Soft Power in the Early Republic: The U.S. and France

Annotated Bibliography

Secondary Sources

Nye, Joseph. Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics. New York: Public Affairs, 2004.

Nye is Dean of Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government and the former Secretary of Defense for the Clinton Administration. His book explains how the United States has entered an era in which military and economic might are insufficient in order to maintain world dominance. He explains that soft power is about co-opting, rather than coercing, others. Students will used the first chapter of his book to gain a clear understanding of soft power and to write their own definitions of the term.

Primary Sources

Franklin, Benjamin, Silas Deane, Arthur Lee, and C. A. Gerard. "The Avalon Project : Treaty of Alliance Between The United States and France; February 6, 1778." Avalon Project - Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\_century/fr1788-2.asp (accessed September 26, 2012).

This treaty was meant to ensure that the American cause would have the support of the French and vice versa in the event that the British would interfere with free commerce across the Atlantic Ocean. This is an example of soft power since Franklin and Deane had worked for years to persuade the French to be willing to become solid allies with the fledgling United States. It was meant to send a message to the British that the French and Americans were a strong united force with whom the British should cooperate.

Hamilton, Alexander. "Alexander Hamilton on the French Revolution." Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media . http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/593/ (accessed September 26, 2012). From Alexander Hamilton Papers at the Library of Congress, Container 25, Reel 22.

Hamilton is willing to acknowledge the early enthusiasm for the French Revolution, given the principles upon it was based and how similar they were to American ideals. However, he warns against continuing to support the revolution given the violent turn it has taken. This is an example of soft power because Hamilton is using his reputation and the weight that comes with his opinion to convince others that supporting the French Revolution is dangerous.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Thomas Jefferson on the French Revolution." Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media . http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/592/ (accessed September 26, 2012). From Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to William Short" (3 January 1793), Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Library of Congress, Series 1, Reel 17.

In this letter, Jefferson explains how he feels about France and the revolution it is experiencing. He sympathizes with the French people and believes their cause is good, but wants to clearly distance himself from any justification for the deaths of innocents in the process. He explains how the fledgling U.S. government is trying to remain an ally of France while it is undergoing this controversial change. This is an example of the U.S. exercising soft power because it seems that Jefferson is arguing that the U.S. government is supporting the change diplomatically without getting physically involved in the violence.

Washington, George. "Avalon Project - The Proclamation of Neutrality 1793." Avalon Project - Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\_century/neutra93.asp (accessed September 26, 2012).

President Washington issued this proclamation in an effort to prove to both American citizens and the trading partners of the United States abroad that the U.S. government was not going to become involved in the war between many European powers. This is an example of the fledgling U.S. government attempting to use soft power, but it was largely a failure since no other nations were willing to help enforce the decree. In the end, both the British and the French continued to suspect U.S. involvement and regularly seized American merchant vessels.

Washington, George . "George Washington - Farewell Address (Excerpts) - September 17, 1796." Vincent Ferraro, The Ruth C. Lawson Professor of International Politics. https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/gwfare.htm (accessed September 26, 2012).

This web page provides excerpts from Washington’s Farewell Address that discuss his recommendations for America foreign diplomacy and alliances. Washington warns against alliances that are too strict and against involvement in conflicts. He worries that foreign alliances may have undue influence on the decisions of the American government in the future. This is an example of soft power because President Washington is attempting to persuade the future leaders of the United States, along with its citizens, to agree with his perspective on foreign relations.