

John Adams

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John Adams (October 30 [O.S. October 19] 1735 – July 4, 1826) was the second president of the United States (1797–1801),^[2] having earlier served as the first vice president of the United States (1789-1797). An American Founding Father,^[3] Adams was a statesman, diplomat, and a leading advocate of American independence from Great Britain. Well educated, he was an Enlightenment political theorist who promoted republicanism, as well as a strong central government, and wrote prolifically about his often seminal ideas—both in published works and in letters to his wife and key adviser Abigail Adams. Adams was a lifelong opponent of slavery, having never bought a slave.^[4] In 1770 he provided a principled, controversial, and successful legal defense to the British soldiers accused in the Boston Massacre, because he believed in the right to counsel and the "protect[ion] of innocence".^[5]

Adams came to prominence in the early stages of the American Revolution. A lawyer and public figure in Boston, as a delegate from Massachusetts to the Continental Congress, he played a leading role in persuading Congress to declare independence. He assisted Thomas Jefferson in drafting the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and was its primary advocate in the Congress. Later, as a diplomat in Europe, he helped negotiate the eventual peace treaty with Great Britain, and was responsible for obtaining vital governmental loans from Amsterdam bankers. A political theorist and historian, Adams largely wrote the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, which together with his earlier *Thoughts on Government*, influenced American political thought. One of his greatest roles was as a judge of character: in 1775, he nominated George Washington to be commander-in-chief, and 25 years later nominated John Marshall to be Chief Justice of the United States.

Adams' revolutionary credentials secured him two terms as George Washington's vice president and his own election in 1796 as the second president. During his one term as president, he encountered ferocious attacks by the Jeffersonian Republicans, as well as the dominant faction in his own Federalist Party led by his bitter

John Adams



2nd President of the United States

In office

March 4, 1797 – March 4, 1801

Vice President Thomas Jefferson

Preceded by George Washington

Succeeded by Thomas Jefferson

1st Vice President of the United States

In office

April 21, 1789* – March 4, 1797

President George Washington

Preceded by *Inaugural holder*

Succeeded by Thomas Jefferson

United States Minister to Court of St. James's

In office

April 1, 1785 – March 30, 1788

Appointed by Congress of the Confederation

Preceded by *Position established*

Succeeded by Thomas Pinckney

United States Minister to the Netherlands

In office

April 19, 1782 – March 30, 1788

enemy Alexander Hamilton. Adams signed the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts, and built up the army and navy especially in the face of an undeclared naval war (called the "Quasi-War") with France, 1798–1800. The major accomplishment of his presidency was his peaceful resolution of the conflict in the face of Hamilton's opposition.

In 1800, Adams was defeated for re-election by Thomas Jefferson and retired to Massachusetts. He later resumed his friendship with Jefferson. He and his wife founded an accomplished family line of politicians, diplomats, and historians now referred to as the Adams political family. Adams was the father of John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States. His achievements have received greater recognition in modern times, though his contributions were not initially as celebrated as those of other Founders. Adams was the first U.S. president to reside in the executive mansion that eventually became known as the White House.^[6]

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Appointed by Congress of the Confederation

Preceded by *Position established*

Succeeded by Charles Dumas (Acting)

Delegate to the Second Continental Congress from Massachusetts

In office

May 10, 1775 – June 27, 1778

Preceded by *Position established*

Succeeded by Samuel Holten

Delegate to the First Continental Congress from Massachusetts Bay

In office

September 5, 1774 – October 26, 1774

Preceded by *Position established*

Succeeded by *Position abolished*

Personal details

Born October 30, 1735
Braintree, Massachusetts
(now Quincy, Massachusetts, U.S.)

Died July 4, 1826 (aged 90)
Quincy, Massachusetts, U.S.

Resting place United First Parish Church
Quincy, Massachusetts

Political party Federalist

Spouse(s) Abigail Smith

Children Nabby
John Quincy
Susanna
Charles
Thomas
Elizabeth (Stillborn)

Alma mater Harvard University

Religion Unitarianism
(formerly Congregationalism)^[1]

Signature 

*Adams' term as Vice President is sometimes listed as starting on either March 4 or April 6. March 4 is

- 8 Presidency: 1797–1801
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the official start of the first vice presidential term. April 6 is the date on which Congress counted the electoral votes and certified a Vice President. April 21 is the date on which Adams began presiding over the Senate.

Early life and education

Adams, the eldest of three sons,^[7] was born on October 30, 1735 (October 19, 1735 Old Style, Julian calendar), in what is now Quincy, Massachusetts (then called the "north precinct" of Braintree, Massachusetts), to John Adams, Sr., and Susanna Boylston Adams.^[8] Adams's birthplace is now part of Adams National Historical Park. His father (1691–1761) was a fifth-generation descendant of Henry Adams, who emigrated from Somerset^[9] in England to Massachusetts Bay Colony in about 1638. The elder Adams, the descendant of Puritans, continued in this religious tradition by serving as a Congregationalist

deacon; he also farmed and served as a lieutenant in the militia. Further he served as a selectman, or town councilman, and supervised the building and planning of schools and roads. Adams commonly praised his father and indicated that he and his father were very close when he was a child.

Susanna Boylston Adams was a member of one of the colony's leading medical families, the Boylstons of Brookline.^{[10][11]}

Though raised in materially modest surroundings, Adams felt acutely that he had a responsibility to live up to his family heritage: he was a direct descendent of the founding generation of Puritans, who came to the American wilderness in the 1630s, established colonial presence in America, and had a profound effect on the culture, laws, and traditions of their region. Journalist Richard Brookhiser, drawing on the relevant historiography, has written that these Puritan ancestors of Adams's "believed they lived in the Bible. England under the Stuarts was Egypt; they were Israel fleeing ... to establish a refuge for godliness, a city upon a hill."^[12] By the time of John Adams' birth in 1735, Puritan tenets such as predestination were no longer as widely accepted, and many of their stricter practices had mellowed with time, but John Adams "considered them bearers of freedom, a cause that still had a holy urgency." It was a value system he believed in, and a heroic model he wished to live up to.^[12]

Young Adams went to Harvard College at age sixteen in 1751.^[13] His father expected him to become a minister, but Adams had doubts. After graduating in 1755 with an A.B., he taught school for a few years in Worcester, Massachusetts, allowing himself time to think about his career choice. After much reflection, he decided to become a lawyer, writing his father that he found among lawyers "noble and gallant achievements" but among the clergy, the "pretended sanctity of some absolute dunces." He later became a Unitarian, and dropped belief in predestination, eternal damnation, the divinity of Christ, and most other Calvinist beliefs of his Puritan ancestors. Adams then studied law in the office of John Putnam, the leading lawyer in Worcester.^[14]

In 1758, after earning an A.M. from Harvard,^[15] Adams was admitted to the bar. From an early age, he developed the habit of writing descriptions of events and impressions of men which are scattered through his diary. He put the skill to good use as a lawyer, often recording cases he observed so that he could study and reflect upon them. His report of the 1761 argument of James Otis in the Massachusetts Superior Court as to the legality of Writs of Assistance is a good example. Otis's argument inspired Adams with zeal for the cause of the American colonies.^[16]

On October 25, 1764, five days before his 29th birthday, Adams married Abigail Smith (1744–1818), his third cousin^[17] and the daughter of a Congregational minister, Rev. William Smith, at Weymouth, Massachusetts. Their children were Abigail (1765–1813); future president John Quincy Adams (1767–1848); Susanna (1768–1770); Charles (1770–1800); Thomas Boylston (1772–1832); and Elizabeth (stillborn 1777).^[18]

Adams was not a popular leader like his second cousin, Samuel Adams. Instead, his influence emerged through his work as a constitutional lawyer and his intense analysis of historical examples,^[19] together with his thorough knowledge of the law and his dedication to the principles of republicanism. Adams often found his inborn contentiousness to be a constraint in his political career.

Career before the Revolution

Opponent of Stamp Act 1765

Adams first rose to prominence as an opponent of the Stamp Act 1765, which was imposed by the British Parliament without consulting the American legislatures. Americans protested vehemently that it violated their traditional rights as Englishmen. Popular resistance, he later observed, was sparked by an oft-reprinted sermon of the Boston minister, Jonathan Mayhew, interpreting Romans 13 to elucidate the principle of just insurrection.^[20]

In 1765, Adams drafted the instructions which were sent by the inhabitants of Braintree to its representatives in the Massachusetts legislature, and which served as a model for other towns to draw up instructions to their representatives. In August 1765, he anonymously contributed four notable articles to the *Boston Gazette* (republished in *The London Chronicle* in 1768 as *True Sentiments of America*, also known as *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*). In the letter he suggested that there was a connection between the Protestant ideas that Adams' Puritan ancestors brought to New England and the ideas behind their resistance to the Stamp Act. In the former he explained that the opposition of the colonies to the Stamp Act was because the Stamp Act deprived the American colonists of two basic rights guaranteed to all Englishmen, and which all free men deserved: rights to be taxed only by consent and to be tried only by a jury of one's peers.

The "Braintree Instructions" were a succinct and forthright defense of colonial rights and liberties, while the *Dissertation* was an essay in political education.

In December 1765, he delivered a speech before the governor and council in which he pronounced the Stamp Act invalid on the ground that Massachusetts, being without representation in Parliament, had not assented to it.^[21]

In 1766, the town meeting of Braintree, Massachusetts, elected John Adams as a selectman.^[22]

Boston Massacre

In 1770, a street confrontation resulted in British soldiers killing five civilians in what became known as the Boston Massacre.^[23] The soldiers involved were arrested on criminal charges. Not surprisingly, they had trouble finding legal counsel to represent them. Finally, they asked Adams to organize their defense. He accepted, though he feared it would hurt his reputation. In their defense, Adams made his now famous quote regarding making decisions based on the evidence: "Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence."^[5] He also offered a now-famous, detailed defense of Blackstone's Ratio:

“ It is more important that innocence be protected than it is that guilt be punished, for guilt and crimes are so frequent in this world that they cannot all be punished.

But if innocence itself is brought to the bar and condemned, perhaps to die, then the citizen will say, "whether I do good or whether I do evil is immaterial, for innocence itself is no protection," and if such an idea as that were to take hold in the mind of the citizen that would be the end of security whatsoever.

”

Six of the soldiers were acquitted. Two who had fired directly into the crowd were charged with murder but were convicted only of manslaughter. Adams was paid only a small sum by the British soldiers.^{[24][25]}

Despite his previous misgivings, Adams was elected to the Massachusetts General Court (the colonial legislature) in June 1770, while still in preparation for the trial.^[26]

Dispute concerning Parliament's authority

In 1772, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson announced that he and his judges would no longer need their salaries paid by the Massachusetts legislature, because the Crown would henceforth assume payment drawn from customs revenues. Boston radicals protested and asked John Adams to explain their objections. In "Two Replies of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Governor Hutchinson" Adams argued that the colonists had never been under the sovereignty of Parliament. Their original charter was with the person of the king and their allegiance was only to him. If a workable line could not be drawn between parliamentary sovereignty and the total independence of the colonies, he continued, the colonies would have no other choice but to choose independence.

In *Novanglus; or, A History of the Dispute with America, From Its Origin, in 1754, to the Present Time* Adams attacked some essays by Daniel Leonard that defended Hutchinson's arguments for the absolute authority of Parliament over the colonies. In *Novanglus* Adams gave a point-by-point refutation of Leonard's essays, and then provided one of the most extensive and learned arguments made by the colonists against British imperial policy.



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Novanglus Essays

It was a systematic attempt by Adams to describe the origins, nature, and jurisdiction of the unwritten British constitution. Adams used his wide knowledge of English and colonial legal history to argue that the provincial legislatures were fully sovereign over their own internal affairs, and that the colonies were connected to Great Britain only through the king.

Continental Congress

Massachusetts sent Adams to the first and second Continental Congresses in 1774 and from 1775 to 1777.^[27] In June 1775, with a view of promoting union among the colonies, he nominated George Washington of Virginia as commander-in-chief of the army then assembled around Boston. His influence in Congress was great, and almost from the beginning, he sought permanent separation from Britain.

Over the next decade, Americans from every state gathered and deliberated on new governing documents. As radical as it was to write constitutions (prior tradition suggested that a society's form of government need not be codified, nor its organic law written down



Trumbull's *Declaration of Independence* depicts committee presenting draft Declaration of Independence to Congress. Adams at center has hand on hip.

in a single document), what was equally radical was the revolutionary nature of American political thought as the summer of 1776 dawned.^[28]

Thoughts on Government

Several representatives turned to Adams for advice about framing new governments. To relieve Adams of the burden of repeatedly writing out his thoughts, Richard Henry Lee published one Adams' version, as the pamphlet "*Thoughts on Government*" (April 1776),^[29] which was subsequently influential in the writing of state constitutions.^[30] Using the conceptual framework of Republicanism in the United States, the patriots believed it was the corrupt and nefarious aristocrats, in the British Parliament, and their minions stationed in America, who were guilty of the British assault on American liberty.^[31]

Adams advised that the form of government should be chosen to attain the desired ends, which are the happiness and virtue of the greatest number of people. With this goal in mind, he wrote in "*Thoughts on Government*",

There is no good government but what is republican. That the only valuable part of the British constitution is so; because the very definition of a republic is an empire of laws, and not of men.

The treatise also defended bicameralism, for "*a single assembly is liable to all the vices, follies, and frailties of an individual.*"^[32] He also suggested that there should be a separation of powers between the executive, the judicial, and the legislative branches, and further recommended that if a continental government were to be formed then it "*should sacredly be confined*" to certain enumerated powers. "*Thoughts on Government*" was enormously influential and was referenced as an authority in every state-constitution writing hall.

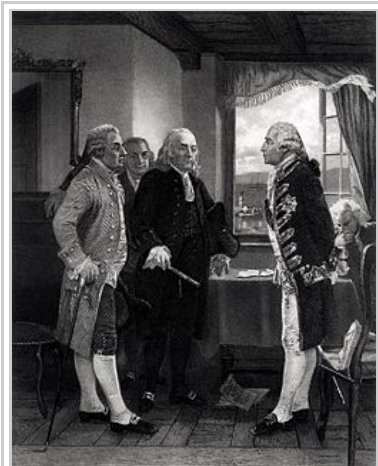
Declaration of Independence

On May 10, 1776, Adams, representative of Massachusetts, seconded the resolution his colleague from Virginia, Richard Henry Lee, which called on the colonies to adopt new (presumably independent) governments.^{[33][34][35]} Adams drafted a preamble to this resolution which elaborated on it, and which Congress approved on May 15. The full document was, as Adams put it, "independence itself"^[36] and set the stage for the formal passage of the Declaration of Independence. Once the May resolutions passed, independence became inevitable, though it still had to be declared formally. On June 7, 1776, Adams seconded the resolution of independence, introduced again by Lee, which stated, "These colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states," and championed the resolution until it was adopted by Congress on July 2, 1776.^[37]

Adams was appointed to the Committee of Five with Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Robert R. Livingston and Roger Sherman to draft the Declaration, which was to be ready when Congress voted on independence. Because the committee left no minutes, there is some uncertainty about how the drafting process proceeded—accounts written many years later by Jefferson and Adams, although frequently cited, are contradictory and not entirely reliable.^{[38][39]} What is certain is that the committee, after discussing the general outline that the document should follow, decided that Jefferson would write the first draft.^[40] The

committee in general, and Jefferson in particular, thought Adams should write the document, but Adams persuaded the committee to choose Jefferson and promised to consult with Jefferson personally.^[41] Although the first draft was written primarily by Jefferson, Adams continued to occupy the foremost place in the debate on its adoption. After editing the document further, Congress approved it on July 4. Many years later, Jefferson hailed Adams as "the pillar of [the Declaration's] support on the floor of Congress, its ablest advocate and defender against the multifarious assaults it encountered."^[42]

Government during revolution



Adams at left in Chappel's depiction of Staten Island Peace Conference

After the defeat of the Continental Army at the Battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776, Admiral Richard, Lord Howe requested the Second Continental Congress send representatives in an attempt to negotiate peace. A delegation including Adams and Benjamin Franklin met with Howe on Staten Island on September 11.^[43] Both Howe's authority and that of the delegation were limited, and they were unable to find common ground.^[44] When Lord Howe unhappily stated he could only view the American delegates as British subjects, Adams replied, "Your lordship may consider me in what light you please, [...] except that of a British subject."^[45] Lord Howe then addressed the other delegates, stating, "Mr. Adams appears to be a decided character." Adams learned many years later that his name was on a list of people specifically excluded from Howe's pardon-granting authority.^[46]

In 1777, Adams began serving as the head of the Board of War and Ordnance, as well as serving on many other important committees. In this capacity, he became a "one man war department"^[47] working eighteen-hour days and mastering the details of raising, equipping, and fielding an army under civilian control. He also authored the "Plan of Treaties," laying out the Congress' requirements for the crucial treaty with France.^[48]

In Europe

Congress twice dispatched Adams to represent the fledgling union in Europe, first in 1777, and again in 1779. He was accompanied, on both occasions, by his eldest son, John Quincy Adams (who was ten years old at the time of the first voyage).

France

Adams sailed for France aboard the Continental Navy frigate *Boston* on February 15, 1778. The trip through winter storms was treacherous, with lightning injuring 19 sailors and killing one. Adams' ship was then pursued by but successfully evaded several British frigates in the mid-Atlantic. Toward the coast of Spain, Adams himself took up arms to help capture a heavily armed British merchantman ship, the *Martha*. Later, a cannon malfunction killed one and injured five more of Adams' crew before the ship finally arrived in France.^[49]

Adams was in some regards an unlikely choice inasmuch as he did not speak French, the international language of diplomacy at the time.^[50] His first stay in Europe, between April 1, 1778, and June 17, 1779, was largely unproductive, and he returned to his home in Braintree in early August 1779.

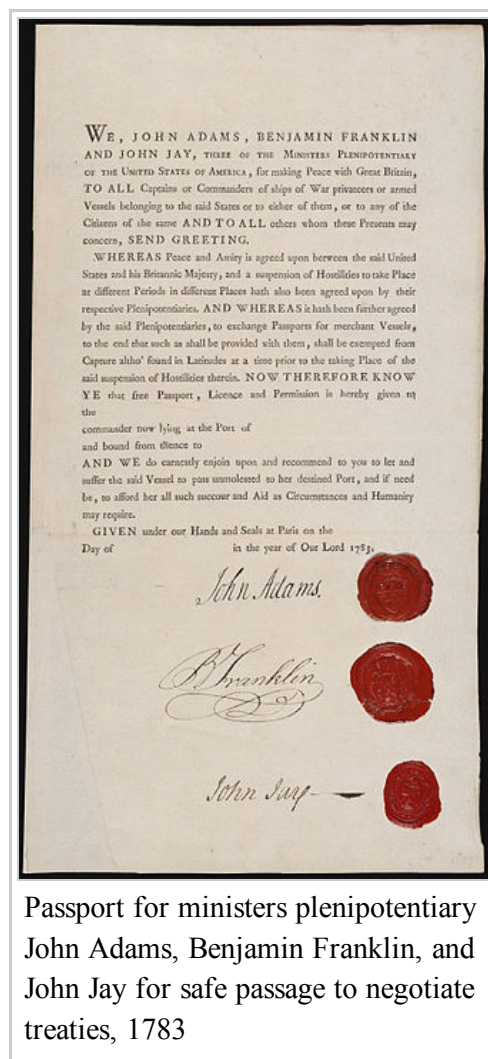
Between September 1 and October 30, 1779, he drafted the Massachusetts Constitution together with Samuel Adams and James Bowdoin. He was selected in September 1779 to return to France and, following the conclusion of the Massachusetts constitutional convention, left on November 14^[51] aboard the French frigate *Sensible*.

On the second trip to Paris, Adams was appointed as Minister Plenipotentiary charged with the mission of negotiating a treaty of peace, amity and commerce with peace commissioners from Britain. The French government, however, did not approve of Adams' appointment and subsequently, on the insistence of the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay and Henry Laurens were appointed to cooperate with Adams, although Jefferson did not go to Europe and Laurens was posted to the Dutch Republic. In the event Jay, Adams, and Franklin played the major part in the negotiations. Overruling Franklin and distrustful of Vergennes, Jay and Adams decided not to consult with France. Instead, they dealt directly with the British commissioners.^[52] Inspired by the American Philosophical Society, Adams became one of the founders and charter members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1780.^{[53][54]}

Throughout the negotiations, Adams was especially determined that the right of the United States to the fisheries along the Atlantic coast should be recognized. The American negotiators were able to secure a favorable treaty, which gave Americans ownership of all lands east of the Mississippi, except East and West Florida, which were transferred to Spain. The treaty was signed on November 30, 1782.

Holland

After the peace negotiations began, Adams had spent some time as the ambassador in the Dutch Republic, then one of the few other Republics in the world (the Republic of Venice and the Old Swiss Confederacy being the other notable ones). In July 1780, he had been authorized to execute the duties previously assigned to Laurens. With the aid of the Dutch Patriot leader Joan van der Capellen tot den Pol, Adams secured the recognition of the United States as an independent government at The Hague on April 19, 1782.^[55] During this visit, he also negotiated a loan of five million guilders financed by Nicolaas van Staphorst and Wilhelm Willink.^[56] In October 1782, he negotiated with the Dutch a treaty of amity and commerce, the first such treaty between the United States and a foreign power following the 1778 treaty with France. The house that Adams bought during this stay in The Netherlands became the first American-owned embassy on foreign soil anywhere in the world.^[57] For two months during 1783, Adams lodged in London with radical publisher John Stockdale.^[58]



Passport for ministers plenipotentiary John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and John Jay for safe passage to negotiate treaties, 1783

In 1784 and 1785, he was one of the architects of far-going trade relations between the United States and Prussia. The Prussian ambassador in The Hague, Friedrich Wilhelm von Thulemeyer, was involved, as were Jefferson and Franklin, who were in Paris.^[59]

Britain

In 1785, John Adams was appointed the first American minister to the Court of St. James's (ambassador to Great Britain). In his diary he mentions an exchange between himself and another ambassador who asked if he had often been in England and if he had English relations, to which Adams explained he had only been to England once for a two-month visit back in 1783 and that he had no relations in the country. The ambassador asked "None, how can that be? you are of English extraction?" to which Adams replied "Neither my father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, great grandfather or great grandmother, nor any other relation that I know of, or care a farthing for, has been in England these one hundred and fifty years; so that you see I have not one drop of blood in my veins but what is American".^[60]

When he was presented to his former sovereign, George III, the King intimated that he was aware of Adams' lack of confidence in the French government. Adams admitted this, stating: "I must avow to your Majesty that I have no attachment but to my own country."

Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom referred to this episode on July 7, 1976, at the White House. She said:

John Adams, America's first ambassador, said to my ancestor, King George III, that it was his desire to help with the restoration of "the old good nature and the old good humor between our peoples." That restoration has long been made, and the links of language, tradition, and personal contact have maintained it.^[61]

While in London, John and Abigail had to suffer the stares and hostility of the Court, and chose to escape it when they could by seeking out Richard Price, minister of Newington Green Unitarian Church and instigator of the Revolution Controversy. Both admired Price very much, and Abigail took to heart the teachings of the man and his protégée Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.^[62]

Adams' home in England, a house off London's Grosvenor Square, still stands and is commemorated by a plaque. He returned to the United States in 1788 to continue his domestic political life.

Constitutional ideas



A medallion produced in Amsterdam for John Adams in 1782 by Johann Georg Holtzhey to celebrate recognition of the United States as an independent nation by The Netherlands, from the coin collection of the Teylers Museum

Massachusetts's new constitution, ratified in 1780 and written largely by Adams himself, structured its government most closely on his views of politics and society.^[63] It was the first constitution written by a special committee and ratified by the people. It was also the first to feature a bicameral legislature, a clear and distinct executive with a partial (two-thirds) veto (although he was restrained by an executive council), and a distinct judicial branch.

While in London, Adams published a work entitled *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* (1787).^[65] In it he repudiated the views of Turgot and other European writers as to the viciousness of the framework of state governments. Turgot argued that countries that lacked aristocracies needn't have bicameral legislatures. He thought that republican governments feature "all authorities into one center, that of the nation."^[66] In the book, Adams suggested that "the rich, the well-born and the able" should be set apart from other men in a senate—that would prevent them from dominating the lower house. Wood (2006) has maintained that Adams had become intellectually irrelevant by the time the Federal Constitution was ratified. By then, American political thought, transformed by more than a decade of vigorous and searching debate as well as shaping experiential pressures, had abandoned the classical conception of politics which understood government as a mirror of social estates. Americans' new conception of popular sovereignty now saw the people-at-large as the sole possessors of power in the realm. All agents of the government enjoyed mere portions of the people's power and only for a limited time. Adams had completely missed this concept and revealed his continued attachment to the older version of politics.^{[28][67]} Yet Wood overlooks Adams' peculiar definition of the term "republic," and his support for a constitution ratified by the people.^[68] He also underplays Adams' belief in checks and balances. "Power must be opposed to power, and interest to interest," Adams wrote; this sentiment would later be echoed by James Madison's famous statement that "[a]mbition must be made to counteract ambition" in *The Federalist* No. 51, in explaining the powers of the branches of the United States federal government under the new Constitution.^{[69][70]} Adams did as much as anyone to put the idea of "checks and balances" on the intellectual map.

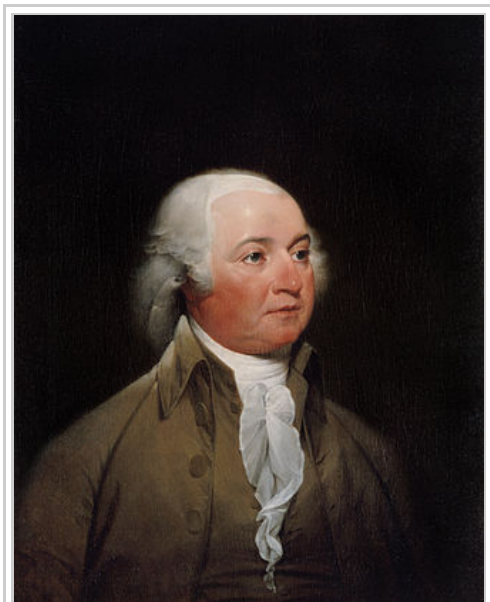
"The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one mile square, without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves."

– John Adams, September 10, 1785^[64]

Adams' *Defence* can be read as an articulation of the classical republican theory of mixed government. Adams contended that social classes exist in every political society, and that a good government must accept that reality. For centuries, dating back to Aristotle, a mixed regime balancing monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy—that is, the king, the nobles, and the people—was required to preserve order and liberty.^[71]

Adams never bought a slave and declined on principle to employ slave labor.^[4] Abigail Adams opposed slavery and employed free blacks in preference to her father's two domestic slaves. John Adams spoke out in 1777 against a bill to emancipate slaves in Massachusetts, saying that the issue was presently too divisive, and so the legislation should "sleep for a time."^[72] He also was against use of black soldiers in the Revolution, due to opposition from southerners.^[72] Adams generally tried to keep the issue out of national politics, because of the anticipated southern response.^{[72][73]} Though it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date on which slavery was abolished in Massachusetts, a common view is that it was abolished no later than 1780, when it was forbidden by implication in the Declaration of Rights that John Adams wrote into the Massachusetts Constitution.^[74]

Vice Presidency



Portrait of Adams by John Trumbull, 1792–93

While Washington won the presidential election of 1789 with 69 votes in the electoral college, Adams came in second with 34 votes and became Vice President. According to David McCullough, what he really might have wanted was to be the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. He presided over the Senate but otherwise played a minor role in the politics of the early 1790s; he was reelected Vice President in 1792. Washington seldom asked Adams for input on policy and legal issues during his tenure as vice president.^[75]

At the start of Washington's administration, Adams became deeply involved in a month-long Senate controversy over the official title of the President. Adams favored grandiose titles such as "His Majesty the President" or "His High Mightiness, the President of the United States and Protector of Their Liberties." The plain "President of the United States" eventually won the debate. The perceived pomposity of his stance, along with his being overweight, led to Adams earning the nickname "His Rotundity."^[76]

As president of the Senate, Adams cast 29 tie-breaking votes—a record that only John C. Calhoun came close to tying, with 28.^[77] His votes protected the president's sole authority over the removal of appointees and influenced the location of the national capital. On at least one occasion, he persuaded senators to vote against legislation that he opposed, and he frequently lectured the Senate on procedural and policy matters. Adams' political views and his active role in the Senate made him a natural target for critics of the Washington administration. Toward the end of his first term, as a result of a threatened resolution that would have silenced him except for procedural and policy matters, he began to exercise more restraint. When the two political parties formed, he joined the Federalist Party, but never got on well with its dominant leader Alexander Hamilton. Because of Adams' seniority and the need for a northern president, he was elected as the Federalist nominee for president in 1796, over Thomas Jefferson, the leader of the opposition Democratic-Republican Party. His success was due to peace and prosperity; Washington and Hamilton had averted war with Britain with the Jay Treaty of 1795.^[78]

Adams' two terms as Vice President were frustrating experiences for a man of his vigor, intellect, and vanity. He complained to his wife Abigail, "My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived."^[79]

Election of 1796

The 1796 election was the first contested election under the First Party System. Adams was the presidential candidate of the Federalist Party and Thomas Pinckney, the Governor of South Carolina, was also running as a Federalist (at this point, the vice president was whoever came in second, so no running mates existed in the modern sense). The Federalists wanted Adams as their presidential candidate to crush Thomas Jefferson's bid. Most Federalists would have preferred Hamilton to be a candidate. Although Hamilton and his followers supported Adams, they also held a grudge against him. They did consider him to be the lesser

of the two evils. However, they thought Adams lacked the seriousness and popularity that had caused Washington to be successful and feared that Adams was too vain, opinionated, unpredictable, and stubborn to follow their directions.^[80]

Adams' opponents were former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, who was joined by Senator Aaron Burr of New York on the Democratic-Republican ticket.

As was customary, Adams stayed in his home town of Quincy rather than actively campaign for the Presidency. He wanted to stay out of what he called the silly and wicked game. His party, however, campaigned for him, while the Democratic-Republicans campaigned for Jefferson.

It was expected that Adams would dominate the votes in New England, while Jefferson was expected to win in the Southern states. In the end, Adams won the election by a narrow margin of 71 electoral votes to 68 for Jefferson (who became the vice president).^[81]

Presidency: 1797–1801

As President, Adams followed Washington's lead in making the presidency the example of republican values, and stressing civic virtue; he was never implicated in any scandal. Adams continued not just the Washington cabinet but all the major programs of the Washington Administration as well. Adams continued to strengthen the central government, in particular by expanding the navy and army. His economic programs were a continuation of those of Hamilton, who regularly consulted with key cabinet members, especially the powerful Secretary of the Treasury, Oliver Wolcott, Jr.^[82] Historians debate his decision to keep the Washington cabinet. Though they were very close to Hamilton, their retention ensured a smoother succession.^[83] He remained quite independent of his cabinet throughout his term, often making decisions despite strong opposition from it. It was out of this management style that he avoided war with France, despite a strong desire among his cabinet secretaries for war. The Quasi-War with France resulted in the disentanglement with European affairs that Washington had sought. It also, like other conflicts, had enormous psychological benefits, as America saw itself as holding its own against a European power.



President's House, Philadelphia. The presidential mansion of George Washington before him, Adams occupied this Philadelphia mansion from March 1797 to May 1800. He then became the first President to occupy the Executive mansion in Washington, D.C.

Historian George Herring argues that Adams was the most independent-minded of all the founders.^[84] Though he aligned with the Federalists, he was more his own party, disagreeing with the Federalists almost as much as he did the Democratic-Republican opposition.^[85] Though often described as "prickly", his independence meant that he had a talent for making good decisions in the face of almost universal hostility.^[84] Indeed, it was Adams' decision to push for peace with France, rather than to continue hostilities, that hurt his popularity.^[86] Though this decision played an important role in his reelection defeat, he was ultimately thrilled with that decision, so much so that he had it engraved on his tombstone.^[87] Adams spent much of his term at his home in Massachusetts, ignoring the details of political patronage that were not ignored by others. Adams' combative spirit did not always lend itself to presidential decorum, as

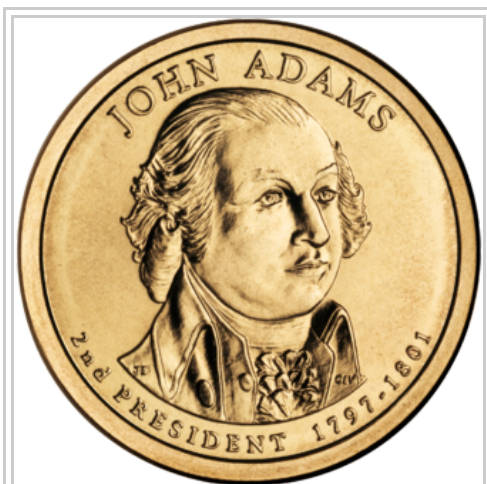
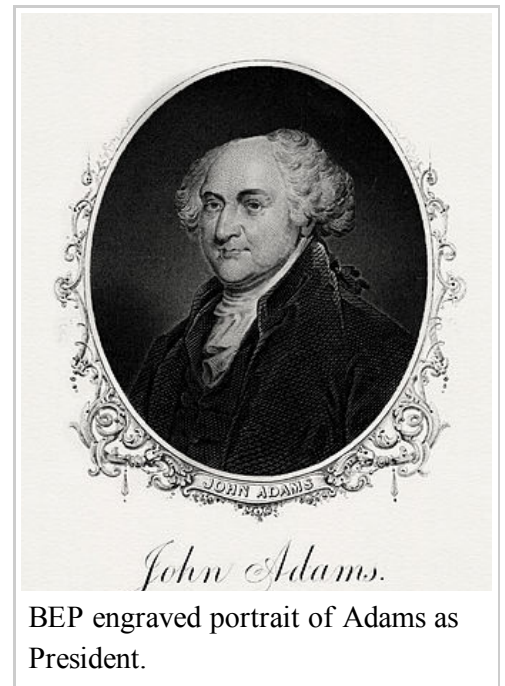
Adams himself admitted in his old age: "[As president] I refused to suffer in silence. I sighed, sobbed, and groaned, and sometimes screeched and screamed. And I must confess to my shame and sorrow that I sometimes swore."^[88]

Quasi-War and peace with France

John Adams said, in a letter to James Lloyd, January 1815, of peace:

"I desire no other inscription over my gravestone than: Here lies John Adams, who took upon himself the responsibility of the peace with France in the year 1800."^[89]

Adams' term was marked by intense disputes over foreign policy, in particular a desire to stay out of the expanding conflict in Europe. Britain and France were at war; Hamilton and the Federalists favored Britain, while Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans favored France.^[90] The French wanted Jefferson to be elected president, and when he wasn't, they became even more belligerent.^[91] When Adams entered office, he realized that he needed to continue Washington's policy of staying out of the European war. Indeed, the intense battle over the Jay Treaty in 1795 permanently polarized politics up and down the nation, marking the start of the First Party System.^[92] The French saw America as Britain's junior partner and began seizing American merchant ships that were trading with the British. Americans remained pro-French, due to France's assistance during the Revolutionary War. Because of this, Americans wouldn't rally behind Adams, nor anyone else, to stop France.^{[93][94]}



Presidential Dollar of John Adams, released in 2007

That problem ended with the XYZ Affair, in which the French demanded huge bribes before any discussions could begin. Before this event, Americans mostly supported France, but after the event, most opposed France. The Jeffersonians, who were friends to France, were embarrassed and quickly became the minority as Americans began to demand full scale war. Adams and his advisers knew that America would be unable to win such a conflict, as France at the time was successfully fighting much of Europe. Instead, Adams pursued a strategy whereby American ships would harass French ships in an effort to stop the French assaults on American interests. This was the undeclared naval war between the U.S. and France, called the Quasi-War, which broke out in 1798. There was danger of invasion from the much larger and more powerful French forces, so Adams and the Federalist congress built up the army, bringing back Washington at its head. Washington wanted Hamilton to be his second-in-command and, given

Washington's fame, Adams reluctantly gave in.^[95] Given Washington's age, as everyone knew, Hamilton was truly in charge. Adams rebuilt the Navy, adding six fast, powerful frigates, most notably the USS *Constitution*. To pay for the new Army and Navy, Congress imposed new taxes on property: the Direct Tax

of 1798.^{[93][96]} It was the first (and last) such federal tax. Taxpayers were angry, nowhere more so than in southeast Pennsylvania, where the bloodless Fries's Rebellion broke out among rural German-speaking farmers who protested what they saw as a threat to their republican liberties and to their churches.^{[97][98]}

Hamilton assumed a high degree of control over the War department, and the rift between Adams and Hamilton's supporters grew wider. They acted as though Hamilton were president by demanding that he control the army. They also refused to recognize the necessity of giving prominent Democratic-Republicans positions in the army, which Adams wanted to do in order to gain Democratic-Republican support. By building a large standing army, Hamilton's supporters raised popular alarms and played into the hands of the Democratic-Republicans. They also alienated Adams and his large personal following. They shortsightedly viewed the Federalist party as their own tool and ignored the need to pull together the entire nation in the face of war with France.^[99] Overall, however, due to patriotism and a series of naval victories, the war remained popular and Adams' popularity remained high.

Adams knew victory in an all out war against imperial France would be impossible, so despite the threats to his popularity, he sought peace. In February 1799, he stunned the country by sending diplomat William Vans Murray on a peace mission to France. Napoleon, realizing that the conflict was pointless, signaled his readiness for friendly relations. At the Convention of 1800 the Treaty of Alliance of 1778 was superseded and the United States could now be free of foreign entanglements, as Washington advised in his farewell address. He brought in John Marshall as Secretary of State and demobilized the emergency army.^[100] Adams avoided war, but deeply split his own party in the process. As he suspected would happen, peace hurt his popularity. Nevertheless, Adams was extremely proud of having kept the nation out of war.^[101]

Alien and Sedition Acts

Though the Democratic-Republicans were discredited by the XYZ Affair, their opposition to the Federalists remained high. In an environment of war, and with recent memories of the reign of terror during the French Revolution, nerves remained explosive. Democratic-Republicans had supported France, and some even seemed to want an event similar to the French Revolution to come to America to overthrow the Federalists.^[102] When Democratic-Republicans in some states refused to enforce federal laws, and even threatened possible rebellion, some Federalists threatened to send in an army and force them to capitulate.^[103] As the paranoia sweeping Europe was bleeding over into America, calls for secession reached unparalleled heights, and America seemed ready to rip itself apart.^[103] Some of this was seen by Federalists as having been caused by French and French-sympathizing immigrants. Federalists in Congress therefore passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which were signed by Adams in 1798.^{[104][105]}

There were four separate acts, the Naturalization Act, the Alien Act, the Alien Enemies Act, and the Sedition Act. These four acts were passed to cool down the opposition by stopping their most extreme firebrands. The Naturalization Act changed the period of residence required before an immigrant could attain American citizenship to 14 years (naturalized citizens tended to vote for the Democratic-Republicans). The Alien Friends Act and the Alien Enemies Act allowed the president to deport any foreigner he thought dangerous to the country. The Sedition Act made it a crime to publish "false, scandalous, and malicious writing" against the government or its officials. Punishments included 2–5 years in prison and fines of up to \$5,000. Although Adams had not originated or promoted any of these acts, he nevertheless signed them into law.

Those acts, and the high-profile prosecution of a number of newspaper editors and one member of Congress by the Federalists, became highly controversial. Some historians have noted that the Alien and Sedition Acts were relatively rarely enforced, as only 10 convictions under the Sedition Act have been identified and as Adams never signed a deportation order, and that the furor over the Alien and Sedition Acts was mainly stirred up by the Democratic-Republicans. However, other historians emphasize that the Acts were highly controversial from the outset, resulting in many aliens leaving the country voluntarily, and created an atmosphere where opposing the Federalists, even on the floor of Congress, could and did result in prosecution. The election of 1800 became a bitter and volatile battle, with each side expressing extraordinary fear of the other party and its policies.^[106] After Democratic-Republicans won in 1800, they used the acts against Federalists before the acts finally expired.^[107]

Reelection campaign 1800

The death of Washington, in 1799, weakened the Federalists, as they lost the one man who symbolized and united the party. In the presidential election of 1800, Adams and his fellow Federalist candidate, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, went against the Republican duo of Jefferson and Burr. Hamilton tried his hardest to sabotage Adams' campaign in the hope of boosting Pinckney's chances of winning the presidency. In the end, Adams lost narrowly to Jefferson by 65 to 73 electoral votes, with New York casting the decisive vote.

Adams was defeated because of better organization by the Republicans and Federalist disunity; by the controversy of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the popularity of Jefferson in the south, and the effective politicking of Aaron Burr in New York State, where the legislature (which selected the electoral college) shifted from Federalist to Democratic-Republican on the basis of a few wards in New York City controlled by Burr's machine.^{[108][109]} Ultimately, however, Jefferson owed his election victory to the South's inflated number of Electors, which counted slaves under the three-fifths compromise.^[110]

In the closing months of his term Adams became the first president to occupy the new, but unfinished President's Mansion (later known as the White House), beginning November 1, 1800.^{[6][111]}

Administration and cabinet

The Adams Cabinet		
OFFICE	NAME	TERM
President	John Adams	1797–1801
Vice President	Thomas Jefferson	1797–1801
Secretary of State	Timothy Pickering	1797–1800
	John Marshall	1800–1801

Speeches

Inaugural Addresses

- Inaugural Address (March 4, 1797)

State of the Union Address

- First State of the Union Address (November

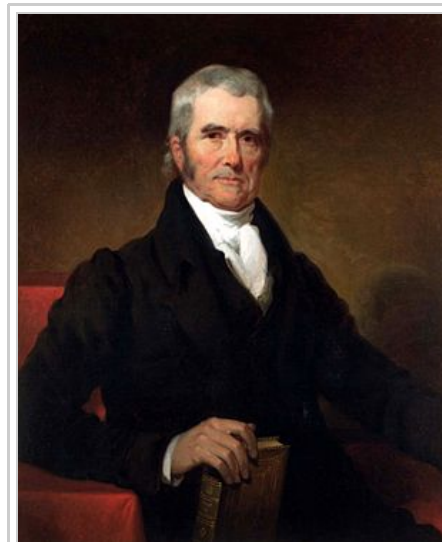


John Adams, as depicted in 1938 on a two-cent American president U.S. Postage stamp

Secretary of Treasury	Oliver Wolcott, Jr.	1797–1801
	Samuel Dexter	1801
Secretary of War	James McHenry	1796–1800
	Samuel Dexter	1800–1801
Attorney General	Charles Lee	1797–1801
Secretary of the Navy	Benjamin Stoddert	1798–1801

22, 1797)

- Second State of the Union Address, (December 8, 1798)
- Third State of the Union Address, (December 3, 1799)
- Fourth State of the Union Address, (November 22, 1800)



Adams' appointment of John Marshall as Chief Justice of the United States is often cited as one of his most important contributions.

Judicial appointments

Supreme court

Supreme Court Appointments by President Adams

Position	Name	Term
Chief Justice	John Jay	1800 (declined)
	John Marshall	1801–1835
Associate Justice	Bushrod Washington	1799–1829
	Alfred Moore	1800–1804

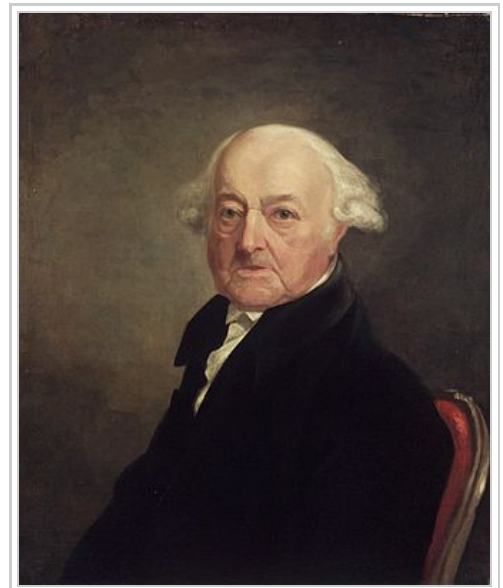
One of Adams' greatest legacies was his naming of John Marshall as the fourth Chief Justice of the United States to succeed Oliver Ellsworth, who had retired due to ill health. Marshall's long tenure represents the most lasting influence of the Federalists, as Marshall infused the Constitution with a judicious and carefully reasoned nationalistic interpretation and established the Judicial Branch as the equal of the Executive and Legislative branches.^[112]

Other judicial appointments

The lame-duck session of Congress enacted the Judiciary Act of 1801, which created a set of federal appeals courts between the district courts and the Supreme Court. The purpose of the statute was twofold—first, to remedy the defects in the federal judicial system inherent in the Judiciary Act of 1789, and, second, to enable the defeated Federalists to staff the new judicial offices with loyal Federalists in the face of the party's defeat in presidential and congressional elections in 1800.^[113] As his term was expiring, Adams filled the vacancies created by this statute by appointing a series of judges, whom his opponents called the "Midnight Judges" because most of them were formally appointed days before the presidential term expired. Most of these judges lost their posts when the Jeffersonian Republicans enacted the Judiciary Act of 1802, abolishing the courts created by the Judiciary Act of 1801 and returning the structure of the federal courts to its original structure as specified in the 1789 statute.

After his presidency

Following his 1800 defeat, Adams retired into private life. Depressed when he left office, he did not attend Jefferson's inauguration, making him one of only four surviving presidents (i.e., those who did not die in office) not to attend his successor's inauguration. Interestingly, one of the other three was his son, John Quincy Adams. (The other two were Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon.) Adams' correspondence with Jefferson at the time of the transition suggests that he did not feel the animosity or resentment that later scholars have attributed to him. He left Washington before Jefferson's inauguration as much out of sorrow at the death of his son Charles Adams (due in part to the younger man's alcoholism) and his desire to rejoin his wife Abigail, who had left for Massachusetts months before the inauguration. Adams resumed farming at his home, Peacefield, in the town of Quincy (formerly a part of the town of Braintree, as it was earlier in his life). He began to work on an autobiography (which he never finished), and resumed correspondence with such old friends as Benjamin Waterhouse and Benjamin Rush. He also began a bitter and resentful correspondence with an old family friend, Mercy Otis Warren, protesting how in her 1805 history of the American Revolution she had, in his view, caricatured his political beliefs and misrepresented his services to the country. Primarily, this revolved around a dispute about whether Adams was sufficiently republican in Warren's view, instead of monarchical, and was related to the Federalist/Republican political divide.^[114]



John Adams, ca 1816, by Samuel F.B. Morse (Brooklyn Museum)

After Jefferson's retirement from public life in 1809 after two terms as President, Adams became more vocal. For three years he published a stream of letters in the *Boston Patriot* newspaper, presenting a long and almost line-by-line refutation of an 1800 pamphlet by Hamilton attacking his conduct and character. Though Hamilton had died in 1804 from a mortal wound sustained in his notorious duel with Aaron Burr, Adams felt the need to vindicate his character against the *New Yorker's* vehement attacks.^[115]

Adams' retirement, at twenty-five years, four months, was the longest retirement of any president until Herbert Hoover surpassed the mark on August 5, 1958. His retirement currently ranks as the fourth longest, after Jimmy Carter (33 years, 311 days to date), Hoover (31 years, 230 days) and Gerald Ford (29 years, 340 days). Interestingly, all four Presidents who have lived more than twenty-five years after their Presidency have been single-term Presidents (or less, in the case of Ford).

Correspondence with Jefferson

In early 1812, Adams reconciled with Jefferson. Their mutual friend Benjamin Rush, a fellow signer of the Declaration of Independence who had been corresponding with both, encouraged each man to reach out to the other. On New Year's Day 1812, Adams sent a brief, friendly note to Jefferson to accompany the delivery of "two pieces of homespun," a two-volume collection of lectures on rhetoric by John Quincy Adams. Jefferson replied immediately with a warm, friendly letter, and the two men revived their friendship, which they conducted by mail. The correspondence that they resumed in 1812 lasted the rest of their lives, and thereafter has been hailed as one of their greatest legacies and a monument of American literature.^[116]

Their letters are rich in insight into both the period and the minds of the two Presidents and revolutionary leaders. Their correspondence lasted fourteen years, and consisted of 158 letters.^[116] It was in these years that the two men discussed "natural aristocracy." Jefferson said, "The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of society. May we not even say that the form of government is best which provides most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?"^[117] Adams wondered if it ever would be so clear who these people were, "Your distinction between natural and artificial aristocracy does not appear to me well founded. Birth and wealth are conferred on some men as imperiously by nature, as genius, strength, or beauty. . . . When aristocracies are established by human laws and honour, wealth, and power are made hereditary by municipal laws and political institutions, then I acknowledge artificial aristocracy to commence."^[118] It would always be true, Adams argued, that fate would bestow influence on some men for reasons other than true wisdom and virtue. That being the way of nature, he thought such "talents" were natural. A good government, therefore, had to account for that reality.

Family life

Sixteen months before John Adams' death, his son, John Quincy Adams, became the sixth president of the United States (1825–1829), the only son of a former president to hold the office until George W. Bush in 2001.



John Adams was nearly 89 when, at the request of his son, John Quincy Adams, he posed a final time for Gilbert Stuart (1823).

Adams' daughter Abigail ("Nabby") was married to Representative William Stephens Smith, but she returned to her parents' home after the failure of her marriage. She died of breast cancer in 1813. His son Charles died an alcoholic in 1800. His wife Abigail died of typhoid on October 28, 1818. His son Thomas and his family lived with Adams and Louisa Smith (Abigail's niece by her brother William) to the end of Adams' life.^[114]

Death

Less than a month before his death, John Adams issued a statement about the destiny of the United States, which historians such as Joy Hakim have characterized as a "warning" for his fellow citizens.

Adams said:

My best wishes, in the joys, and festivities, and the solemn services of that day on which will be completed the fiftieth year from its birth, of the independence of the United States: a memorable epoch in the annals of the human race, destined in future history to form the brightest or the blackest page, according to the use or the abuse of those political institutions by which they shall, in time to come, be shaped by the human mind.^[119]



Tombs of Presidents John Adams (distance) and John Quincy Adams (foreground) and their wives, in a family crypt beneath the United First Parish Church.

On Tuesday, July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, at approximately 6:20 PM,^[120] Adams died at his home in Quincy. Told that it was the Fourth, he answered clearly, "It is a great day. It is a *good* day." Relatives who were at his bedside reported that his last words were "Jefferson survives";^[121] news of Jefferson's death earlier that day did not reach Boston until after Adams' death. Adams and Jefferson are the only two Presidents to die on the same day; the nearest two other presidents have died to each other was 27 days apart (between Harry S. Truman on December 26, 1972, and Lyndon B. Johnson on January 22, 1973). His death left Charles Carroll of Carrollton as the last surviving signatory of the Declaration of Independence.

Adams' crypt lies at United First Parish Church (also known as the *Church of the Presidents*) in Quincy, the site of his funeral was held on July 7. He and Abigail had originally been buried in Hancock Cemetery, across the road from the Church. News of his death did not reach his son, the President, until Sunday, July 9, near Baltimore, after he had received word to hurry back to Boston earlier in the day. The younger Adams, in fact, knew about Jefferson's death before his own father's.^[122] Until the older Adams' record was broken by Ronald Reagan in 2001, he was the nation's longest-living President (90 years, 247 days) maintaining that record for 175 years. Adams is currently the third longest-living president, behind Reagan and Gerald R. Ford, who lived forty-five days longer than Reagan. Adams also held the title of oldest living President longer than anyone until Hoover again passed his record on July 27, 1959. Adams is still behind only Hoover in that mark.

Political philosophy and views

Monarchical and hereditary institutions

Throughout his lifetime Adams expressed controversial and shifting views regarding the virtues of monarchical and hereditary political institutions.^{[123][124]} At times he conveyed substantial support for these approaches,^{[123][124][125]} suggesting for example that "hereditary monarchy or aristocracy" are the "only institutions that can possibly preserve the laws and liberties of the people."^[125] Yet at other times he distanced himself from such ideas, calling himself "a mortal and irreconcilable enemy to Monarchy" and "no friend to hereditary limited monarchy in America."^[126] Such denials did not assuage his critics, and Adams was "dogged" throughout his career with accusations of being a Monarchist.^[127] Many of these attacks are considered to have been scurrilous, including suggestions that he was planning to "crown himself king" and "grooming John Quincy as heir to the throne".^[127] However, Peter Shaw has argued that:

[T]he inevitable attacks on Adams, crude as they were, stumbled on a truth that he did not admit to himself. He was leaning toward monarchy and aristocracy (as distinct from kings and aristocrats) at the time he wrote 'Davila', though he did not directly reveal this in its essays. Decidedly, sometime after he became vice-president, Adams concluded that the United States would have to adopt a hereditary legislature and a monarch... and he outlined a plan by which state conventions would appoint hereditary senators while a national one appointed a president for life.^[123]

In apparent contradiction to such notions, Adams claimed in a letter to Thomas Jefferson:

If you suppose that I have ever had a design or desire of attempting to introduce a government of King, Lords and Commons, or in other words an hereditary Executive, or an hereditary Senate, either into the government of the United States, or that of any individual state, in this country, you are wholly mistaken. There is not such a thought expressed or intimated in any public writing or private letter of mine, and I may safely challenge all of mankind to produce such a passage and quote the chapter and verse.^[128]

Religious views

Adams was raised a Congregationalist, since his ancestors were Puritans. According to his biographer David McCullough, "as his family and friends knew, Adams was both a devout Christian, and an independent thinker".^[129] In a letter to Benjamin Rush, Adams credited religion with the success of his ancestors since their migration to the New World in the 1630s.^[130] Adams was educated at Harvard when the influence of deism was growing there, and sometimes used deistic terms in his speeches and writing.^[131] He also believed that regular church service was beneficial to man's moral sense. Everett (1966) concludes that "Adams strove for a religion based on a common sense sort of reasonableness" and maintained that religion must change and evolve toward perfection.^[132] Fielding (1940) argues that Adams' beliefs synthesized Puritan, deist, and humanist concepts. Adams at one point said that Christianity had originally been revelatory, but was being misinterpreted and misused in the service of superstition, fraud,

and unscrupulous power.^[133] Goff (1993) acknowledges Fielding's "persuasive argument that Adams never was a deist because he allowed the suspension of the laws of nature and believed that evil was internal, not the result of external institutions."^[134]

Frazer (2004) notes that, while Adams shared many perspectives with deists, "Adams clearly was not a deist. Deism rejected any and all supernatural activity and intervention by God; consequently, deists did not believe in miracles or God's providence....Adams, however, did believe in miracles, providence, and, to a certain extent, the Bible as revelation."^[135] Frazer argues that Adams' "theistic rationalism, like that of the other Founders, was a sort of middle ground between Protestantism and deism."^[136] By contrast, David L. Holmes has argued that John Adams, beginning as a Congregationalist, ended his days as a Christian Unitarian, accepting central tenets of the Unitarian creed but also accepting Jesus as the redeemer of humanity and the biblical account of his miracles as true.^[137] In common with many of his Protestant contemporaries, Adams criticized the claims to universal authority made by the Roman Catholic Church.^[138] In 1796, Adams denounced political opponent Thomas Paine's Deistic criticisms of Christianity in *The Age of Reason*, saying, "The Christian religion is, above all the religions that ever prevailed or existed in ancient or modern times, the religion of wisdom, virtue, equity and humanity, let the Blackguard Paine say what he will."^[139]



The United First Parish Church in Quincy.

Ancestry

Biographies

The first notable biography of John Adams appeared as the first two volumes of *The Works of John Adams, Esq., Second President of the United States*, edited by Charles Francis Adams and published between 1850 and 1856 by Charles C. Little and James Brown in Boston. This biography's first seven chapters were the work of John Quincy Adams, but the rest of the biography was the work of Charles Francis Adams.

The first modern biography was *Honest John Adams*, a 1933 biography by the noted French specialist in American history Gilbert Chinard, who came to Adams after writing his acclaimed 1929 biography of Thomas Jefferson. For a generation, Chinard's work was regarded as the best life of Adams, and it is still a key factor in determining the themes of Adams biographical and historical scholarship. Following the opening of the Adams family papers in the 1950s, Page Smith published the first major biography to use these previously inaccessible primary sources; his biography won a 1962 Bancroft Prize but was criticized for its scanting of Adams' intellectual life and its diffuseness. In 1975, Peter Shaw published *The Character of John Adams*, a thematic biography noted for its graceful prose and its psychological insight into Adams' life. The 1992 character study by Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John*

Adams, was Ellis's first major publishing success and remains one of the most useful and insightful studies of Adams' personality. In 1993, the Revolutionary War historian and biographer John E. Ferling published his acclaimed *John Adams*, also noted for its psychological sensitivity; many scholars regard it as the best biography to date.

In 2001, the popular historian David McCullough published a large biography, also entitled *John Adams*, that won various awards and general acclaim. McCullough's biography was developed into a 2008 TV miniseries, in which Paul Giamatti portrayed John Adams. Finance writer James Grant published *John Adams, Party of One* in 2005.

See also

- List of Presidents of the United States, sortable by previous experience
- Hannah Adams
- John Adams Building of the Library of Congress
- Suffolk County Courthouse, also known as the "John Adams Courthouse"

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41. ^ From Adams' notes: "Why will you not? You ought to do it." "I will not." "Why?" "Reasons enough." "What can be your reasons?" "Reason first, you are a Virginian, and a Virginian ought to appear at the head of this business. Reason second, I am obnoxious, suspected, and unpopular. You are very much otherwise. Reason third, you can write ten times better than I can." "Well," said Jefferson, "if you are decided, I will do as well as I can." "Very well. When you have drawn it up, we will have a meeting."": Digital History (http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/learning_history/revolution/revolution_declaringindependence.cfm). digitalhistory.uh.edu

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