

Political Parties



By 1796, arguments over the meaning of the Constitution and purpose of government led to the creation of two political parties: the Federalists and the

Democratic-Republicans.

Alexander Hamilton founded the Federalists in 1791. The Federalists believed only educated, wealthy citizens should run the government as they were the best of society. They supported a strong federal government and weaker state governments. Federalists believed the American economy should be based upon manufacturing and trade. To accomplish their goals, they supported a loose interpretation of the Constitution so as to create institutions like a national bank to loan money to businesses.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison created the Democratic-Republican Party (sometimes called Republicans) to oppose the Federalists. The Democratic-Republicans thought that properly informed, the common person could rule the country. They supported strong state governments and limited federal power. As a result, Democratic-Republicans endorsed a strict interpretation of the Constitution to prevent the federal government from becoming too powerful. Jefferson thought America should remain a nation of farmers.

1. The Federalists believed in... (circle three)
-
- e. agriculture
 - h. a loose interpretation of the Constitution
 - s. rule by the educated and wealthy
 - y. manufacturing

2. The Democratic-Republicans believed in... (circle three)
-
- e. agriculture
 - h. a strict interpretation of the Constitution
 - s. rule by the common person
 - y. a national bank

Election of 1796

After two terms as president, Washington retired. In 1796, for the first time, several people ran for the presidency with Federalists and Democratic-Republicans fighting for control of the government. At this time in U.S. history, the person who got the most votes became president and the person who got the second-most votes became vice president. John Adams, a Federalist, won the presidency with 71 votes; Thomas Jefferson, a Democratic-Republican, won the vice presidency with 68 votes. Adams and Jefferson, once good friends, now found themselves in different political parties but both now shared the executive office.

John Adams was wise, honest, loyal, and hardworking. However, he often suspected people of working against him, he constantly doubted his own decisions, his blunt honesty often insulted others, and he made many enemies that prevented him from becoming one of the great presidents.

3. What prevented Adams from becoming a great president? (circle three)
-
- e. his honesty insulted others
 - h. he worked hard
 - s. he had a lot of self-doubt
 - y. he made many enemies

Foreign Affairs

After signing Jay's Treaty in 1794, France accused the United States of helping Britain and immediately began attacking American ships. In what became known as the XYZ Affair, President Adams sent three ministers to France to discuss peace. The French foreign minister demanded a bribe before he would negotiate for peace. Insulted at this display of diplomacy, President Adams angrily refused to pay.

Adams' own party, the Federalists, controlled Congress, and Alexander Hamilton led the Federalist Party. For France's insult to the United States, the Federalists demanded war. To prepare for battle, Congress created the Department of the Navy, increased the size of the army, and built warships. Between 1798 and 1800, the United States was in an undeclared war with France. All of the fighting took place on the ocean.

To avoid further bloodshed, Adams sent a minister to France who negotiated the Treaty of Mortefontaine (1800) that ended the fighting and renewed the friendship between the two countries. As a result of President Adams' desire to avoid a large war, he lost the support of many Federalists, including Alexander Hamilton.

4. The United States fought an undeclared war against... (circle one)
-
- e. Britain
 - h. France
 - s. Spain
 - y. Russia

5. By ending the fighting with the French, Adams... (circle one)
-
- e. became a national hero
 - h. was reelected to office
 - s. lost Federalist support
 - y. started a war with Britain

Political Parties Fight

Democratic-Republicans accused the Federalists of wanting to start a war. To weaken public support for the Democratic-Republicans, the Federalist Party and the Adams Administration signed into law four bills that became known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. Under the Naturalization Act, an immigrant needed to stay in the country 14 years (previously 5) before becoming a citizen. The Alien Act allowed the president to deport any alien considered dangerous. The Enemies Alien Act allowed the president to deport any person belonging to a country at war with the United States. The Sedition Act made it a crime, punishable by imprisonment, to print or publish criticism of the president or Congress—although nothing prevented anyone from criticizing Adams’ enemy Vice President Thomas Jefferson. These acts were made to silence Vice President Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans so the Federalists might win the presidential and congressional elections in 1800.

6. The purpose of the Alien and Sedition Acts was to... (circle two)
-
- e. protect the country
 - h. help the Federalists
 - s. hurt the Democratic-Republicans
 - y. punish John Adams

States’ Rights

In response to the Federalist’s attempt to keep control of the federal government, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison wrote resolutions that states had the right to judge and nullify laws passed by the federal government. This concept of states having authority over the federal government became known as states’ rights. At this time, only Virginia and Kentucky fully supported Jefferson’s resolutions, which became known as the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. Over the coming decades, this idea of states’ rights would lead to argument, division, and civil war.

7. The idea of states’ rights gave the states... (circle two)
-
- e. power over the federal government
 - h. less control over the federal government
 - s. the ability to declare war
 - y. the ability to cancel federal laws

The Election of 1800

In the election of 1800, anger over the Alien and Sedition Acts led to Adams’ defeat in the presidential election. Jefferson became president. In addition, the public rejected the Federalists and gave control of Congress to the Democratic-Republicans. Bitter over his defeat, Adams spent his last days and hours appointing Federalists to courtroom judge positions. Adams reasoned that since the Federalists lost power in

the executive and legislative branches, the Federalists could still control the judicial branch. Out of spite, Adams refused to attend Jefferson’s inauguration. This bitterness between both men would continue for years, until in their old age they began to write letters to each other explaining their views on politics and life. These letters became some of the most important documents on American political thought of the time. Adams died on July 4, 1826, fifty years to the day of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Adams’ last words were “Jefferson still survives.” Unknown to Adams, several hundred miles away in Virginia, Jefferson had passed away only hours earlier. The last men alive who created the Declaration of Independence had died.

8. How did Adams try to keep the Federalists in power? (circle one)
-
- e. by controlling the federal courts
 - h. by starting a revolution
 - s. by refusing to leave office
 - y. by not attending Jefferson’s inauguration