Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

LO 1 Describe the creation of the federal government under the new Constitution.

LO 2 Describe how disagreements over how the United States should be governed led to political divisions, and discuss some of the individuals who took strong stands on each side.

LO 3 Outline the country’s development of a two-party political system.

LO 4 Discuss the issues of John Adams’s presidency, and explain how he and the country dealt with them.

LO 5 Explain the convoluted political process that made Thomas Jefferson president in 1800, including the constitutional change designed to mend the problem.
Although the war had been won and the Constitution ratified, the debate about the size, shape, and duties of the federal government continued. A blueprint, after all, is not a building. Some, like New York’s Alexander Hamilton, were worried that common people could not handle democracy and would be confused by the challenges of running a modern nation. Others, like Thomas Jefferson, were concerned that a powerful centralized federal government would likely take away coveted liberties.

The stakes were high, as the unformed nation struggled to establish itself on the periphery of the European economic system. Daily life went on, of course: people went to school, got married, had families, bought slaves, moved west, and built new homes. But they did so during a time of heightened worries about the political stability of their new nation. Was American independence going to be temporary? Could the country’s leaders pull the nation together? Politics of the 1790s was fraught with questions, anxiety, and passion. It led to disagreements, and even duels. And the social life of the new nation would not change dramatically until the 1810s and the Market Revolution (which appears in Chapter 10).

In the end, the political center held, but not in a way that anyone had predicted. Nearly all the founders disliked political partisanship, yet they helped usher in the two-party system that we know today. They also preached the virtues of liberty and equality but went to great extremes to safeguard both the practice of slavery and the continued seizure of Native American lands. Thomas Jefferson advocated a rural, agrarian republic, yet the stability enjoyed and the land acquired during his presidency helped foster an economic revolution—one that we will encounter in the following chapters. But, first, to the decade following the ratification of the Constitution, when the central role of the federal government was to secure the new nation. This chapter examines the development of the new government, the rise of the two-party political system, and the first peaceful turnover of power in the “bloodless revolution” of 1800.

**LO1 Creating a New Government**

From 1789 to 1800 the federal government was remarkably small. In 1800, the Department of State had only three employees, plus representatives in London, Paris, Madrid, Lisbon, and The Hague. The entire Treasury had a total of about seventy-five employees. The War Department consisted of the secretary of war, two clerks, and a messenger. The Post Office numbered seventy-five offices. The legislative branch had only twenty-six senators and
sixty-four representatives. For a nation suspicious of centralized power, a small federal government was appropriate.

As the new government began operations in 1789, it became clear that, although the Constitution outlined a framework of government, the exact roles of its three branches were not clearly defined. Establishing precedents would be the mission of the first group of federal politicians.

**The First Citizens**

According to Article 4, Section 2 of the Constitution, the states dictated who was and was not a citizen. They more or less confined citizenship to white, property-holding males, although there were a few exceptions to this generalization. Immigrants could become citizens as well, and in the Naturalization Act of 1790, Congress declared that, among immigrants, only “free white persons” could become citizens of the United States. This obviously limited black people, Native Americans, and Asians. (These restrictions continued for almost a century, until 1870, when African Americans were allowed to become citizens.) White women also had few property rights, and, once married, anything a woman owned became the property of her husband. It was not until 1920 that women were granted full citizenship.

**The First Congress**

The first federal election under the new Constitution was held late in 1788. Most of the men elected were sympathetic to the arguments laid out in the Federalist Papers. At its first meeting in the capital city of New York, the first Congress had four major tasks: (1) setting up a system of federal courts; (2) securing the Bill of Rights that had been promised during the ratification period; (3) establishing the executive department; and (4) raising revenue. By addressing these pressing issues in a relatively tidy manner, the first Congress demonstrated its strength compared to the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation. The new government seemed to be working.

**Courts**

The Judiciary Act of 1789 created three circuit courts and thirteen district courts to accompany the Supreme Court established by the Constitution.

**Rights**

James Madison proposed to Congress seventeen amendments to the Constitution, twelve of which Congress approved and ten of which the states later ratified. These ten amendments are known as the Bill of Rights.

**Executive Department**

Congress created five executive posts: (1) the secretary of state, (2) the secretary of war, (3) the secretary of the Treasury, (4) the attorney general, and (5) the postmaster general. These positions were to be filled by the president, meaning that the president would control patronage, defined as...
the granting of rewards for assisting with political victories (although, in these early years, these jobs were not viewed as lucrative because the federal government was so small). Under President George Washington, these positions (except that of postmaster general) would serve as his cabinet of advisors.

**Revenues**

James Madison, who had played an essential role at the Constitutional Convention, was elected to the House of Representatives from Virginia. His work was equally indispensable during the first term of Congress. In 1789, he persuaded Congress to pass the Hamilton Tariff of 1789, which imposed a 5 to 10 percent tariff on certain imports. This act’s success freed the federal government from constant worry about economic shortfalls.

**The First President**

The least surprising outcome of the nation’s first election was installing George Washington as president. His stature as an honest war leader made him the obvious choice to lead the new government. He never ran for the office, and indeed, had retired from public life altogether before he was elected. Washington had to be talked into coming back and serving his country once again.

As he formulated his approach to the office, Washington was aware that he had no contemporary role models; the American republic was truly an experiment. “I walk on untrodden ground,” he said. “There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn in precedent.” Washington established several important precedents while in office. Three of the most significant concerned the presidential manner, the cabinet, and relations with Congress.

**The Presidential Manner**

Washington displayed a dignified and formal manner as president. In the debate about how people should address him, Washington remained quiet. Federalists proposed calling him “His Excellency” or “His Highness,” but Anti-Federalists rebuffed the proposal, favoring a less lofty title. Without any insistence from Washington himself, he came to be called simply “Mr. President.” This endowed him with importance, but not regal entitlement. Washington also dressed formally (never in military attire, always in American-made suits), conducted affairs in a formal manner, and decided not to use his veto power unless he deemed a law unconstitutional. He wanted people to take the office of president seriously, but without encouraging the office to usurp the will of the people as expressed by Congress.

“It was not until 1920 that women were granted full citizenship.”

>> Washington in retirement at Mount Vernon after the war. He would have to be persuaded to reenter public life and become the new nation’s first president.
The Cabinet

Washington’s second important precedent concerned his cabinet. Congress voted to create several departments within the executive branch, but the Constitution did not explicitly outline the responsibilities of these departments (which were collectively known as the president’s “cabinet”). With the cabinet’s role open to interpretation, Washington assembled this group with an eye toward gathering differing viewpoints. He hoped that including a range of opinions within the government would keep leaders working together in the nation’s interests rather than fighting among themselves for power.

Washington appointed Thomas Jefferson the first secretary of state. In addition to heading American diplomatic relations, Jefferson’s office was also in charge of the census, patents and copyrights, public lands, and the mint. Washington’s Treasury secretary was Alexander Hamilton, a close friend who had served as his aide-de-camp during the Revolution. Henry Knox was secretary of war, as he had been under the Continental Congress during the 1780s. Knox commanded an army of 5,000 men, most of whom were deployed for defense against Native Americans in the western territories. Samuel Osgood was the postmaster general, in charge of mail delivery. Edmund Randolph was the attorney general, who met with the cabinet as Washington’s personal advisor.

Reflecting the balance of perspectives that Washington sought, Hamilton and Knox favored a strong centralized government, whereas Jefferson and Randolph favored greater power at the state level. Jefferson and Randolph were from Virginia, Hamilton from New York, Knox and Osgood from New England. When Washington began consulting them on official matters (or, more commonly, asking Randolph to solicit their opinions), the cabinet system was born.

Relations with Congress

The Constitution required that the executive branch draft treaties with the “advice and consent” of the Senate, but the first time Washington endeavored to make a treaty, the resulting bickering with Congress led to an inconclusive treaty. From then on, Washington decided to negotiate treaties first and then submit them to Congress for approval. This established a precedent. Washington also took seriously his role of informing Congress of the state of the union once a year, thus demonstrating that he was ever attentive to the will of the people.

LO2 Political Divisions

During its first decade, this small government had serious problems to confront, and the confrontations sparked factionalism. Whose side you chose in the debate depended on your vision for the nation. Some, like Washington,
Hamilton, and Adams (who, as a political group, would come to be called the Federalists), wanted a strong federal government that would assist merchants and industry in order to create a buoyant, market-based nation. Others, like Jefferson and Madison (who would come to be called the Democratic-Republicans), preferred a weaker federal government that would allow the preservation of “natural rights” and of slavery. Two issues illustrated these competing visions—problems over government finance and foreign policy.

The Problem of Finance

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress had taken out loans to fund the war. Foreign investors held $12 million worth of notes; domestic bondholders were owed $48 million. To establish good credit and to maintain authority over the states, the federal government had to pay off the loans.

Hamilton’s Financial Plan

As Treasury secretary and an author of the Federalist Papers, Alexander Hamilton promoted economic policies aligned with his vision for a strong, centralized government. He proposed an economic plan that favored the interests of the commercial and mercantile elite. His plan had four key components: (1) consolidating the loans that Congress took out during the Revolutionary War into one national debt, which would importantly commit the wealthy people who were owed money to the success of the federal government; (2) consolidating the individual states’ loans into the national debt, making the states beholden to the federal government and thus strengthening its authority; (3) raising revenue through the sale of bonds, the sale of public lands, the establishment of tariffs, and the imposition of an excise tax on whiskey; and (4) creating the First Bank of the United States, which would hold the government’s revenue and issue bank notes (paper money) that would be legal tender throughout the country.

The bank was the linchpin of the plan. It would benefit the business classes, who could capitalize on the stability provided by a bank. It would organize the loans and the debt as well. But it would also expand the power of Congress and, therefore, of the federal government. A national bank was not mentioned in the Constitution, but the Constitution did grant Congress the power to do anything “necessary and proper” to carry out its delegated powers. If Congress could successfully charter a bank (which it did in 1791), it would assume a vast amount of implied powers through a loose interpretation of the words in the Constitution—a position called loose constructionism. This would in turn make the federal government much more powerful. Some of the founders had envisioned this all along, while others had not, thus making the “original intent” of the founders difficult if not impossible to decipher.

Opposition to Hamilton’s Plan

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison led the faction that immediately opposed Hamilton’s policies. Because Jefferson was a towering figure in the new government, this faction came to be called the Jeffersonians, although they preferred to be called the Democratic-Republicans. The Democratic-Republicans had three problems with Hamilton’s plan (see “The reasons why...” on page 140):

Jefferson, Madison, and their supporters envisioned an agrarian nation made up of independent farmers, not laborers and industrialists who were dependent on others. Their plan for an agrarian nation, of course, also allowed for, indeed depended on, the perpetuation of slavery. (Hamilton, meanwhile, ardently opposed slavery, believing that it denied individual liberty and favored the established aristocracy of the South over the merchants of the North.)
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Congressional Impasse and Washington, D.C.

The deadlock over Hamilton’s plan was ultimately broken by a compromise on an entirely separate issue: the location of the national government. Between 1789 and 1793, the federal government of the United States was in New York City. In 1793, the government moved south to Philadelphia, but southern leaders wanted the government to be located even farther south, in Virginia. They also wanted it to be located outside a big city, because many of Jefferson’s supporters considered big cities sinkholes of corruption.

Over dinner and wine one night, Jefferson and Hamilton struck a deal: Hamilton would instruct the supporters of his economic plan to favor relocating the seat of government along the Potomac River, and Jefferson would allow Hamilton’s plan to pass through Congress. With this compromise, the economic legislation passed, the First Bank of the United States was created (it lasted until 1811), and the stage was set for the national government to move to Washington, D.C.

The Whiskey Rebellion

Opposition to Hamilton’s economic policies was not limited to Democratic-Republicans in the govern-
The Difference between Jefferson and Hamilton

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In western Pennsylvania, Hamilton’s decision to tax whiskey proved divisive. Before railroads or canals were built, western farmers depended on slow, halting, horse-based transport and had difficulty transporting their crops without spoilage. They found it easier to distill their grain to whiskey and ship it in that form. A tax on whiskey was thus a serious threat to their livelihood. To make matters worse, Hamilton’s plan taxed small producers of whiskey more than it did large producers, in part because the tax was an effort to demonstrate to small farmers and westerners the government’s authority to tax them. This gave rise to accusations of East Coast elitism.

In 1794, many westerners attacked the tax men who tried to collect the whiskey tax. When Washington and Hamilton attempted to bring some of the rebels to justice, they chose whiskey producers in western Pennsylvania as their test case. The rural Pennsylvanians fought back, eventually rioting and overrunning the city of Pittsburgh, where they were to be tried for tax evasion. This was the Whiskey Rebellion. Alarmed by the direct refusal to adhere to the dictates of the federal government, George Washington issued a proclamation declaring the farmers in rebellion and sent a newly organized army of nearly 13,000 to quell the revolt. Washington himself at times led the troops. But by the time the army reached western Pennsylvania, the rebels had gone home. Washington ultimately pardoned the two men who were captured in the dispute.

There were two main results of the Whiskey Rebellion. First, from this time forward, the western provinces were firmly Anti-Federalist, favoring the small-government approach of the Democratic-Republicans. But second, Washington’s message was clear: The national government would not allow extralegal protests to effect change. In a nation of laws, change would come only through peaceful means.

The Problem of Foreign Policy

Through the 1790s, there were still no formal political parties, but clear divisions were apparent. Both politicians and everyday Americans had to determine what kind of nation they wanted. In the Whiskey Rebellion, the Pennsylvania farmers sought to defend their idea that the federal government should not reach too deeply into the pockets of everyday Americans. They lost that particular battle, but the sympathy they aroused from the future Democratic-Republicans showed that their complaints did not go unheard.

As a new nation, the United States also had to travel the often-treacherous terrain of foreign policy. And here too, almost every decision made by the federal government was liable to be framed in divisive language. Would the nation support other Enlightenment-based revolutions, like the one taking place in France? Would it challenge England when it infringed on American liberties in the seas? Plus, there were still divisions in the west, with the Spanish still in control of the Mississippi River and Florida, the British still possessing forts in the western hinterlands and Canada, and Indians still living on and claiming lands throughout the vast terrain. The answers to these questions only increased political divisions.
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The Pinckney Treaty

In one rare instance, the Pinckney Treaty of 1796 (also called the Treaty of San Lorenzo) was an accomplishment everyone could celebrate. The tax on whiskey remained after the Whiskey Rebellion, but opposition to the policy cooled when the treaty with Spain gave Pennsylvania farmers an easier way to get their crops to market. The Pinckney Treaty opened the Mississippi River to American shipping and allowed Americans the “right of deposit” at New Orleans, which meant that American merchants could warehouse goods in the city. The Pinckney Treaty was popular, a notable foreign policy achievement in a decade of political controversy. Other foreign policy decisions, however, divided American leaders in the 1790s. In particular, government officials clashed over the French Revolution and the conduct of trade with certain foreign nations.

The French Revolution and the Citizen Genêt Affair

In 1789 in France, growing discontent with the king spurred the French people to overthrow their monarchy, inciting the French Revolution. Most Americans were initially pleased with the news, thinking that they themselves had been on the front line of an inevitable transition to republican governments around the world. But by the early 1790s, the news from France grew worse: The country had erupted into violence, and one leader after another had been deposed, creating chaos and a reign of terror. The French could not agree on what liberty was, who was deserving of it, or how it could be governed fairly.

Public opinion in America was divided over the French Revolution. The disorder in France alarmed many Federalists, and criticism increased when the revolutionaries executed the former king, Louis XVI, and his wife, Marie Antoinette, in 1793. At the same time, many Federalists (especially in New England) viewed England as the United States’s natural trading partner. When Britain declared war on France in 1792 (other European nations saw France’s chaos as an opportunity to make territorial gains, prompting Europe-wide battles), many New Englanders were concerned that too much support for France’s revolution would sour trade relations with England. On the one hand, the Democratic-Republicans continued to sympathize with the revolution, supporting its attempt to create a republican government. On the other hand, Federalists in New England supported Britain.

In the United States, the conflict came to a head when an ambassador from the revolutionary French Republic, Edmond Genêt, arrived in the United States on April 8, 1793. Genêt’s mission was to raise support for the new French government, particularly because the revolution had brought France into conflict with England and Spain, key trading partners of the United States. Genêt received a mixed reception. Many Americans remembered the French contribution to the American Revolution and welcomed him. Others pointed out that America’s alliance had actu-
ally been with the now-deposed French king, not the new French Republic. To avoid entanglement, Washington issued a neutrality proclamation two weeks after Genêt's arrival, on April 22, 1793.

Genêt ignored the proclamation and very publicly tried to recruit American soldiers and advocate American attacks on British ships. Since this was a direct challenge to Washington's stance on neutrality, the president issued a proclamation in August 1793 that France recall Genêt. (Genêt was allowed to stay in America, however, after a new French government demanded his arrest and Washington became aware that Genêt would likely be executed if he returned to France. Washington opposed Genêt's methods, not Genêt himself.)

Besides creating a diplomatic nuisance, the Genêt affair was significant because it delineated further distinctions between Washington's Federalists and Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans. Jefferson opposed President Washington's neutrality and realized that Washington had started looking more to Hamilton for advice on foreign affairs than to him. Recognizing his loss of influence, Jefferson resigned as secretary of state in July 1793, a sign of the growing divisions within American political leadership.

U.S. Neutrality and Jay's Treaty
The rebuke of Genêt did not end Washington's problems maintaining neutrality. Indeed, neither France nor Britain respected American neutrality, with the British sometimes performing the terrible act of impressing (capturing and forcing into service) American sailors into its navy. Other British policies, unrelated to the war with France, also aggravated Americans. For example, the treaty that ended the American Revolution decreed that the British evacuate their forts on the American frontier, but a decade after the agreement was reached, Britain still occupied the forts. In addition, Britain closed its ports in the West Indies to American ships.

To address these issues, in 1794, Washington sent New York's John Jay to Britain. Jay had served as the first chief justice of the Supreme Court and helped negotiate the treaty that ended the American Revolution.

In 1795, Jay returned with Jay's Treaty. In it the British agreed to evacuate military posts along the frontier in the Northwest Territory and make reparations for the cargo seized in 1793 and 1794. But Jay made several concessions; for instance, the United States lifted duties on British imports for ten years. Furthermore, the treaty avoided addressing other important issues, such as the impressing of American sailors.

Jay's Treaty brought the conflict over foreign relations (whether to support France or England) to a boiling point. Jefferson's partisans were brutal in their attacks on the Federalists, claiming that Jay's Treaty was a betrayal of the 1778 alliance with France and a humiliating capitulation to the British. At public rallies, protesters burned Jay in effigy. The vehemence of the opposition caused Washington to hesitate in signing the treaty, although he did sign it eventually. Nevertheless, Jay's Treaty indicated growing divisions within American politics, passionate divisions over the direction of the nation that would contribute to the rise of a two-party political system.

Indian Relations
If problems of finance and foreign policy were crafting two political factions, both parties could at least agree on the policies toward Indians. Once again, it was the Americans' westward expansion that provoked conflict.

Indian Resistance in the Northwest
In 1790, a huge coalition of Indian tribes (including the Chippewa, Ottawa, Shawnee, Delaware, Pottawatomi, and others) attacked American settlers north of the Ohio River, in what is today Ohio. Butressed by British promises of support, the Native Americans were successful in defeating several American battalions until 1794, when the American Army finally secured a victory in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. President Washington intended to clear the Ohio River Valley for settlement and had finally done so at that battle. The result was the Treaty of Greenville (1795), which forced the Indian tribes of the Old Northwest westward across the Mississippi River in 1795.
beneficiaries of the Creek war, because the Creeks served as a buffer between Spain's Florida territory and the American settlers in Georgia.

Anxious to avoid continued attacks by the Creeks, George Washington called the Creek leader, Alexander McGillivray, to New York to pursue a treaty. The parties agreed to terms that legitimated the Creek presence and ended hostilities until 1792, when McGillivray accepted better terms from the Spanish. Small wars continued in the South and Southwest until 1794, at which time Tennesseans, hoping to establish Tennessee as a state, successfully pushed the Creeks farther west and south.

A New Policy

The continuing violence led the United States to revise its Indian policy. In 1790, Congress passed the first of the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, which made it illegal for Americans to trade with Native American tribes without formal consent from the federal government. The acts also made it illegal to sell land to or buy land from Native Americans without similar federal consent. This last part began the process of defining “Indian territory,” the lands where Indians could live and work. The acts once again made it clear that the United States had no intention of integrating Indians into their new nation.

The Rise of Two-Party Politics

Despite the factions’ willingness to come together to fight Indians, by 1795, after the uproars caused by the Citizen Genêt affair and Jay’s Treaty, the two major divisions of opinion had crystallized into political parties: the Democratic-Republicans and the Federalists. Each party considered itself the inheritor of America’s revolutionary ideology and viewed its opposition as illegitimate.

The Democratic-Republicans

The Democratic-Republican Party (often called the Republican Party or the Jeffersonian-Republicans) coalesced in opposition to Hamilton's economic policies and Jay’s Treaty. James Madison and a few other Virginians were the architects of the new organization. They transformed a loose collection of "Democratic-Republican societies" into a disciplined party whose members voted with consistency. In 1792, Thomas Jefferson assumed the party's leadership.

In general, the Democratic-Republicans favored limited government. They opposed the national bank and other measures that enhanced the power of the federal government, and they sided with France over Great Britain because of the feeling of shared republican brotherhood with France. It should be noted, however, that their sense of self-rule also included the right to own slaves if one so desired. Jefferson found supporters among southern landholders and among free workers and laborers everywhere.

The Federalists

The Federalist Party grew out of the faction of American leaders that endorsed Hamilton’s economic policies and Jay’s Treaty. They supported Washington's presidency and helped John Adams succeed him in 1796. In general, the Federalists supported the stability provided by a centralized government and were suspicious of the whims of the populace. The Federalists supported a strong governmental role in economic affairs and the stability of trade with Britain. They were mostly wealthy merchants, large property owners, or conservative farmers. New England and the Middle Colonies were Federalist strongholds.

Slavery

Aside from finance and federalism, another issue caused a rift between the two parties: slavery. To be sure, most Federalists were not abolitionists, but many of them were less committed to the continuation of slavery than the Democratic-Republicans. This division was illuminated in each party’s reaction to the Haitian Revolution.

The Haitian Revolution

In 1791, slaves in Santo Domingo, Haiti, a Caribbean island nation just south of Florida, revolted, killing planters and burning sugar plantations. Led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, the slaves declared independence from their French overlords. In America, the Federalists supported the revolution (in this
instance, they were the ones mindful of their own republican roots). George Washington kept up trade relations with Haiti and sought to recognize the independent nation that was made up mostly of former slaves.

Democratic-Republicans were aghast at Washington’s actions. The Haitian Revolution had forced a flood of white landholders to decamp to America’s southern states, who told of the violence they had witnessed and warned against the potential creation of a black republic near the coast of America. When Thomas Jefferson became president in 1800, he reversed the nation’s position on the Haitian Revolution and supported French attempts to crush the slave rebellion. (The French lost this effort in 1803, and Haiti became the first black republic and Latin America’s first independent state.)
There were three results of the Haitian Revolution in the South. First, southern lawmakers tightened black codes, citing fear of slave insurrections in America. Second, the revolution also hardened planters’ conviction that the South was meant to maintain slavery. This reliance on slavery had deepened after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, which made labor-intensive cotton profitable in much of the South. Finally, the revolution underscored France’s increased reluctance to maintain its possessions in the New World, a sentiment that led to the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 (see Chapter 9).

Gabriel’s Conspiracy

Yet another result of the Haitian Revolution was the spread of revolutionary fervor among American slaves, which sparked Gabriel’s Conspiracy in 1800. After the American Revolution, New York and Philadelphia became havens for free black people, and nearly all of the northern states developed plans to free their slaves. The opposite was happening in the South, where slavery was becoming more entrenched.

In 1800, several churchgoing African Americans learned of the events in Haiti and planned a similar attack on Richmond, Virginia. They intended to burn the town and capture the governor, James Monroe. After heavy rain postponed the attack, several conspirators leaked the plan. State leaders hanged twenty-six rebels, including the leader, a slave named Gabriel.

A second attack in 1802 (led by a slave named Sancho) was also preemptively stopped. These two attempts to overthrow the system resulted in the continued tightening of the laws governing slaves. Most significantly, all postrevolutionary talk of emancipation in the South ended due to white fears of black insurrection. The harsh measures were meant to stifle slaves’ hopes of escaping the system, and the measures worked.

LO Adams’s Presidency and Dealing with Dissent

George Washington easily won reelection as president in 1792, but as the election of 1796 approached, Washington decided not to run for a third term. Exhausted by his years as president and by the continual attacks of the Democratic-Republican press, Washington encouraged Americans to come together under a nonpartisan system.

His hopes were not realized. The Democratic-Republicans and the Federalists both began organizing local meetings of their supporters. In his heartfelt Farewell Address, Washington rued these divisions, but both parties were sufficiently well organized to field candidates in the election of 1796. The two-party political system was born.

Adams’s Election

When Washington’s vice president, Federalist John Adams, announced his candidacy for president, the Democratic-Republicans nominated Thomas Jefferson to oppose him. After a particularly partisan campaign, rife with intense bickering and disension, Adams received seventy-one electoral votes and became president. According to the Constitution, the candidate with the second highest number of electoral votes was to be vice president, and, by previous arrangement among Federalist electoral voters, Adams’s running mate, Thomas Pinckney of South Carolina, was meant to receive the same number of votes as Adams less one, with one supporter withholding his vote. This would have given Pinckney seventy
votes and the vice presidency. Confusion and trickery muddled the plan, though, and, communications were slow. No one was sure who was supposed to hold back his vote for Pinckney, and so several did. The result was that, instead of Pinckney, it was Jefferson who took second place, with sixty-eight electoral votes. Thus, Adams's opponent, Thomas Jefferson, became his vice president. From 1797 to 1800, there would be no harmony in the federal government.

The XYZ Affair

Upon entering office in 1797, Adams immediately faced a foreign policy crisis called the XYZ Affair, which further divided the two factions. The French had interpreted Jay's Treaty as an indication that the United States was siding with Great Britain in the trade wars, and they retaliated by raiding American merchant ships. France was angry at what it saw as a rebuke to the clan of republican brotherhood. Adams sent three envoys to France to defuse the situation, and the French foreign minister sent three agents to meet them (designated X, Y, and Z in official French documents). It became evident that X, Y, and Z’s real purpose was to extort money from the Americans as a prerequisite for negotiations. When news of “the XYZ Affair” reached the United States, Americans were outraged at France’s galling lack of respect.

Result—The Quasi-War

Meanwhile, the French continued to raid American ships. The Adams administration responded to these raids by repudiating America's 1778 alliance with France, and a so-called “quasi-war” erupted between the two nations. From 1798 to 1800, the naval fleets of both countries openly plundered each other’s ships. As Franco-American relations deteriorated, Adams feared the outbreak of a full-scale war between the two nations. This was significant because it put Adams on the defensive regarding dissent within the American government. In his mind, America was on the verge of an international war.

The Alien and Sedition Acts

Adams’s concerns about dissent became problematic because partisanship had continued to escalate during his term. For example, in 1798, a fight broke out on the floor of the House of Representatives when Matthew Lyon, a pugnacious Democratic-Republican congressman from Vermont, declared that aristocratic Federalist representatives were perpetually duping the people. Roger Griswold, a Federalist representative from Connecticut, asked Lyon if he meant to defend the people with a wooden sword. (Griswold was referring to the fact that, during the American Revolution, Lyon had been court-martialed for cowardice and forced to wear a wooden sword as punishment.) Lyon retaliated by spitting in Griswold’s face, and the two men began wrestling on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Attempting to bring such bitter conflicts under control, Adams pushed a series of measures through Congress known collectively as the Alien and Sedition Acts. They turned out to be his undoing.
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“Cinque-têtes, or the Paris Monster,” an outrageous contemporary political cartoon on the XYZ Affair, shows staunch Americans resisting threats and demands for money from revolutionary France, depicted as happily devouring frogs, guillotining aristocrats, and supporting the Haitian Revolution (notice Toussaint L’Ouverture seated at the far right).

The Alien and Sedition Acts consisted of three separate acts, the third of which would have the biggest impact on Adams’s future: (1) The Alien Enemies Act authorized the deportation of the citizens of enemy nations; (2) the Alien Friends Act allowed the government to detain and deport noncitizens for almost any cause. Because many of the most active Democratic-Republicans were recent British immigrants, the Alien Friends Act was regarded as a deliberate assault on the party; and (3) the Sedition Act set fines and prison sentences for anyone found guilty of writing, speaking, or publishing “false, scandalous and malicious” statements against the government.

The two Alien Acts had little impact, but the Sedition Act was explosive. Several Democratic-Republican newspaper editors were jailed for violating the new law. Federalists used the law to jail Matthew Lyon, the Democratic-Republican representative who had wrestled on the House floor. Not only did the act make political martyrs out of the jailed Republican-Democrats, but it also provoked their party colleagues to fight back.

Calling the Alien and Sedition Acts a violation of the First Amendment’s guarantees, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison collaborated anonymously to pen a set of resolutions denouncing the acts. In 1798, the legislatures of Virginia and Kentucky adopted resolutions—called the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions—proclaiming the Sedition Act to be an infringement on rights protected by their state constitutions. The resolutions declared that each state had the right to nullify federal laws within its borders.

Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions
Declarations written by Thomas Jefferson and James Madison and adopted by the legislatures of Virginia and Kentucky, proclaiming the Sedition Act to be an infringement on rights protected by their state constitutions and that states had the right to nullify federal laws within their borders.
This bold challenge to federal authority was called the **doctrine of nullification**. No other state endorsed the resolutions, and several openly rebuked them, but they provided the intellectual framework for sectional divisions that were to come. They also set the stage for the bitter election of 1800.

### The “Bloodless Revolution” of 1800

The candidates in the election of 1800 were the same as those in 1796, Jefferson and Adams. Four years of controversy, however, had intensified the bitter rivalry between the two men. Citing the Alien and Sedition Acts, Democratic-Republicans accused Adams of harboring monarchical ideas and called him a slave to British interests. Federalists castigated Thomas Jefferson as an atheist (he had composed his own personal copy of the Bible by cutting out everything but the words spoken by Christ) who would follow the lead of the French revolutionaries and instigate a reign of terror in the United States. The campaigning was vitriolic, to say the least.

### The Mistake

John Adams gave his opposition unexpected help by reopening negotiations with France. In terms of international relations, the negotiations were a success; they resulted in a peace treaty that brought the quasi-war to an end. In terms of Adams’s candidacy, because most of his fellow Federalists were pro-British, his efforts to smooth things over with France divided his own party. The Federalist Party had already suffered in the controversy over the Alien and Sedition Acts. Now they were divided over whether the United States should negotiate with France.

### The Election

As the election of 1800 approached, the Federalists were too divided to give Jefferson any real competition. Hamilton, in fact, jockeyed to get the Federalists to dump Adams as their candidate. In contrast, the Democratic-Republican Party was well organized, and the final tally in the Electoral College gave Jefferson and his running mate, Aaron Burr of New York, a clear margin of victory.

### Results

The assumption of power by the Democratic-Republicans did not go off without a hitch, however. Ironically, the Democratic-Republicans were, in a way, too organized. Jefferson and Burr received seventy-three votes apiece in Electoral College voting. This was a problem because the Constitution did not provide for a two-person ticket (with one designated as president and the other as vice president). Rather, it stated that the candidate with the most electoral votes became president and the candidate with the second most votes assumed the vice presidency. In the event of a tie, the decision was placed in the hands of the House of Representatives.

In the election of 1800 (Map 8.2), Democratic-Republican candidates had also won control of both houses of Congress, but the new Congress did not sit until after the presidential election was settled. Therefore, it was the **lame-duck** (or, soon-to-be-out-of-office) Federalist Congress that would make the decision. Some Federalists decided to support Burr and deny Jefferson the presidency, and, although Burr did not openly support this movement, he also did not denounce it. Hamilton, however, distrusted Burr more than he disliked Jefferson. Using his influence among the Federalists, Hamilton helped his old rival Thomas Jefferson to victory on the thirty-sixth ballot. To ensure that the shenanigans of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burr</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinckney</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Map 8.2. The Election of 1800**

The presidential election of 1800 witnessed the first transfer of power from one political faction to another. This “bloodless revolution” was vital in ensuring the survival of the young nation.
The 1800 election would never be repeated, in 1804 the United States adopted the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, allowing electors to vote for president and vice president separately.

And in the end . . .

Although party politics had increased tremendously between 1796 and 1800, the election of 1800 was valuable in demonstrating that an opposition party could defeat the party in power without causing a total breakdown of government or a civil war. This was a tremendous accomplishment. When Adams and the Federalists handed over the reins of power peacefully, optimism ran high that the nation had passed a critical test. Jefferson himself declared in his Inaugural Address, “We are all Republicans. We are all Federalists,” thus suggesting that the survival of the nation should trump political differences. After 1800, opposition became a cornerstone of the American system of government, as did the two-party system. The so-called bloodless revolution of 1800 paved the way for active, peaceful political dissent in American life.

What else was happening . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>Early bicycles are made in Scotland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>France begins using the metric system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>Tula Slave Rebellion in the Dutch Caribbean colony of Curacao lasts a month before finally being suppressed. August 17 is still celebrated in Curacao as a day of freedom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>The first soft drink is invented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Worcestershire sauce is invented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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