

1800 - 1817

Major Themes:

Manifest Destiny/Expansion
Foreign Policy/Trade
Federalists vs. Anti-federalists
War of 1812

Presidencies:

Thomas Jefferson (AF) – 1801 - 1809
James Madison (AF) – 1809 - 1817

Overview:

The curtain comes up on the 1800's with a critical event – the election of Thomas Jefferson. Now we had already had two Presidential elections with no major issues, but this time, an Anti-federalist, Jefferson, would win against a Federalist, Adams, and it would require a transfer of power between political enemies for the first time. Would Adams, the author of the Alien and Sedition Acts step down in favor of the politician he hated most? The fact that he did, which historians refer to as the “Revolution of 1800”, is considered an important coming of age sign for the new country – democracy was tested and survived.

Adams did get in one final jab at his rival though, by waiting until the last few days he had in office to pass the Judiciary Act of 1801, increasing the number of courts and judges in the federal government – judges which Adams could then appoint. Among these “midnight judges” was John Marshall, who many would come to describe as the Father of the Supreme Court for his long and influential term on the bench.

Now that Jefferson was in office, the anti-federalists he represented could rest easy. Or could they? The new President quickly found out that it was difficult being an *anti-federalist* in charge of a *Federal* government. Could he stay true to strict constructionist principles and follow the Constitution literally?

No, he couldn't. Almost immediately, Jefferson was faced with a threat from the Barbary States of North Africa, a loosely bonded group of pirates who threatened American shipping and charged taxes to those U.S. ships that passed through the Mediterranean. Jefferson assembled a “mosquito fleet” of armed merchant ships to transport Marines to the region and take on the pirates. While successful, it wasn't exactly how people expected an anti-federalist to act. In fact, it seemed rather aggressive.

Soon after, Jefferson found himself presented with the bargain of a lifetime in the form of all of France's holdings in the New World for only \$15 million. TJ wanted New Orleans most of all, and probably would have paid full price for merely that city, since it controlled access to the Mississippi River and allowed us to secure our western frontier from foreign interference, but as long as Napoleon was being generous, why not? Well, the Constitution didn't give the government power to purchase land at all, so Jefferson had to overlook his own anti-federalist principles in order to make the purchase, and spend more than twice the entire national budget to make buy the Louisiana Territory. It was just too good a deal to pass up.

As a result, Jefferson would send Lewis and Clark in charge of the Corps of Discovery to both explore what we had just bought as well as look for a Northwest Passage. In the next two years, they would make it to Astoria, Oregon, unknowingly laying claim to the Pacific Northwest for the United States.

Like Washington before him, Jefferson did want to be careful of entangling alliances with foreign countries that might drag the United States into war. So to keep us from entering the Napoleonic Wars that had Europe in flames at the time, Jefferson and his congress passed the Embargo Act in 1807, prohibiting any American company from trading with any countries currently involved in that war. Unfortunately, that was pretty much all of Europe, so to American merchants in the northeast, this seemed especially harsh and more or less killed their businesses. Some likened it to the heavy handed Navigation Acts used by the British, and said it seemed like an odd thing for an anti-federalist to do.

As Madison entered the Presidency in 1809, pressure to ease up on these trade restrictions was growing, so he modified it with the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, which made it so merchants were only prohibited from trading with France and England. OK, so it wasn't much better given that those were the two main trading partners for the US. The War of 1812 between the US and Britain also interfered with trade, obviously, so American traders felt like they had been picked on long enough. In 1814, five states in the northeast sent representatives to the Hartford Convention to discuss opposition to the war and trade policies. While it wasn't voted on, secession from the Union was discussed.

The war was mainly about British impressments of American sailors. When capturing an American merchant ship, they would simply hold the sailors captive and force them to work on British warships. It was the ultimate insult for an independent nation. On top of the other unresolved issues between us and England – the Canadian border, unpaid claims by the loyalists, and freedom of the seas – it was enough to cause war to break out.

The conflict ended in a stalemate. The powerful British navy controlled the oceans, even while a professional US Navy had been created, its relatively few ships were no match for the Royal Navy. Meanwhile, in order to win the war, the British would have to conquer us physically – occupy the land – and this, as they well knew, was more impossible by the early 1800's than it had been during the Revolution. Despite a raid on Washington DC and an American victory at New Orleans by Andrew Jackson, both sides tired out by 1815, signed the Treaty of Ghent, and would never go to war against each other again.

As a final signal that hostilities between the two sides might be a thing of the past, the two countries followed up with the Rush-Bagot Treaty, agreeing not to station any warships in the Great Lakes region, demilitarizing the Canadian water border.

Two court cases to know from this time period – both with John Marshall as Chief Justice.

1803 *Marbury vs. Madison* established the principle of judicial review of laws for constitutionality.

1817 *McCulloch vs. Maryland* – ruled that a state could not tax a federal institution, in this case, the National Bank. “The power to tax implies the power to destroy”