

The Early American Republic



GW, running for president

First President When George Washington returned to Mount Vernon after the Constitution was finished, he did so happily. He missed the life of a plantation owner, and truly wanted to retire.

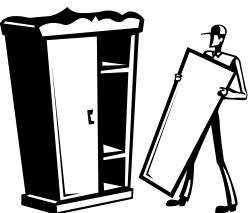
However, ol' George couldn't sit still for long. In 1788, the Electoral College chose him to be the president, and Washington's sense of duty meant he could not refuse his country now. He saddled up the horse and rode back north to the capitol in New York (DC wasn't built yet) to be sworn in as president.

Why did people want him to be president? Well, GW was still an American hero that nearly all Americans admired. In a time when communication was difficult, he was one of the few national celebrities. EVERYbody knew his name. He was humble, modest, and Anti-federalists didn't have to be afraid that he would try to become a king or dictator – the guy was just too nice. He'd even stepped down from command after the war ended!

Washington and John Adams were sworn in on April 30, 1789, in New York City. This is where the government was headquartered at the time while they waited for Washington, D.C. to be built – as of 1789, DC was just a swamp along the Potomac River.

If you call a king “Your Highness” then what do you call a president? “Your Middleness?”

As silly as it seems, one of the first big debates in Congress was what to call the president. Adams wanted him to be called “His Excellency” so people would respect the president like they respected kings. Many people disagreed, saying the president wasn't that exalted. In the end, Washington characteristically preferred the simple title of “Mr. President.”



No, they didn't sit in an actual cabinet.

The Cabinet The Constitution says the president can have a group of advisors. Washington's **cabinet**, or group of advisors, were made up of a mix of leaders. Today, President Obama has 15 cabinet departments, plus a handful of other cabinet officials. Washington had a whopping total of three cabinet members.

The three lucky ducks were: Henry Knox (the big man on a little horse from *John Adams*—Adams' bookseller) was Secretary of War, Thomas Jefferson was Secretary of State, and Alexander Hamilton was Secretary of Treasury. The War department handled, well, wars. The State department handles our country's relationship with all other countries, and the Treasury handles money and financial issues.

Was GW's election unanimous?
Well, sort of. At this time, the 69 electors in the Electoral College wrote down two people's names—their first and second choice for president. Washington got 69 votes, so every single elector put his name down. Several other men got the other 69 “second-choice” votes split between them. John Adams had the second most votes, so he became VP.

The Meaning of the word “State”
Originally, a state meant a national government. So technically, France is a state, Russia is a state, Mexico is a state, the US is a state.

When the US changed from “colonies” to “states,” we stole the word and changed it's meaning to mean a sub-division of our country.

That's why the purpose of the State Department often confuses people...but it is using the *older* definition of the word.

The Early American Republic:

Problems, Problems, Problems

Have you ever been given a task or assignment that you have absolutely no previous skills or knowledge in, and then are not given any examples of what the final product should be? Now imagine that your success or failure in this task would mean the success or failure of your entire nation.

You might have some idea of the pressure on George Washington.

The early years of our country were pretty tough. Washington had absolutely no instruction manual for our country other than the Constitution that his buddies had written a few years before. And these same buddies were now all disagreeing about what they'd "meant."



What GW might have felt like.

Debt By 1789, our country's debt had mounted to around \$54 million dollars. Our brilliant Sec of Treas. Hamilton had some ideas as to how to fix this. But watch out—they're going to make Anti-federalists mad.



- Plan Part #1:** the national gov't should take all the debt away from the states. Just wipe the slate clean. People won't be paid back, but they won't be taxed as high either.

- Plan Part #2:** keep tariffs high. Tariffs are taxes on imported goods. This does two things: it keeps prices of foreign goods high, which encourages us to buy American-made goods, and also ensures the gov't has tax money flowing in .

- Plan Part #3:** create a national bank.

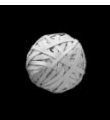
Says Who? Thomas Jefferson (TJ) was not happy about Hamilton's plan. He and Madison both agree that since the Constitution doesn't say anything about creating a national bank, then Congress CAN'T do it. Hamilton disagrees, saying Congress can do it because of the Elastic Clause of the Constitution. Hamilton's argument wins out, and the National Bank is created.

Natives You already learned about how we created the Northwest Territory and divided it up in neat little squares – how cute! – but oops, we forgot, there are entire nations of people already living there called Native Americans. They fight back during this time period, but eventually realize America is not going to leave them alone. They sign a treaty that gives up their claim to Ohio and they move West. This is not the first nor the last time this will happen.

The Elastic Clause

This is a handy section of the Constitution that basically is a big ol' "ETC." It says that Congress can pass any law that is "necessary and proper" for the good of the country.

It's a vague sentence, which means you can interpret it in different ways—and people did, and still do.



The Natives were probably not this cheerful at this point.

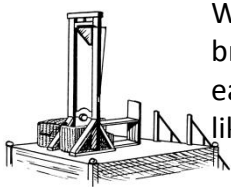
The Early American Republic:

Problems, Problems, Problems

Whiskey Rebellion Relax. This is not as unruly as it sounds like it would be. Hamilton's financial plans put high taxes on whiskey. At this time, it was much easier for farmers to haul rye *whiskey* to market than it was to haul rye *grain*. It was merely a matter of weight and money. A horse could haul 2 bushels of rye grain, but could haul 2 barrels (made of 24 bushels of rye) of whiskey. So they made lots of whiskey. So farmers suffered under these high taxes, and they protested the taxes using violent mobs and tarring and feathering.

Washington knew this was a chance to compare the new government to the old Articles gov't. The old gov't couldn't handle Shay's Rebellion. The new gov't *could* handle this—so Washington sent soldiers to put down the rebellion. This proved to the country that the new gov't was strong.

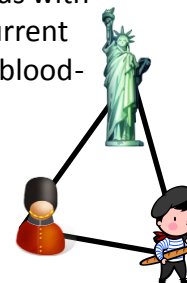
"Off With Their Heads!" Meanwhile, across the pond, our recent allies, the French, are having quite a time of it. They're having severe economic problems (man, they really shouldn't have loaned us all that money for our war) and the people of France have been inspired by *our* revolution for liberty. However, their revolution becomes extremely violent, and it quickly turns into civil war. They introduce the efficient execution style of the guillotine (pictured below). The civil war makes their economic situation worse.



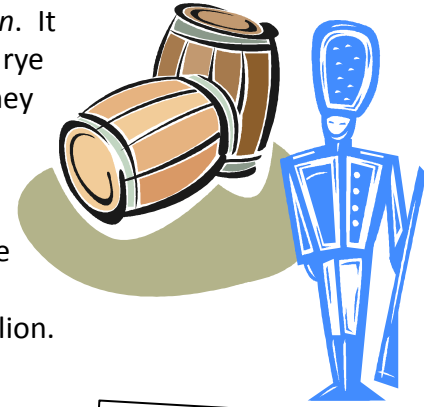
When the French Queen Marie Antoinette hears of the extreme bread shortages in the streets, she helpfully suggests "Let them eat cake." (Clearly, she did not understand the problem. It's not like they're being picky eaters; they are starving.)¹

So, she and her husband Louis are both punished for their lack of concern by – you guessed it – the guillotine, slicing off their heads. This shocks the other kings and queens of Europe. Britain responds by declaring war on France – after all, they're weakened. A perfect time to strike.

Awkward Love Triangle So now America's in a tricky spot. Does Lady Liberty side with her ex-boyfriend, who we've kind of become friends with again (Britain is our biggest trade partner) or do we side with her current boyfriend who she wants to break up with (France is getting a little blood-thirsty for our taste)? Washington decides to just stay **neutral**. He promises to not help either country at all, therefore staying out of the whole mess.



"Across the pond" is a colloquial phrase that means on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. So we're across the pond from Europe, and Europe is across the pond from us.



Colloquial
Colloquial means a phrase that is used locally or in casual language. For instance, saying "you guys" to mean "you all" is colloquial in Iowa. Some people say "youz guys" while Southerners say "ya'll." They're all colloquial sayings.

Guillotine

The guillotine was actually invented by a man who wanted to find a humane way to execute people. Before the guillotine, executioners often had to swing multiple times, due to their lack of practice and dullness of blades. Mr. Guillotine invented a machine that would slice using gravity, not a man's muscles. The blade was curved, and so it stayed sharper, longer. Most people died instantly, much better than multiple gashes.

¹There is actually no record of Marie Antoinette saying this. But it's such a well-told story that I wanted to make sure you understood the reference when you hear it.

The Early American Republic:

The Post-Washington Years

New Leaders After his second term in office, Washington decided he wanted to retire for good this time. He went back to Mount Vernon, but only after warning the nation against forming political parties that would divide the country. No one listened. Already, two parties were emerging. John Adams and Alexander Hamilton were strong **Federalists**. Jefferson and James Madison led the new **Democratic-Republican** party. The friendship that Adams and Jefferson had developed during the war years quickly turned bitter as their political beliefs became more and more opposed.

Federalist Beliefs

- Strong national gov't
- National bank
- Don't trust "the people"
- Want trade, merchants, commerce
- Want strong president
- Adams and Hamilton



Democratic-Republican Beliefs

- Strong state gov'ts
- No national bank
- Trust "the people"
- Want rural farmers and agriculture
- Want weak president
- Jefferson and Madison

Adams' Presidency The electoral college voted in 1796 and set off a weird twist of history. At this time, the members of the electoral college simply wrote down two names for president on pieces of paper. Whoever got the most votes became president, and the runner-up became VP.

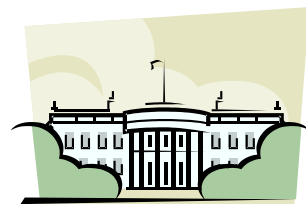
In 1796, John Adams won the most votes, but Thomas Jefferson won the second most votes. So all of a sudden our country's two bitterest political rivals were the president and vice president. (It'd be like if in the upcoming election, Donald Trump became president and Hillary Clinton became vice president.) As you can imagine, this is not going to go too well.



JOHN ADAMS
The 2nd U.S. President
1797-1801

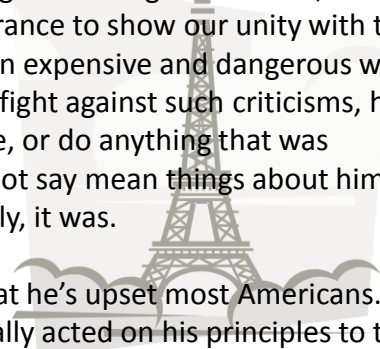
The French situation was getting worse. France was frustrated that we weren't helping them out, so they started attacking our merchant ships at sea. Many Americans wanted us to go to war against France, while others like Vice President Jefferson wanted to officially ally ourselves with France to show our unity with the ideas of liberty and freedom. President Adams, however, wanted to avoid an expensive and dangerous war. He was loudly criticized as a wimp, especially by Democrat-Republicans. To fight against such criticisms, he signed the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, which made it illegal to say, write, or do anything that was harmful, false, or disloyal to the government; he was trying to get them to not say mean things about him. Many people saw this as trampling on their rights of free speech—and clearly, it was.

So Adams approaches the chance to run for re-election knowing full well that he's upset most Americans. He doubts he will win re-election. He's one of the few presidents who actually acted on his principles to the **detriment**, or harm, of his political future.



The White House

Adams moved into the White House to show that the government was growing and to encourage other people to move to the new "federal city." However, he moved in while the house was still being finished. The grounds were still a muddy construction site, surrounded by slaves' quarters (slave labor built the White House). The plaster hadn't been completely dried, and since few rooms were ready, Abigail Adams used the now formal East Room as a place to hang her laundry. The Adams' were the first presidential family to live in the White House. The interior has been re-built twice. The first was after the British burned it in 1814. The second was in the 1950s, when they realized the structure was nearly rotted.



The Early American Republic:

The Post-Washington Years

Hamilton Betrays Adams In 1800, Jefferson and Aaron Burr ran for president for the Dem-Repes against John Adams. A strange thing happened though. Jefferson and Burr each received equal votes, even though everybody knew that Jefferson was supposed to be president and Burr was running for vice president. But at that time, you didn't distinguish between offices; electors just wrote down two names.



So if there's a tie, the Constitution says the House of Representatives gets to decide who's president. And the House – as luck would have it – was controlled by Adams' party. He got his hopes up that he would be re-elected. However, Hamilton knew that Adams was unpopular and would be hated for "stealing" the election. Hamilton completely disagreed with Jefferson on almost every issue, but he *really* disliked Burr; he even publicly admitted he thought Burr was an idiot. So he encouraged his own Federalist party to support Jefferson instead of Adams. As you can imagine, Adams was extremely angry with Hamilton. Burr, also, won't forget Hamilton's public criticisms.

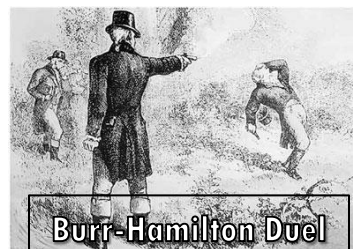
Jefferson Changes Things Up Jefferson was an interesting guy. Some people today guess that he had Asperger's syndrome; he was a lawyer, musician, inventor, architect, and politician. He founded the University of Virginia, built his own mansion called Monticello, submitted an architectural plan for the Capitol building contest, and had such an extensive library that it was used as the basis for what is now the Library of Congress, which now holds a copy of every single book published in the United States.

He liked small government and wanted to make sure the president was not too powerful, so he tried to do "common folk" things. Instead of riding in a carriage, he walked to his inauguration. He used round dining tables so there would be no "head of the table." Once, a late-night visitor arrived at the White House and knocked on the door. They were shocked when the door opened and there stood the president in his nightgown, answering his own door!



In terms of policies, he tried to undo much of what Washington and Adams had accomplished. He removed several taxes, cut the size of the military, and ended the Alien and Sedition Acts.

Marbury v Madison The most significant court case in our history occurred during Jefferson's presidency. The case called *Marbury v Madison* established that the Supreme Court's job is to interpret the law and Constitution. They have the final say in the meaning of any legal language or Constitutional clauses. Without this case, the Supreme Court would pretty much just sit there and do nothing. This added one more "check" on Congress' powers.



Burr-Hamilton Duel

After Hamilton publicly embarrassed Burr, Burr challenged him to a duel. The two men met on the outskirts of New York City. Hamilton had already decided not to fire, but Burr didn't get the memo, and shot Hamilton. Hamilton died the next day. So when Dick Cheney shot that guy in the face? He was not the first sitting vice president to shoot somebody. At least *he* didn't do it on purpose.

Asperger's Syndrome



Asperger's is a syndrome that affects many people. It is a form of autism that causes a person to have intense interest in subjects. Usually "aspies" are extremely aware of details and can focus on many parts at once. Often, aspies lack social understanding. Their brains sometimes can't process social cues like humor, sarcasm, or pick up when a person is signaling for the conversation to end. Some brain researchers say it's not a disorder – it's just a different way for the brain to be wired. "Aspies" make very good employees in jobs where attention to detail is important.