

# The edified election of eighteen-hundred (adams vs. jefferson)

[History](#), [American History](#)



The upcoming United States presidential election seems to make headlines of every news station because of the constant drama, name-calling, and blaming. It is as though everything is “breaking news”. Tensions rise, parties split, and it makes a great news story. Elections can cause a nation a great deal of stress. Twenty-first century elections are not the only to possess this style, however. Today’s generations can certainly learn from the Presidential election of 1800; famous or infamous, history provides succeeding generations with valuable information of which they can learn from. By examining the conflicts and the resolutions of the rivalry between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, the answer to pacify current presidential elections could seem much clearer. The Democratic-Republicans, led by Jefferson, and the Federalists, led by Adams, tussled in a similar fashion that Democrats and Republicans do today. The media had a strong influence on American thought- precisely what happens today. Again, like present-day, political party labels created a national schism. Both Thomas Jefferson, a Virginia Democratic-Republican, and John Adams, a Massachusettes Federalist, worked together to create the United States and declare independence from the British Empire. However, the two did not unite after freedom rang across the new nation they created. Before one can compare such elections, one must understand the circumstances of both candidates in 1800, and the condition of the country they attempted to administer.

John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, the two final candidates for the election, had been co-workers in the Continental Congress. Both were assigned the demanding, but honorable, task to write the Declaration of Independence. Perhaps their extreme intelligence and ideological differences made them

perfect to write a paper for an extremely diverse nation. It is difficult to understand why the two founding fathers later disliked each other. It must be noted, however, this was more than twenty years before the election of 1800. Although both colonial politicians, Jefferson and Adams came from very different backgrounds.

Similarly to most Virginians at the time, Thomas Jefferson was very loyal to his Virginia heritage and the responsibilities with it. He believed in using the land in every possible industrial, agricultural, and economically efficient way. In the late eighteenth century, this implied the practice of slavery. Thomas Jefferson was a polite, gentle, and reliable introvert. Even though a well-renowned politician, Jefferson did not enjoy public events. After a public assembly, Jefferson only hoped that he would not make the newspapers. Although this sounds paradoxical, the newspapers in the late seventeenth-hundreds were very malicious, and Jefferson did not want the misleading newspapers to distribute hateful articles about his campaign. Democratic-Republicans believed in what moderners accept as true American principles: democratic elections, freedom of speech, and religious tolerance. These were all values that Thomas Jefferson fought for more so than John Adams. Although the shy Virginian possessed these ideologies, Jeffry Pasley argues that northern Democratic-Republicans were actually closer to the modern-America view. When talking about northern Democratic-Republicans, Pasley states that, " The Democratic-Republicans embraced Thomas Paine and William Godwin along with Jefferson and looked forward to rapid social progress... They denounced human slavery in all forms and promoted such

causes as separation of church and state, public education, abolition of imprisonment for debt, and legal reform." Jefferson's great qualities are, however, usually overshadowed by the fact that he owned slaves.

Democratic-Republicans in the North are viewed as closer to modern America, simply because they denounced slavery. As a Northern Federalist, John Adams was also against slavery.

Before the election, Jefferson was John Adams' vice president. Although their political ideas differed dramatically, the Constitution ordered that second-place Jefferson must be Adams' vice president. When the Constitution was signed, political leaders did not anticipate political parties would develop in the United States and create such different opinions between first and second place candidates. Some Federalists even tried giving a large enough vote to Adams to win, and for another Federalist to get second, but at the same time, lessening Adams' chances of winning. This meant making Adams' winning margin smaller and the likelihood of a Federalist vice-president bigger. John Adams had much different ideas than Jefferson, and those same ideas allowed John Adams to succeed George Washington as the second president of the United States.

John Adams was much more of an extrovert than Jefferson. He made multiple political enemies due to his excessive persistence and bad temper. He also possessed a large ego, believing that his work on the Declaration of Independence was equal, if not more, important than Jefferson's. Adams claimed he worked more than any member of the Continental Congress. He complained that Jefferson did not talk enough. Adams had a much greater

voice than Jefferson, but did not always use it kindly. Adams did not believe in total freedom of speech, as many Republican journalists were put in prison during his presidency. Adams was more tolerant of Great Britain, restricted freedom of speech, and supported a strong central government. Adams and Jefferson possessed different ideologies, but also personalities. With such contrasting candidates, a close election would only be possible if the newly independent United States was divided drastically, and it was.

Less than thirty years after the United States became an independent country, political parties created a divide that never quite cooled until after the Civil War. In the anteceding years of the election of 1800, the previously-mentioned differences in political thought created an unwanted division. Most Federalists resided in New England, and most Democratic-Republicans occupied the South. The hostility between these two political parties can be expertly described in a Joane Freeman article, as she writes, "...National politics in the 1790s was like a war without uniforms..." However, many believe this schism actually contributed to the Civil War, the bloodiest war in United States history. The election of 1800 occurred during a time of hatred politics. Media, propoganda, naivety, and only two major parties contributed to many unethical behaviors by both Democratic-Republicans and Federalists.

America's founding fathers ridiculed political parties. They did not want to align with certain guidelines that their political party might represent. They wanted to be recognized as simply "Jefferson", or "Adams", not as a label of a political party. The two-party system is troublesome for any nation,

especially when that nation has only been independent for twenty-four years. The two political parties would dominate and divide a nation. The founding fathers knew this, however, and that is why they despised it. They believed that a two-party system would destroy the Union by elimination opportunity for abstract thought, increasing hate toward a single party, and potentially misinforming United States citizens about a particular candidate. No previous republic had ever peacefully transitioned to a different political party and remained a republic. Comparable to today, Republicans and Democrats account for the large majority of political alliance. Also like today, the media had a considerable influence on elections, and ultimately, only widened the political gap created by the establishment of political parties.

Similar to today, the media treated political opposition unfairly. Today, some Americans wrongly categorized the media as something new and modern; someone speaking in front of a camera. In fact, in 1800, the media may have had more impact than today, only in the form of newspaper. Democratic-Republicans sometimes referred to Federalists as "Monarchists", and Federalists occasionally called the Democratic-Republicans, "Jacobins"- a radical political group responsible for the French Revolution. Of course, the media did the same, miscategorizing political leaders with overexaggerated comparisons. In theory, media is provide information that helps citizens better understand a certain circumstance. Yet, when the media focuses on name-calling and bias, it actually confuses and misinforms its listeners. With the malicious media, naive name-calling, and needless division, the election of 1800 was building-up to be a close, hostile, and revolutionary contest.

Although the influences of both the election of 1800 and recent elections are alike, the format was certainly different. In the late 1790s, congressmen had more freedom and likelihood of making change, especially to the electoral college. In the late eighteenth century, states had more power than today, and the country's youthhood made it vulnerable to change. As a result, states felt less companionship toward their fellow states. If all states elected by popular vote, Jefferson would have been the clear winner. At the time, however, some states favored popular-vote systems, and some did not. Federalist-controlled states would try everything in their power to limit popular vote. Federalists tried to limit popular vote, and manipulate the upcoming election in their favor.

Though, the Democratic-Republicans did have a remedy to Federalist efforts: The Three-Fifths Compromise. Every state had a number of delegates to represent how many people were in their state. The delegates are then added-up from each state to make the electoral college, which then decides the president. In this process, a popular vote does not always win. The Three-Fifths Compromise, passed in 1787, allowed slaves to count as three-fifths of a person. This then made southern states more valuable in the electoral college. How then, was the election so close; why did Jefferson not win by a great deal?

Even though popular and well-liked among Democratic-Republicans, Thomas Jefferson was not always the clear candidate. Jefferson not only had to compete against John Adams, he would also have to settle with close competition from a fellow Democratic-Republican. Aaron Burr, a New York

Democratic-Republican, also ran for president in 1800. Although New York is a northeastern state, it was one of the very few swing states in 1800, allowing Burr to get crucial New York votes. Not only would the United States divide over the election of Jefferson and Adams, but the Democratic-Republicans created their own internal division. When time came for Democratic-Republicans to choose their final candidate, a constitutional, communicational, and political catastrophe occurred: Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson tied.

The Democratic-Republican tie is one of many reasons the election of 1800 is so interesting. As mentioned before, the fresh, slightly naive United States of America was undoubtedly going to have some unforeseen obstacles. In the event of a tie, the House of Representatives decides the winner. Although, it was probably one man in particular that chose, albeit unwillingly, who represented the Democratic-Republicans as president. Alexander Hamilton, perhaps one of the most popular Federalists in 1800, had the power and trust of his fellow Federalists to persuade the Federalist-dominated House of Representatives to pick Jefferson over Burr as the opposing party's candidate, and ultimately, the president. Even though not given an official title, Hamilton took responsibility to make sure that Burr had no chance of being president. The two New Yorkers, Hamilton a Federalist and Burr a Democratic-Republican, despised each other and their policies. Before the House's decision, Hamilton talked of Aaron Burr as, "... the most unfit man in the U. S. for the office of president. Hamilton described Burr as bankrupt, selfish, dishonest, and eager for war. When writing about Burr's possible



nomination, Hamilton wrote, " Disgrace abroad, ruin at home are the probable fruits of his elevation." Hamilton spent the following days persuading to his fellow Federalist House members to vote for Jefferson. After four days and thirty-three ballots, the final nomination had ceased; James Bayard of Delaware changed his vote from Burr to Jefferson. Now that Jefferson defeated Aaron Burr and John Adams, Jefferson would become the third president of the United States.

Jefferson won the presidential election in such a peculiar fashion that it may seem difficult to imagine a similar election today. Although, by comparing recent elections, which are actually similar in many ways, with the election of 1800, it can be proven that American elections have not changed very little. Political parties have supplied much of that consistency throughout American history. Instead of Federalists and Democratic-Republicans dominating political popularity, today places Democrats and Republicans in their respective positions. The manors of etiquette have not changed dramatically either. It is commonly believed that recent presidential elections, especially that of 2016, have been more hostile than ever. Actually, they are quite lax compared to the bitterness experienced in 1800. For example, Thomas Jefferson was trying to run against the president of which he was vice-president for, Aaron Burr later shot Alexander Hamilton in a duel, and John Adams purposefully created many Federalists-favored implications in the American political system, like appointing multiple Federalist supreme court members, just days before he had to give-up his office to a Democratic-Republican. As Robert Novak, author of Our Founding

Partisans, put it, “ I am frequently asked, by mail and on the lecture circuit, how it is that our country has fallen so low in recent years from the heights of our noble past into a dismal swamp of bitter partisanship. I reply that bitter partisanship is very much in the American tradition, and that perhaps today’s politicians are more courteous than their predecessors.” The media, which has been a catalyst for bitter partisanship throughout American history, had a great influence on the outlook of the election of 1800.

Similarly to today, political media can cause great affliction among voters, making an election more hostile, embarrassing, and infamous. John Adams would have seemed a threat to some media organizations, since Adams limited free speech. Political propaganda helped Jefferson more because people had already seen what John Adams was capable, or incapable, to accomplish in office. As with any second-term election, propaganda will most likely assist the candidate who is not in office. The media swarms around a topic that attracts people’s attention, which usually strays from important political topics. In the eyes of the media, Jefferson was timid, loose with money, and a hypocrite of freedom because he owned slaves. The media portrayed Adams as a self-centered, strict-ruling, monarchists. During the campaigning years of the election, Adams and Jefferson disliked each other. Though, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were great men with ideas that were able to transform a country. The media added insult to injury on an already tense situation. The media is very much responsible for making the election of 1800 unfortunately infamous. Ultimately, the election of 1800’s infamy helped, as much as it hurt, the United States of America.

With the demoralizing election over, Jefferson and vice-president Burr, would prove many of their nonbelievers wrong. With a divided nation on Jefferson's doorstep, he reassured America's westward goals in his inaugural speech:

A rising nation, spread over a wide and fruitful land, traversing all the seas with the rich productions of their industry, engaged in commerce with nations who feel power and forget right, advancing rapidly to destinies beyond the reach of mortal eye; when I contemplate these transcendent objects, and see the honour, the happiness, and the hopes of this beloved country committed to the issue and the auspices of this day, I shrink from the contemplation & humble myself before the magnitude of the undertaking.

Jefferson had an extremely successful time as president, and is regarded as one of America's finest leaders. The rigorous path to become president hardened the already seasoned politician. Jefferson was in a distinctly unique position; he would lead a country that had just completely, and peacefully, swapped political values. In 1800, this was revolutionary. America had plenty to look forward to, whether that was land westward or governmental glory.

During the election of 1800, many of America's true values formed, and many flirted with disaster. After all the name-calling, political manipulation, clashing ideologies, constitutional mishaps, exaggerated newspaper headlines, political propaganda, and riveting rivalries, Jefferson's Republicanism stayed true and lead America into a prosperous future. After understanding the election of 1800, recent elections may not seem to stand-

out as much as many once thought. In fact, current presidential elections would seem rather tranquil when compared to what happened during the beginning of the nineteenth century. Political parties still exist, and the United States may never be completely “united”. Yet, if it was, how would America hope to get the determination and fight out of every candidate, like Adams, Burr, and Jefferson did in 1800.

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