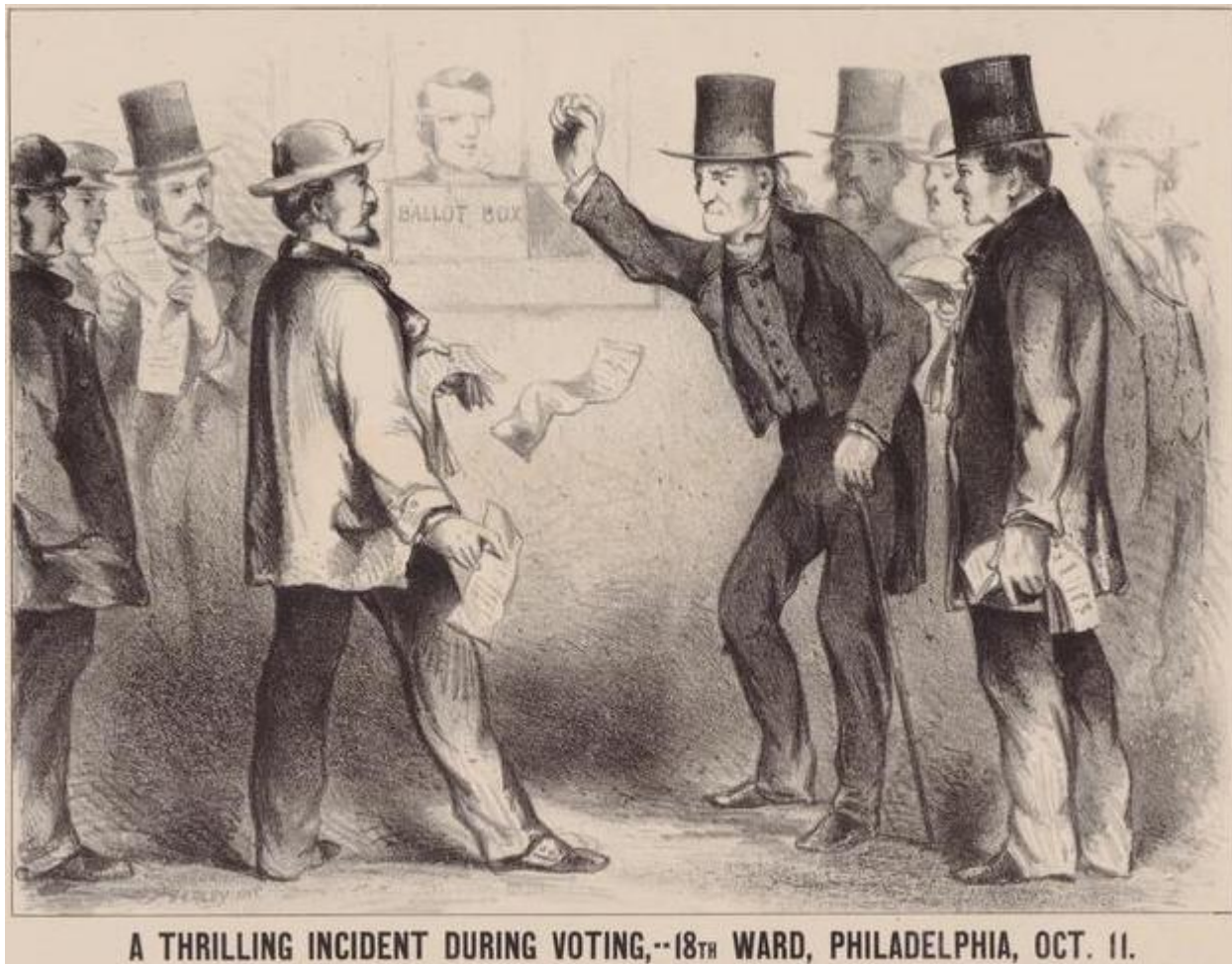


## Public Occurrences 2.0 October 2008



**October 31, 2008**

**“Seems Like Old Times”: Democracy = No God**

Roughly 208 years ago this month you could open many a Federalist newspaper – the mainstream commercial press of the time – and find the following notice regarding that year’s hotly contested presidential election:

This was the first case of a U.S. party in power trying to save itself by juicing up the atavistic fears of Christian voters. In 1800, it was the supporters of John Adams who tried to paint challenger Thomas Jefferson as an alien infidel out to destroy traditional values and shut down the churches, even though there were almost no federal policy issues related to religion or the sanctity of the family being debated. (Jefferson was also accused of palling around with terrorists, in the Reign of Terror sense anyway.)

These 1800 attacks on Jefferson were what Joe Biden was referring to the other day in a comparison that made headlines a few places, [“Biden compares Obama attacks to past presidents”](#):

Democratic vice presidential candidate Joe Biden on Monday cast White House hopeful Barack Obama with presidential giants, likening attacks against his running mate to criticisms lobbed against Thomas Jefferson's Christianity, Abraham Lincoln's commitment to individual rights and John F. Kennedy, for being a "dangerous choice in difficult times."

"Sound familiar?" Biden asked the crowd. "The defenders of the status quo have always tried to tear down those who would change our nation for the better."

That comparison seemed a trifle strained (only a trifle) when Biden uttered it, but apparently the Elizabeth Dole campaign down in North Carolina looked up the 1800 race and decided that the Federalists' "No God" line needed to be echoed even more literally:

[The Trail – washingtonpost.com](#)

North Carolina's U.S. Senate race erupted this week after Sen. Elizabeth Dole (R-N.C.) launched an ad accusing her Democratic challenger of supporting the agenda of a political committee devoted to atheists.

State Sen. Kay Hagan (D), who polls show is narrowly leading Dole, filed suit in a North Carolina court Thursday accusing the incumbent of defaming her in the advertisement, which ends with an image of Hagan on the screen and a female voice saying, "There is no God."

Here's the commercial itself, for the comparative record:

## October 29, 2008

### Cotton Mather to Edmund Ruffin, the Musical Journey

I am trying to be a serious person in these serious times, but permit me to take moment to follow up on the [Early American History Band Names](#) thread from a while back. Mention was made of the 90s power pop outfit Cotton Mather, out of Austin, TX.

I have just learned that Cotton Mather leader Robert Harrison's new band, [Future Clouds and Radar](#), has a [new album](#) coming out next week, and that the American history references continue, albeit to a later period. Song #2 on [Peoria](#) is something called "Old Edmund Ruffin." The rumor is that FC&R is doing a little tour through my environs (Columbia, Chicago, St. Louis & Louisville) week after next, so I look forward to asking Harrison how he came to name pop bands and songs after Puritan theologians and hyper-secessionist editors.

Future Clouds and Radar's [eponymous debut album](#) from last year is also very much worth seeking out. An epic two-CD set, the best song on that collection (video below) also has some geek value. It's "Build Havana" and appears to use Fidel Castro's capital city as a metaphor for the sort of relationship that the

singer would like to have: "Our love's in currency that I can't hold." I think this metaphor might qualify Robert Harrison as [a socialist under current rules](#), so John McCain might want to look into that. Most struggling indie rock bands do stand in need of some wealth-spreading.

## October 28, 2008

### [Myths of the Lost Atlantis: Were Early American Elections For White Men Only? \(Zagarri\)](#)

This is a guest post, the fifth in our new series, running in honor of Philip Lampi and in conjunction with the [Common-Place politics issue](#). See the [introduction](#) for an explanation. Click the logo below to see all of the posts.

#### WERE EARLY AMERICAN ELECTIONS FOR WHITE MEN ONLY?

[BLOGITORIAL NOTE: I asked Prof. Rosemarie Zagarri, author of [Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic](#) (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), to post on a myth that she and a number of other scholars have already dispelled. The answer to the question posed above is still "mostly," but there were wider forms of participation in the celebratory politics of the Early Republic and direct participation for some wealthier women and African Americans because of property requirements for suffrage rights. New Jersey is the famous case of this. Zagarri's post indirectly answers my question, but goes it one better by also drawing an up-to-the-minute parallel between the politics of Jefferson-era New Jersey and the current election cycle. In both cases, the prospect of new or unusual numbers of voters led to charges of voter fraud.— JLP]

## October 26, 2008

### Erin Burr, Rogue Veep

The story is careful to cite campaign tensions between other running mates, but I can't say I remember reading anything like this before. If the election ends up going to the House – which I am *not* predicting – McCain should be glad the [12th Amendment](#) is in place, because he might have an Aaron Burr problem on his hands. I don't see our Sarah voluntarily refusing the presidency.

#### [Palin's 'going rogue,' McCain aide says – CNN.com](#)

"She is a diva. She takes no advice from anyone," said this McCain adviser. "She does not have any relationships of trust with any of us, her family or anyone else.

“Also, she is playing for her own future and sees herself as the next leader of the party. Remember: Divas trust only unto themselves, as they see themselves as the beginning and end of all wisdom.”

I certainly hope these nonplussed McCain aides are the same ones who thought that picking a vice-presidential candidate the way you might choose an actor for a TV commercial would be an awesome “maverick type of move” back in August. Said one of them in the [NYT Magazine story](#) today: “‘The sense you immediately get is how tough-minded and self-assured she is,’ [McCain speechwriter Mark Salter] recalled three weeks after meeting her. ‘She makes that impression in like 30 seconds.’ ” Possibly they are thinking now they should have thought 30 seconds longer.

## [Myths of the Lost Atlantis: Slavery as a Political Issue in Early Republic \(Mason\)](#)

Filed under: [“Myths of the Lost Atlantis”](#), [Early Republic](#), [Historians](#) – Jeff Pasley @ 3:45 pm

In this fourth guest post in our new series, Prof. Matthew Mason gives a personal perspective on political historians’ long-standing habit of ignoring slavery as a major political issue before the traditional survey course opening of the “Sectional Crisis,” with the Missouri Compromise. Mason’s research on the so-called “Era of Good Feeling” showed that actually reading through the press of the time gives a very different impression.

See the [introduction](#) for an explanation of the “Lost Atlantis” series. Click the logo below to see all of the posts.

### **WAS SLAVERY REALLY NOT A MAJOR ISSUE IN AMERICAN POLITICS BEFORE THE MISSOURI CRISIS?**

Debunking the Myth Without the Aid of a Method or an Online Database

At my dissertation prospectus defense, one of the committee members posed a question that vexed me even more than the others faced that day. “What,” he inquired, “is the method to your madness here?” He noted that I had listed a whole series of sources but proposed no research method other than to “just read these newspapers and sermons and congressional debates.” I stammered out some half-baked reply, he urged me to find a method, and we moved on. At some point after this defense, I surely became a more efficient researcher. But I’m not sure I’ve found a better method than “just reading” the sources with an eye to the research question at hand.

If I had actually obeyed the injunction to find some more selective or

systematic approach to the sources, I may not have written this particular dissertation and book, [\*Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic\*](#), in the first place. This because I quite literally began this research by just sitting down and reading the newspaper: *Niles' Weekly Register*, one of the very few truly national publications of the early nineteenth century.

My question was whether slavery really disappeared from national politics between the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 and the Missouri Crisis beginning in 1819. The common wisdom was that the partisan and international fury surrounding Jefferson's Embargo on foreign trade and the War of 1812 took slavery off the table in national politics. I thought this national newspaper in particular would be a good place to inquire as to the truth of that historiographical consensus.

Hezekiah Niles published his *Weekly Register* in volumes and bound them with an index, but fortunately I did not discover that right away. The lack of index entries for such terms as "slavery" or "negroes" would have confirmed the traditional take on this era, as would a glance at the headlines and topic headings on each page. But here's where just reading the thing paid off: I found slavery everywhere in Niles's coverage of those headline events and issues, even though none of them had anything overtly to do with slavery. Here was a prowar (Democratic-)Republican comparing the Royal Navy's impressment of American sailors to Algerian or West Indian or even southern slavery. There was a Federalist campaign to abolish the Constitution's three-fifths clause – which they commonly branded "slave representation" – in response to a wicked war the "Virginia dynasty" ruling in Washington had brought on the country. There in turn was Niles and other Republican editors casting about for good replies to this Federalist attack on the power of slaveholders. Yet none of these tactics in the larger partisan struggle showed up in the index, which was quite naturally devoted to the main subjects at hand, like the war.

I found the same thing whether I sat down to "just read" fiery sermons from New England Congregationalist divines, antiwar or prowar pamphlets, or the Annals of Congress. Indeed, ignoring the inadequate index and page headings to the congressional debates paid the same dividends as doing the same for *Niles' Weekly Register*. In the course of their diatribes against the war, for instance, various congressmen warned the southern warmongers that slave insurrection would be a natural and just consequence of their leaving their plantations to invade Canada. One of the great moments came as I waded through an 1813 debate over expanding the army – yes, there was a bitter partisan dispute over such a radical notion in time of war – when I encountered Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts charging that the expanded army would march north to drag the administration's political enemies into slavery, yoking them in with the black slaves over which the Virginia despots ruled. And on and on it went in much this same fashion, as I encountered slavery everywhere in debates that should have borne no direct relationship with slavery whatsoever. It became clear that the subject of slavery was never truly absent from American public life.

It also became quite clear why so many previous scholars had argued that slavery had subsided as an issue in these years. The 1810s were manifestly not the 1850s, when slavery was the headline issue around which everything else revolved. The whole exercise showed that unearthing new documents is not always the Holy Grail of historical scholarship. In this case, as with so many others, examining old familiar sources with a new question in mind generated surprising conclusions.

While a blog post may be a strange place to air this particular moral to the story, the whole experience makes me tremble just a little for my profession as I see the proliferation of online databases make such sources as early American newspapers more widely available. This development has undeniable payoffs, which even my (strong) inner Luddite is not inclined to dispute. But researchers doing only word searches will miss not only context, but also what might lurk just beneath the headlines.

Matthew Mason  
Brigham Young University

**October 24, 2008**

### **Back in the saddle, and (intellectually) gunning for Greenspan**

Clearly I should not have promised new "Lost Atlantis" posts every 3-5 days and then run off to the land of uncertain Internet access that Italy turned out to be. My apologies. At any rate, I restarted the series Wednesday, almost as soon as I walked back in the door, with Andrew Shankman's post on Jeffersonian charges of monarchism, below. (I seem to have figured out how to make footnotes work on the blog on this one occasion, so enjoy.) Matthew Mason's and Rosemarie Zagarri's posts will be coming soon after that, and more are looming on the horizon. I am also happy to report that new contributors have volunteered, so the series will be continuing for a while.

As to the blog itself, I will be posting my own comments, but I must say that I am feeling pretty inhibited about commenting on the presidential election right now because of my strict no-gloating and no pre-hatched-chicken-counting rules.

As to Alan Greenspan, in his case, I think we early American historians are entitled to gloat, given that he [went up to Capitol Hill and admitted](#) that his and most other economists' ideology of the market and "private enterprise" as infallible, self-policing mechanisms is wrong, wrong, wrong:

Greenspan called this "a flaw in the model that I perceived is the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works."

We did tell him so, most recently in the [current issue of \*Common-Place\*](#).

**October 22, 2008**

**[Myths of the Lost Atlantis: Jeffersonian Charges of Monarchism \(Shankman\)](#)**

This is a guest post, the third in our new series, running in honor of Philip Lampi and in conjunction with the *Common-Place* politics issue. See the [introduction](#) for an explanation. Click the logo below to see all of the posts.

**WERE JEFFERSONIAN CHARGES OF MONARCHISM REALLY JUST SLEAZY, HYSTERICAL SMEARS?**

**by Andrew Shankman**

Rutgers University, Camden Campus

**October 17, 2008**

**Suspending my campaign**

Technical difficulties here at the Publick Occurrences roving command center have prevented any posts this week. "Myths of the Lost Atlantis" and more will be back next week when my Internet access becomes reliable again, on approximately Tuesday, the 21st.

**October 10, 2008**

**[Myths of the Lost Atlantis: Andrew Jackson and the Election of 1824 \(Ratcliffe\)](#)**

This is a guest post, the second in our new series, running in honor of Philip Lampi and in conjunction with the *Common-Place* politics issue. See the [introduction](#) for an explanation. Click the logo below to see all of the posts.

**WAS ANDREW JACKSON REALLY THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE IN 1824?**

**by Donald J. Ratcliffe**

Rothermere American Institute, University of Oxford

**October 8, 2008**

## Relevanter and Relevanter

Current events are rapidly catching up with the [“We the Government” section](#) of the [Common-Place politics issue](#):

[U.S. May Take Ownership Stake in Banks – NYTimes.com](#)

WASHINGTON – Having tried without success to unlock frozen credit markets, the Treasury Department is considering taking ownership stakes in many United States banks to try to restore confidence in the financial system, according to government officials.

Treasury officials say the just-passed \$700 billion bailout bill gives them the authority to inject cash directly into banks that request it. Such a move would quickly strengthen banks’ balance sheets and, officials hope, persuade them to resume lending. In return, the law gives the Treasury the right to take ownership positions in banks, including healthy ones. . . .

If I may quote from [my own introduction](#):

Thus it seems more obvious than ever that historians and history readers ignore the role of government institutions at their peril. While putting U.S. taxpayers into the insurance business, the mortgage business, and soon the investment management business contradicts the ideology of both present-day political parties, even the George W. Bush administration finally had to admit what has always been true: that government is the ultimate guarantor of the national weal. No matter how privatized basic public functions (such as shielding citizens from financial risk) appear to be, it is government that has to take responsibility when the chips are down and basic stability is at stake. Actually government has always had that ultimate responsibility, but in recent times American leaders found it more politic and seemingly more efficient to handle such tasks through institutions defined as private businesses. Now we know better. Any notion of political history with even the slightest pretensions to accuracy and comprehensiveness cannot afford to leave the “American state” out of the picture.

For perspective, see [Max Edling’s article](#) on public finance, especially.

This article originally appeared in issue 9.1 (October, 2008).

---

Jeffrey L. Pasley is associate professor of history at the University of Missouri and the author of *“The Tyranny of Printers”: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (2001), along with numerous articles and book chapters, most recently the entry on Philip Freneau in Greil Marcus’s forthcoming *New Literary History of America*. He is currently completing a book on the



presidential election of 1796 for the University Press of Kansas and also writes the blog Publick Occurrences 2.0 for some Website called *Common-place*.