

Achievements of great importance during the presidency of iconic figure john quin...

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The Presidency of John Quincy Adams

John Quincy Adams, the sixth president of the United States, was the son of the second president, John Adams, making him the first son of a president to actually become president himself. Born in Braintree, Massachusetts in 1767, he watched the Battle of Bunker Hill from the top of Penn's Hill above the family farm. As he grew up with the new nation, his parents literally trained him for the highest office. During his long lifetime he had two distinguishable careers, separated by an unfortunate interlude of presidency. In his first career, he went from an American diplomat to secretary of state. In his second great era, he was a member of the House of Representatives and a strong opponent to slavery. These two positions were interrupted by his four-year presidency, in which time the states rested very uneasily upon his shoulders. Never publicly popular and often reproached by his enemies, John Quincy Adams nevertheless ended his life in the " sunshine of national esteem."

As a young boy, Adams obtained most of his lustrous education from his mother and father. At the age of ten he began to accompany his father on diplomatic trips to Europe, where he learned French fluently, and eventually studied at the University of Leiden. Extraordinarily cultured and educated, he returned to the U. S. in 1785 to finish his formal education at Harvard. Five years later he settled down in Boston to practice law.

At some point during his law profession, Adams began writing articles in local newspapers defending George Washington's policy of neutrality against the diplomatic attacks of Citizen Guret, the new French minister to the United

States. This luckily caught Washington's attention, and he in turn appointed Adams as minister to The Netherlands. Later he was promoted to minister of Berlin. While negotiating about the Jay Treaty in England, he married Louisa Catherine Johnson on July 26, 1797.

Adams was relieved of his post by his father immediately following Jefferson's election in 1801. He resumed his law career for a couple of years, only to be elected as a Federalist to the U. S. Senate in 1803. The federalist leaders of Massachusetts were deeply dismayed by Adams' independent course as senator, and as a result, recanted him by electing a successor two years early. He went back to practicing law and served as a professor at Harvard, when in 1809, President Madison appointed him as the first Prime Minister of the United States to Russia.

During this time, the War of 1812 broke out between Britain and the United States. After abortive attempts at mediation, Adams was called to the peace negotiations at Ghent, where he was technically the chief of the American mission. Because of his outstanding performance, he was soon after appointed as minister to Britain.

As a diplomat, it is fair to say that John Quincy Adams made very few mistakes, and influenced many people. His vast European experience made him a vigorous supporter of the policy of isolation from the ordinary novelties, combinations, and wars of European politics.

In 1817, Adams was called from England by President Monroe to become Secretary of State, where he remained throughout Monroe's two consecutive

terms. As secretary, he pursued policies and principles that helped to perfect the foundation of America's foreign policies, including the Monroe Doctrine. Adams' greatest diplomatic achievement as secretary was undoubtedly the Transcontinental Treaty with Spain, signed on February 22, 1819. By this treaty, Spain acknowledged East Florida and West Florida to be a part of the United States, and agreed to a frontier line that ran from the Gulf of Mexico to the Rocky Mountains, and along the 42 degree parallel line to the Pacific Ocean. In this negotiation, Adams took skillful advantage of Andrew Jackson's military raids into Florida and also of Spain's humiliation of the rebellions of her American colonies. Because of this treaty, Columbia, Mexico, Chile, the United Province of the Rio de la Plata, and later Brazil were recognized as independent states from Spain. Peru remained to be recognized by Adams himself, when he served as Monroe's successor. The idea of drawing the frontier line through to the other ocean was his own inspiration. It has been called "the greatest diplomatic victory ever won by a single individual in the history of the United States." At the same time he defended the northeastern frontier against the English, and held the line of 49 degrees in the Oregon country. He was perhaps the greatest secretary of state in the history of this country.

John Quincy Adams may have been one of the greatest secretaries, but the same is certainly not true for his presidency. He was actually a minority president, only chosen by the House of Representatives in preference of Andrew Jackson. In the election, Jackson actually got the majority vote at the polls and at the state electoral colleges, but lacked a constitutional majority. So, in 1825 when Henry Clay threw his support to Adams in the House, he

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became president. Soon after he was elected, he appointed Clay to secretary of state, raising high suspicion that the two had had a “ corrupt bargain.” The judgement of most historians is that there was indeed a bargain, but no corruption was involved.

Adams’ policy was to exercise national power to make freedom more flourishing for the people. In order to accomplish this, he called for strong national policies under executive leadership. Some of his famous policies include the Bank of the United States as a device for national fiscal authority, a national tariff to protect domestic industries, administration of land for settlement, protection for native Americans, improvement on internal physical structures (highways, train system, canals, etc), and a move toward federal encouragement in education. Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt played out his outlook almost a century later.

Adams as a president was too far in advance for his time. The loose democracy of the day wanted the least amount of federal power possible, and the South feared that his program might pave the way for abolition of slavery. Also, he had no real party to back him up during his presidency. The opposition, with Andrew Jackson at its head and “ Bargain and Corruption” as their battle cry, combined to defeat him for reelection in 1828.

Almost two years after his term was up, the twelfth district in Massachusetts elected Adams to Congress. He eagerly accepted the position, feeling not as a party member, but as an ex-president, a representative for the entire country. Here he displayed the most spectacular phase of his lifelong career of public service. He evangelized a strong nationalism against the states

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rights and pro-slavery John Calhoun. He never claimed to be an abolitionist, only that he was “ bonded by the constitution and its political compromises to work for universal emancipation.” He single-handedly fought against the annexation of Texas and actually did delay the process himself. However hard he fought, he still saw the state welcomed into the country after the election of James Polk in 1844.

He also tried to introduce constitutional amendments to congress so that no one could be born a slave in the United States, but the “ gag rule” prevented the discussion of anything relating to slavery. Eventually Adams used the freedom of assembly to overthrow this. An abolitionist at heart but not in practice, Adams tried to postpone the issue of slavery until the North was strong enough and sufficiently united to preserve the Union and abolish slavery by martial law, if necessary.

John Quincy Adams, nicknamed “ Old Man Eloquent,” was the most illustrious example of the scholar in politics before Woodrow Wilson. During all of his controversies, he continuously forebode the sentiments of his own constituents. His fellow citizens regularly elected him to Congress from 1830 until he died in the House on February 23, 1848. Of his three sons, only the youngest, Charles Francis Adams, survived him. Charles served as minister to Britain under Lincoln, while him and his three sons continued to carry out the long line of traditions of the Adams family.