

### *Part III*

## AMERICANIZATION

Historians usually depict the 1790s as the period that saw the awkward, painful emergence of divisive partisanship in America, and also as the last attempt by conservatives to contain the revolutionary spirit, or at least channel its direction. It was indeed all those things. But in the context of this book, it was the decade when the classical model ran out of steam. This would result, surprisingly quickly, in what one scholar terms "a radical shift in discourse" that demoted or diminished "all things classical."

Partisanship emerged stealthily. No one wanted to admit to it, and so no formal political organizations emerged as such. There were no conventions or primaries. Rather, early in the decade, loose groups began to form, mainly in opposition to the growing power within the Washington administration of Alexander Hamilton, secretary of the treasury from 1789 to 1795. Political parrying took the form of slashing personal attacks on the morals and ethics of emerging opponents, often describing them as disloyal conspirators. Some of this surfaced in squabbles between cabinet members. But it became public in the pages of the fiercely partisan newspapers of the day, as they battled over the defining issues of the decade—Hamilton's plans for the federal government, the proper response to the Whiskey Rebellion, the meaning of the French Revolution, and finally, the Federal counterattack on the newspapers themselves, in the form of the Alien and Sedition Acts.