over Europe, including playing a significant role in the outcome of the French Revolution.<sup>21</sup> Robison wrote, “the express aim of this Order was to abolish Christianity, and overturn all civil government.”<sup>22</sup> The *British Evening Post* ran excerpts of his unpublished book in 1797 over a period of three days, in order to educate their readers about “that part of the narrative, of which the Order of Illuminati is subject.”<sup>23</sup> The publication of these excerpts incited panic in Britain. Robison’s view was supported by Abbe Augustin Barruel, who was a Jesuit priest

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<sup>19</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 196.

<sup>20</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 197.

<sup>21</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), 411.

<sup>22</sup> John Robison, *Proofs of a conspiracy against all the religions and governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Free masons, Illuminati, and reading societies. Collected from good authorities*, (Dublin: Watson and Son, 1798), 35.

<sup>23</sup> John Robison, “Proofs of a conspiracy against all the religions and governments of Europe, carried on in the secret meetings of Free masons, Illuminati, and reading societies. Collected from good authorities.” *British Evening Post*, October 5-7, 1797.

that had been expelled from France. Barruel published *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* in 1797, outlining the Illuminati organization and their intrigues<sup>24</sup>. According to Barruel and Robison, members of the Illuminati sought to infiltrate and seize control of every government in the world, including that of the United States. The organization also desired atheism for all people, and ultimately the end of organized religion.<sup>25</sup> These works capitalized upon existing European anxieties, as now not only common people, but also scholars believed the Illuminati posed a significant threat. The threat of the Illuminati crossed the Atlantic, inciting panic in the newly established United States, where existing tensions from ideological differences provided the ideal catalyst for a large-scale conspiracy to emerge.

As news of the Illuminati reached New England, the Congregational clergy feared their waning influence in matters concerning morals and devotion to the Church. After the American Revolution, many people relaxed their personal views about the appropriateness of theatre and drinking, which led to a questioning of Puritan teachings<sup>26</sup>. People's new conceptions of freedom and independence allowed them to explore their own amusement in ways previously prohibited<sup>27</sup>. They also abandoned more traditional notions of a ranked society, much to the

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<sup>24</sup> Abbe Augustin Barruel, *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, trans. Cornelius Davis (New York: Isaac Collins, 1799).

<sup>25</sup> Bryan Waterman, "The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere."

<sup>26</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*, 28.

chagrin of the Congregational church, which saw themselves as the Puritan elite in New England.<sup>28</sup>

At the time, the Church, a large influence in public matters and political opinions, feared the decline of a Calvinist approach to theology, where the word of God was followed quite strictly. In the 1790s “liberal” clergy members began interpreting the Bible more loosely, and applying their own interpretations, causing the Congregational Church to fear a decline in belief among the people of New England. Politically, many clergy members aligned with the Federalist Party, and expressed a strong anti-French sentiment due to tensions between the United States and France after the American Revolution.<sup>29</sup>

In the fall of 1797, President John Adams sent three American representatives to France to negotiate US-French relations, hoping to diffuse a potential conflict. Upon their arrival, three French representatives demanded large loans as well as a bribe, actions that the Americans interpreted as extortion. As the news of this incident reached the United States, many people became angry not only about the French treatment of the U.S. diplomats, but also about the lack of information provided by the government. President Adams addressed Congress, naming the French representatives X, Y, and Z, and declaring that a war with France appeared inevitable. Thus, this tense incident, known as the XYZ affair, heightened the likelihood of a war between France and the United States, leaving only the

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Leon Jackson, “Jedidiah Morse and the transformation of print culture in New England, 1784-1826,” *Early American Literature* 34 (1999) 2-32.



question of which country would attack the other first.<sup>30</sup> After the XYZ affair, the New England Congregational clergy fought vehemently for a military response to France, and for repression of “radical” ideas within the United States. Despite former optimistic beliefs about the French Revolution, the clergy believed France conspired with American infiltrators to bring what they saw as atheism and anarchy to the country.<sup>31</sup>

In the 1790s, Timothy Dwight, the President of Yale College, and a member of the Congregational Clergy, established himself as a leader among Federalists in Connecticut.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, Reverend Jedidiah Morse emerged as an outspoken representative of the Federalist clergy.<sup>33</sup> Both clergymen shared the opinion that the United States should be a republic governed by Christian ideals, and additionally believed that the 1790s were crucial to the formation of this republic.<sup>34</sup> In the mid-1790s, the Reverend John Cosens Ogden named Dwight the Federalist “Pope” of New England, a large insult at the time due to a strong anti-Catholic sentiment among many Americans. However, calling Dwight the “Pope,” carried an important significance given that he was known to have influenced the teaching of theology at Yale, and enforced a strong Calvinist, and also politically Federalist, interpretation of

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<sup>30</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Revolutionary Era* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 313.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 73.

<sup>32</sup> John R. Fitzmier, *New England's Moral Legislator: Timothy Dwight, 1752-1817* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 56.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 73.

<sup>34</sup> K. Alan Snyder, “Foundations of Liberty: The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse,” *The New England Quarterly* 56 (1983) 382-397.

biblical texts.<sup>35</sup> Dwight failed to disguise his anti-Republican views, often publicly denouncing anyone associated with the party, including prominent political figures. A letter published in the Connecticut Courant illustrated Dwight's political influence on a parishioner identified as 'A.B.,' who claimed that after hearing a comment made by Dwight about Thomas Jefferson, he had been convinced that "he is the real Jacobin, the very child of modern illumination, the foe of man, and the enemy of this country."<sup>36</sup>

Morse, on the other hand, advocated the importance of evangelism, and promoted evangelical Protestantism.<sup>37</sup> He also staunchly believed that God used the French Revolution to punish the regimes of Europe, and that unless the United States stood together behind John Adams' Federalist administration, it, too, would fail as a nation.<sup>38</sup> In 1798, Morse discovered a copy of Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy*, and believed the book provided the necessary proof to expose a potentially dangerous plot to the citizens of the United States.<sup>39</sup> Morse delivered a sermon on Fast Day of May 9, 1798, asserting that branches of Illuminati existed in America, citing Robison's book as evidence of the intrigue.<sup>40</sup> He spoke to his congregation, saying, "This is a day of trouble, and of reviling and blasphemy."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Robert J. Imhold, "Timothy Dwight, Federalist Pope of Connecticut," *The New England Quarterly* 73 (2000) 386-412.

<sup>36</sup> A.B. "Letter to the editor," *The Connecticut Courant*, August 22, 1798.

<sup>37</sup> Charles J. G. Griffin, "Jedidiah Morse and the Bavarian Illuminati: An Essay in the Rhetoric of Conspiracy," *Central States Speech Journal* 39 (1988) 293-303.

<sup>38</sup> Charles J. G. Griffin, "Jedidiah Morse and the Bavarian Illuminati: An Essay in the Rhetoric of Conspiracy," 297.

<sup>39</sup> Charles J. G. Griffin, "Jedidiah Morse and the Bavarian Illuminati: An Essay in the Rhetoric of Conspiracy," 297.

<sup>40</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 411.

<sup>41</sup> Jedidiah Morse. A sermon, delivered at the New North Church in Boston : in the morning, and in the afternoon at Charlestown, May 9th, 1798, being the day recommended by John Adams, president of the United States of America, for solemn humiliation, fasting and prayer.

Other Congregational clergy failed to mention the Illuminati in their Fast Day Sermons, but warned their congregations that only religion and resistance to France could save the country.<sup>42</sup> David Tappan, another member of the clergy, delivered a sermon claiming that through the use of the French as instruments, God attempted to punish humanity for “infidelity” and “wickedness.”<sup>43</sup> Within months, news of the Illuminati spread, and soon other members of the clergy asserted that the French Revolution had begun a series of events that would lead to anarchy and atheism worldwide.<sup>44</sup> Morse continued to advocate his anti-French views, as well as to publish articles in newspapers based upon the writings of Robison. Seeing a respected church leader so emotionally invested in the controversy convinced many people that the Illuminati posed a severe and immediate threat to the citizens and government of the United States.

On Thanksgiving Day in 1798, Morse delivered a sermon aimed at outlining the threat of the Illuminati. Within it, he reminded his congregation to appreciate their leaders, saying, “In nothing are we, as a people, more highly distinguished among the nations of the earth, than by the enjoyment of the rare blessing of good government.<sup>45</sup>” Morse also praised the Constitution, preaching that it “...may be considered as the great anchor, which, under Providence, has hitherto saved us from

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<sup>42</sup> Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 76.

<sup>43</sup> David Tappan, A discourse, delivered to the Religious Society in Brattle Street, Boston, and to the Christian Congregation in Charlestown, on April 5, 1798. being the day of the annual fast in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Boston, S. Hall, 1798.

<sup>44</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 412.

<sup>45</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A sermon, preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798, on the anniversary Thanksgiving in Massachusetts. With an appendix, designed to illustrate some parts of the discourse; exhibiting proofs of the early existence, progress, and deleterious effects of French intrigue and influence in the United States* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1798), 10.

shipwreck, amidst the political storm which now rages all over the world, which has overturned, in rapid succession, all the republics of Europe, and has caused us, not without reason, to tremble for our safety, freedom, and independence".<sup>46</sup> He argued that laws against vices and immorality lacked enforcement, and that due to this "selfish spirit," the American people put their country at risk. Near the end of his sermon, he delivered a warning, "the blessings of good government have been most imminently and immediately endangered by foreign intrigue. From this source have arisen our greatest perils."<sup>47</sup> Morse claimed saboteurs attempted to stop the efficient government, weaken the powers of the executive, and destroy checks and balances.<sup>48</sup> Federalist Party newspapers in Philadelphia and New York printed abstracts of his sermon.<sup>49</sup> By naming the Illuminati, Morse provided the public with an enemy at which to direct their anger. Instead of the vague description of "intrigue" by a few persons, now an entire group potentially threatened the United States.

A supporter of the Republicans, and an Episcopalian reverend, John Cosens Ogden was determined to make the charges of Illuminism backfire. Ogden claimed an Illuminati Order existed, but said it centered on monthly meetings of the clergy, who conspired with wealthy laymen to perpetuate New England's church-state union. Ogden argued said their only interest was power; they courted the rich and remained aloof from the people.<sup>50</sup> In 1799, he published "*A view of the New-England*

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<sup>46</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A sermon, preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A sermon, preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A sermon, preached at Charlestown, November 29, 1798*, 15.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 81.

<sup>50</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 413.

*illuminati: who are indefatigably engaged in destroying the religion and government of the United States; under a feigned regard for their safety--and under an impious abuse of true religion,"* in which he attempted to expose the moral flaws of clerical and political leadership in New England.<sup>51</sup>

Morse found himself thrust into the middle of a controversy, as particularly the Republican press targeted his sources and the validity of his accusations. At first, Morse attempted to defend himself using defenses of Robison printed in British papers. A problem arose, however, when the Jeffersonian press discovered that Morse only utilized articles supporting Robison, ignoring the many printed denouncing his claims and research.<sup>52</sup> In a sermon delivered later than year, Morse named Masonic lodges as the true culprits that harbored the Illuminati, citing several specific lodges he suspected of harboring the organization. Many Federalists, however, belonged to Masonic lodges, and thus, Morse's allegations ultimately damaged his reputation, and led many to discredit him.<sup>53</sup>

Inspired by the outrage of the clergy, many prominent politicians also targeted the Illuminati. In an attempt to bolster support for Federalism, newspapers around 1800 began publishing supposed "plots" they had uncovered; one such claim was that Illuminati members met in Philadelphia clothing stores.<sup>54</sup> After the publication of Ogden's book accusing the Federalists of Illumination, however, the term became an instrument of political battle. Each party used it as an insult against

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<sup>51</sup> John C. Ogden, *A view of the New-England illuminati: who are indefatigably engaged in destroying the religion and government of the United States; under a feigned regard for their safety--and under an impious abuse of true religion* (Philadelphia: James Carrey, 1799).

<sup>52</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 411.

<sup>53</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 414.

<sup>54</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 329.

each other.<sup>55</sup> Eventually, the term lost its true conspiratorial meaning, and became another way to attempt to undermine the opposite party.

As the public looked to 1800, they hoped the next century would bring an era of growth and prosperity for the young United States. Unfortunately, the country appeared divided. John Adams ran for the Federalists, and Thomas Jefferson for the Republicans, sometimes called “Jeffersonians”.<sup>56</sup> During the 1790s, the formation of Democratic-Republican societies, as well as the Illuminati scare exposed a fundamental difference between the two parties about the nature and regulation of public expression.<sup>57</sup> After the XYZ Affair, for example, President Adams withheld the transcripts of the conversations between the French and the United States, but told Congress that a war with France appeared inevitable. The Jeffersonian-Republicans, however, demanded that the transcripts be released, as they believed they might have contained information presenting France in a favorable light.<sup>58</sup> These conflicting views illustrated different opinions about the secrecy of government and specifically executive branch affairs.

In the opinion of the Federalists, the executive branch reserved the right to determine which documents and sources Congress and the public at large accessed. For them, the public lacked the ability to understand the inner workings of the government, and therefore, should trust that the right decisions were made by those in power. The Jeffersonian-Republicans, however, maintained that a certain level of

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<sup>55</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*, 413.

<sup>56</sup> Humphrey 337

<sup>57</sup> Bryan Waterman, “The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere.”

<sup>58</sup> Martin E. Halstuk, “Policy of Secrecy-Pattern of Deception: What Federalist Leaders Thought About a Public Right to Know, 1794-98,” *Communication and Mass Media* 7 (2002) 51-76.

executive secrecy could be allowed, but that at the very least Congress should have access to the documents surrounding diplomatic relations, particularly at such a time when the threat of war loomed overhead.

At the time, the nation's most prominent Republican newspaper was William Duane's *Aurora*, which grew to become a vociferous critic of Federalist administrations.<sup>59</sup> The *Aurora* painted Jefferson as the better alternative to Adams while creating a negative image of New England, which Adams represented.<sup>60</sup> After the XYZ Affair, the *Aurora* published an open letter to Congress urging the public disclosure of all diplomatic communications between the United States and France.<sup>61</sup>

Ultimately, in the election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson and the Jeffersonian-Republicans defeated the incumbent President John Adams. Many attributed the Illuminati scare and the vehement support of the conspiracy by the Congregational Clergy to Adams' eventual defeat.<sup>62</sup> In January of 1800, the Massachusetts Spy published a letter from Adam Weishaupt, sent by the Gotha Gazette in Germany, asking, "please give the following a place in your Spy". Within the letter, Weishaupt claims he failed to argue in his defense and this made his enemies more daring; he fears it may negatively impact his life, saying, "I am the father of a large family. By

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<sup>59</sup> Alan V. Briceland, "The Philadelphia Aurora, The New England Illuminati, and The Election of 1800," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 100 (1976): 3-36.

<sup>60</sup> Alan V. Briceland, "The Philadelphia Aurora, The New England Illuminati, and The Election of 1800."

<sup>61</sup> Martin E. Halstuk, "Policy of Secrecy-Pattern of Deception: What Federalist Leaders Thought About a Public Right to Know, 1794-98."

<sup>62</sup> Joseph W. Phillips, *Jedidiah Morse and New England Congregationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 72.

me many innocent persons may suffer." He reveals his decision to offer a public examination to clear his name:

I challenge them all at any lawful tribunal for an enquiry, and decision of all things alleged against me...I can prove that I deceived no man; that the association was not in the least dangerous; and in all its consequences was innocent; and, after all contrary pretenses, was great and good, which any institution for self knowledge, or the knowledge of mankind can be so, and of such an institution this was only an outline.

Weishaupt argues that through education and the improvement of abuses, the world may achieve true good, and continues inviting an investigation into his organization.<sup>63</sup>

The public letter by Weishaupt provided proof for many that the Order of the Illuminati had, indeed, disbanded, and posed no threat to the government or religions of the United States. As historian Michael Barkun notes, "Although the alleged doings of Illuminist plotters in America seemed credible to some prominent New England clerics and academics, the panic peaked by the turn of the nineteenth century, after which it became increasingly clear that the Illuminati lived mostly in Robison's fantasy life."<sup>64</sup> Newspapers had fueled the allure of the Illuminati since news of its secret writings spread in Germany, and ironically, newspapers published the letter denouncing the organization altogether. The Illuminati conspiracy showcased the growing importance of the press, and the wide influence of the written word on the minds of an entire country.

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<sup>63</sup> Weishaupt, Adam. "Dr. Weishaupt to the Public." *Massachusetts Spy*, January 8, 1800, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 46.



Despite the letter by Weishaupt explaining the disbanding of the organization, the Illuminati name still graces many theories of conspiracy today. Newspapers like *The Vigilant Citizen* warn of prominent Illuminati members, among them Lady Gaga, attempting to influence the minds and thoughts of people worldwide. Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons* illustrated the allure of the Illuminati, as many know the name of the organization, yet few understand the intricacies or history of it. In New England, however, the conspiracy scare ultimately revealed the manipulation of the press, and caused many to lose faith in the clergy.