



John Adams

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- Father and Farm
- Harvard Law
- First Continental Congress, 1774-76
- Signed Declaration
- Diplomat to France, 1776-79
- MA state Constitution
- Ambassador to Europe
- Peace Treaty, 1783
- U.S. Minister to the British court, 1783- 88
- First Vice President, 1789
- President, 1796

(1735-1826)



John Adams the Man

- In addition to all his public accomplishments, his correspondence with his wife, children and friends, shows a man who was genuine, honest, passionate, and kind.



Abigail's Letters

- Kind and touching
- Thoughtful and strategic
- She wrote to John in Holland, after two year's separation: "My whole soul is absorbed in the idea. The honor of my dearest friend, the welfare and happiness of this wide, extended country, ages yet unknown, depend for their happiness and security upon the able and skillful, the honest and upright discharge of the important trust committed to him. It would not become me to write the full flow of my heart upon this occasion."

Role in Financing Revolutionary War

- His role as an ambassador to France and the Netherlands was critical in getting the financing we needed to fund our army and in getting the French navy to assist us.
- Benjamin Franklin
- Victory at Yorktown in 1781 gave the Dutch confidence.

Negotiations with French

- He also played a crucial role in counteracting the overly accommodating Franklin in our negotiations with the French; if the French had had their way we would have been more of a satellite state of France. They wanted to dictate our foreign policy and he would have none of it. He was a stubborn man and principled, and he wouldn't compromise on this point even though he was under pressure to do so.

Jefferson on Adams in letter to Madison, 1784

- “He hates Franklin, he hates Jay, he hates the French, he hates the English. To whom will he adhere? His vanity is a lineament in his character which had entirely escaped me. His want of taste I had observed. Notwithstanding all this he had a sound head on substantial points, and I think he has integrity. I am glad therefore that he is of the commission and expect he will be useful in it. His dislike of all parties, and all men, by balancing his prejudices, may give the same free play to his reason as would a general benevolence of temper. At any rate, honesty may be expected even from poisonous weeds.” (318)

Negotiated Peace with England

- He negotiated the peace treaty with England on terms that were as beneficial to the United States as you could possibly imagine!
- France wanted to dictate the peace and Franklin was swayed by them.
- He won fishing rights off the Atlantic coast

Constitutional Writing

- He wrote the Massachusetts state Constitution and of course played a role in the writing and adoption of the US Constitution.
- The politics in adoption of the Constitution were intense and complicated and his principled and strong leadership devoid of partisanship was critical.

First Vice-President

- As the first Vice-President, he was loyal to Washington and didn't oppose him in public even when he disagreed.
- Title of address to President; believed in the dignity of the position; "His Majesty, the President"
- Hamilton and creation of standing Army

Advocate for Navy

- As President he was the first to argue vigorously for a strong Navy, and founded the Department of the Navy. This would prove to be very useful in our future.
- French and English ships attacked US merchant ships

Neutrality on French-English War

- As President he guided us through a dangerous period when England and France were at war and there was a lot of pressure for us to ally with one or the other from the two political parties. He helped us avoid war at a time that we were ill-prepared.
- “Wooden walls” reminiscent of Pericles and Athenian democracy
- Peace through Strength

Opposed Partisanship

- As President and Vice-President, he was dismayed by the emergence of partisanship and the two political parties shortly after Independence.
- He was connected with the Federalists, but he was never a pawn of the Federalists and always tried to do what was in the best interest of the country and not the party.
- Even then the pull of party politics was divisive and poisonous and he saw how dangerous it could be to our civil society.

Presidential Campaign of 1800

- The first time a sitting President was opposed by his own Vice-President, Jefferson
- Political Parties: Federalists and Republicans
- James Callender and *Richmond Examiner*: Adams a “monarchist,” a gross hypocrite,” “one of the most egregious fools upon the continent,” “a hideous hermaphroditical character which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman.”
- Alien and Sedition Act
- Jefferson as seduced by French philosophy and more French than American. Sexual Immorality and Sara Hemmings

Closing words on honor of Public Service to John Q Adams

- “Public business, my son, must always be done by somebody. It will be done by somebody or other. If wise men decline it, others will not; if honest men refuse it, others will not...Integrity should be preserved in all events, as essential to his happiness...His first maxim should be to place his honor out of reach of all men. In order to do this he must make it a rule never to become dependent on public employments or subsistence. Let him have a trade, a profession, a farm, a shop...and then he may engage in public affairs, if invited, upon independent principles. My advice to my children is to maintain an independent character.”

Summary

- Strong advocate for American independence
- Secured necessary French and Dutch help during war
- Secured a beneficial peace treaty from England
- Kept us at peace during his presidency and began the tradition of Peace through Strength
- Failed to see the danger of shutting down free speech in the name of security
- Was a principled, patriotic man who believed in serving his country, and was a devoted husband and father.