

John Adams
2nd President

John Adams



Term: 1797-1801

Political Party: Federalist

First Lady: Abigail Smith Adams

Vice President: Thomas Jefferson

Highlights from the *John and Abigail Adams* <

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/index.html>> website include:

- Find out how Adams became a revolutionary
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/sfeature/sf_choice.html>
- Listen to readings <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/sfeature/sf_letters.html>
from the famous couple's correspondence
- Visit Sites of Liberty < <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/maps/index.html>>, maps
that show the birth of our nation
- Read about the Adams children
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/peoplevents/p_adamskids.html>, access a
timeline <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/adams/timeline/index.html>>, and more

Overview

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Born: October 30, 1735, in Braintree (now in Quincy), Massachusetts... A man of compassion and intellect, John Adams tried to keep the office of president apolitical, ceding leadership of his party to others, but left himself open to criticism from both parties. As war heated up in Europe, Adams' inclination was to keep the United States neutral. After being defeated for reelection, Adams retired to Massachusetts and his beloved wife Abigail -- their wide ranging correspondence while he was away from home details a love between equals. His correspondence with Jefferson reveals a rivalry within a friendship; Adams' dying words were "Thomas Jefferson survives" -- although his successor had in fact died just hours earlier...
Died: July 4, 1826.

The Era

- Duck-billed platypus first seen by Europeans (1797)
- The Rosetta stone is found, leading to the eventual decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphics (1799)
- Adams becomes the first resident of the White House after the government moves
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/duel/peoplevents/pande21.html>> from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. (1800)

"Our Country will be envied, our Liberty will be envied, our Virtues will be envied."

— John Adams, 1783

Domestic Policy

The Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, passed into law following revelation of the XYZ Affair, were designed to protect Americans from foreign insurgents. The four laws lengthened the residency requirement for citizenship, limited the number of new voters (who tended to vote Democratic-Republican), allowed for the president to deport or detain non-citizens insofar as they threatened national security, and banned subversive communication. Many hundreds of non-citizens fled from such unwelcome practices. Thomas Jefferson
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-jefferson/>> and James Madison

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<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-madison/> challenged the legitimacy of the Alien and Sedition Acts with their Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, and opposition to the laws helped Jefferson to unseat Adams as president in the 1800 election. Congress repealed or let lapse the four laws during Jefferson's first term.

Foreign Affairs

Following the American Revolution, the United States promised to ally with France in the event that either country became embroiled in a war with England. Following the signing of the Jay Treaty regularizing relations with Britain, however, French ships began harassing American vessels with British cargo. Adams sent envoys to negotiate an end to this undeclared enmity, but the three members of the French delegation demanded bribes before they would even meet with the Americans. The "XYZ Affair" (the French trio remained anonymous) sparked an American nationalism that led to the Alien and Sedition Acts. On the eve of war with France, following a buildup of the American Navy, a second commission negotiated a new treaty with Napoleon, freeing the U.S. from any formal alliances.

Presidential Politics

As the second president, Adams made a number of precedent-setting decisions. Where he chose to emulate George Washington <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-washington/>, he was often led astray. Trying to stay apolitical, he allowed Alexander Hamilton <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/hamilton/> to control the Federalist Party and occasionally even sided with Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/duel/peopleevents/pande09.html>. He kept most of George Washington's cabinet and found himself surrounded by Hamilton loyalists. By the rules of the original Constitution, his election also gave him his rival Thomas Jefferson as a vice president. Faced with rising animosity between parties and a split within the Federalists, Adams lost his re-election bid to his vice president.

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