



CHAPTER ONE

The President vs. the Vice President

HE WASN'T A candidate, but Alexander Hamilton was possibly the leading political player in the election of 1800. As the nation's first Treasury Secretary wielding immense power in the first presidential administration, he set out to be a kingmaker in crowning the third president of the United States. He perhaps crowned the king he and most American political observers least expected.

King is a term that must be used judiciously, considering the American Revolution was about casting off the shackles of the British crown. Ultimately, for all his brilliance, Hamilton was a man who carried deep vendettas, and made the political personal.

As revered as George Washington was, few seemed moved by his warning against factions during his farewell address. The first president was twice elected by acclamation, but for all practical purposes governed as a Federalist. He was far removed from the fierce electioneering that had devolved into factionalism by the time the first contested presidential election came.

Round One

In 1796, Vice President John Adams, carrying Washington's view of federalism, and former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, leader of the anti-federalist Democratic-Republicans, tangled in the first contested presidential campaign. The two factions were fairly unorganized that year, but each side would demonstrate the strategy of regional balance early. Adams, a New Englander, had Thomas Pinckney, a distinguished diplomat from South Carolina, as his running mate. Jefferson, the Virginian, had New Yorker Aaron Burr at his side. Four years later, the names were the same and the only thing that would change is that the Federalists picked the younger brother of Pinckney, Charles, to run with Adams in 1800.

It ended in the election of Adams—the ideological successor to Washington, winning the presidency with 71 electoral votes to Jefferson's 68. Jefferson, as the second runner up, became vice president. The fact that two opponents would govern together was, to some, evidence of a constitutional flaw.

Without disputing the matter, Jefferson accepted the vice presidency, believing it a good idea to work with a moderate Federalist against the Hamiltonians. Jefferson wrote to Madison:

*It is to be considered whether it would not be on the whole for the public good to come to a good understanding with him.*ⁱ

Scandal and Near War

The United States had begun trading with Britain, with which France was at war. The French insisted that anyone trading with Britain was an act of war. French navy officials began boarding American trade ships and seizing cargo.

The Directory, the pre-Napoleon ruling regime in France, refused to accept an American envoy to the country and decided to cut commercial relations with the young country seeking to establish an economic foothold. French Foreign Minister Charles Maurice de Talleyrand asserted in 1798 that France refused to negotiate with America unless the government would first pay a substantial bribe.

Adams reported the apparent act of extortion to Congress, and the Senate printed the correspondence, in which the Frenchmen were referred to only as “X, Y, and Z.” One of the first American political scandals to have a name was the XYZ Affair. The bribery scandal pumped up the popularity of the Adams administration and led to a Federalist landslide in the 1798 midterm elections. Congress approved money for the naval conflict with France and passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, the latter which led to the demise of Adams. It was an attempt to curb criticism of the administration, but resulted in making him more unpopular.

Adams and his Federalist administration led the nation into a quasi-naval war with France, in what might have marked an early divide about hawkish foreign policy vs. more restraint. His vice president, Jefferson, strongly opposed the military involvement against the French, whom he had sympathies for. But Jefferson also had troubles with militarization—which he feared would empower the federal government to oppress the public.ⁱⁱ

As vice president, Jefferson was still one of the authors of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions that declared the Alien and Sedition Act to be unconstitutional, and there was broad belief that states could nullify federal laws.ⁱⁱⁱ

Under the Alien and Sedition Act—later found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court after it had already expired—the president was allowed to expel or imprison any immigrant who was considered to be dangerous and or treasonous. It further authorized prison terms or fines for anyone who distributed “any false, scandalous, and malicious writings” that could promote the overthrow of the government. This gave the government very broad interpretation, which is difficult to imagine today. The Adams administration had 15 opposition newspaper editors jailed. But framed in the context of the fears of the revolutionary bloodletting in France, to some, it might seem comparable to the USA Patriot Act in post-9/11 America, or surveillance by the National Security Agency.

However, Adams proved to be a moderate on the defense front. The quasi-war with France never turned into anything more, as Adams negotiated a peace with France. That enraged Hamilton, who had a distinguished record on the battlefield in the Revolutionary War, rising to the rank of Major General, and serving on the staff of General Washington.

The Presidential Candidates

A great founder, Adams had a tumultuous four years in office and always watched his back for Vice President Jefferson. The 1796 campaign certainly had its moments of mudslinging between the two men who would both die on the Fourth of July, but the political discourse of an 1800 rematch devolved to political warfare. It would be the last time the vice president challenged a president, primarily because of the constitutional change prompted by these controversial elections.

There was no set national Election Day at the time for all states to select their electors. In the absence of popular voting, states were left to decide themselves. The only real Election Day would be on Wednesday Dec. 3, when electors would meet in their respective state capitals and cast their votes.

Adams was the only candidate to have never owned slaves. At that time, one in six Americans living in the country were enslaved. There was of course Jefferson’s complex approach of being personally opposed to slavery but still owning slaves. Pinckney of South Carolina was also a slave owner. Even Burr, the New Yorker, had previously owned slaves. Every state had at least limited slavery except for Adams’ own Massachusetts and nearby Vermont.^{iv}

Born in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1735, Adams was a Harvard-educated attorney who served in

the Continental Congress. He served as a diplomat in France and Holland during the Revolutionary War, a cause he strongly supported. He returned to the United States to be elected as the first vice president of the United States, under George Washington.

The most influential member of the Washington administration was most definitely Hamilton, and Adams was aware of this. The vice president told his wife Abigail Adams:

My country has in its wisdom contrived for me the most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived.^v

Though Jefferson was obviously not his choice to be part of his administration, it might have given Adams some relief that his foe was cast into insignificance.

Born in 1743 in Albemarle County, Virginia, Jefferson inherited about 5,000 acres from his mother. He studied at the College of William and Mary. In 1772 he married a widow, Martha Wayles Skelton, and the two lived in his famous Monticello home in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Jefferson served the Virginia House of Burgesses, later the Continental Congress, and authored the Declaration of Independence at the age of 33. In 1786 he authored the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom. But it was a year prior to that—1785—that he succeeded Benjamin Franklin as the minister to France, where he became sympathetic with the French Revolution, or at least the thinking behind it. That sympathy prompted the conflict with Hamilton and abbreviated his time as Washington's Secretary of State, which lasted only from 1790 to 1793. In 1796, he stepped up to run for president.

There is much complaint about how long presidential campaigns last today. The 1800 campaign, before there were actual voters to persuade and big money to raise, began about a year before the voting, almost as long as today's elections, and a departure from 1796, when the campaign began about three months before the Electoral College convened.

Though a fierce campaign to be sure, it wasn't fiercely fought by the candidates themselves, who both stayed above of the fray, allowing political operatives, journalists of the partisan press and other surrogates do their dirty work. For his part, President Adams was toothless and barely able to speak publicly. So when it got nasty, the candidates themselves didn't sling the mud. Both parties had massive barbecues and booze-fests across the 16 states to get the public charged up.

That year, 10 of the 16 existing states actually had the state legislatures choose the electors. The other six states chose their electors by popular vote. However, state legislators—who were directly elected—were considered a proxy vote for president that year, as it would be these state governments that would pick the electors for that state.

A few states sought to change the way electors are picked, such as in the Democratic-Republican leaning Georgia. The Federalist-leaning New England states also altered how things were done. Because both houses of each state legislature essentially had to agree on the set of electors, Pennsylvania and South Carolina had trouble arriving at a position until just days before the election.

Meanwhile, the states of Kentucky, Virginia, Maryland, Rhode Island, North Carolina and Tennessee wrestled with whether the winners in their states would get all of their state's electoral votes—as is the case in most states today whether a candidate carries the state by 1 percent or 20 percent—or would there be proportionality, allowing the individual electors to cast their individual votes. This was significant, because it would allow parties—depending on the state—to have a significant advantage, or disadvantage. Winning all of the state's electoral votes could be a big boon.

Virginia—which seemed to like being the first at everything at the time—was the first state to choose its electors in January. Though heavily Democratic-Republican, there were some Federalist elected officials. So, the majority was sure to change the rules to “general ticket” voting—or a winner take all system. The change was spearheaded by James Madison.^{vi}

The Vice Presidential Candidates

Incredibly important to this contest were the two vice presidential candidates, chiefly Aaron Burr, who was running with Jefferson (though not as a ticket as we know today) but also Charles Pinckney of South Carolina (who was running with Adams). Both Burr and Pinckney were presidential candidates.

Under the structure, each party picked two presidential candidates, with an understanding—but no formal designation—of who would become president and who would be vice president. The idea was that electors would place each first and second, since the second runner up in an election became the vice president. The lack of the presidential-vice presidential tickets we know today is why we had an Adams-Jefferson administration for four years.

Burr, born in 1756 in Newark, New Jersey, was the son of a minister. He first considered following in his father's footsteps, before deciding it wasn't the life for him. Like his rival Hamilton, he became an aide to General Washington. Washington had more than a few problems with the pompous young Colonel Burr, but admired his ability enough to entrust him with monitoring British troop movements in New York.

Burr married Theodosia Bartow Prevost, the widow of a British army officer, in 1782. In just 12 years, Burr was a widower when his wife died, but they had one child named Theodosia, after her mother.

He started his political career serving one term in the New York Assembly beginning in 1784. He actually joined forces with Alexander Hamilton to support Richard Yates in the 1789 New York Governor's race. Yates lost to George Clinton, but Clinton appointed Burr as the state attorney general and orchestrated his appointment to the U.S. Senate in 1791. Clinton and Burr would go on to have a complex relationship.

Burr's move to the U.S. Senate came at the expense of ousting Sen. Philip Schuyler, who happened to be Hamilton's father-in-law. This was one of the first points of animosity between Burr and Hamilton.

Burr, though legendary for his lack of any ideology or principles, was a staunch partisan Democratic-Republican in the Senate and opposed the foreign policy of his old boss—President George Washington—while also voting against most of Washington's nominees, including a failed attempt to block John Jay from serving in the Supreme Court.

He had the endorsement of the Democratic-Republicans to be vice president under Jefferson in 1796. However, after that vote that year, he came in fourth place, since half of the Democratic-Republicans didn't cast their second ballot for Burr—a far cry from what would happen four years later.

Burr retired from the U.S. Senate in 1797 and returned to the New York state Assembly in 1798, where he was more bipartisan, and supported defensive measures to protect New York harbors from the French after the "XYZ Affair." Some in his party had their misgivings about him, and also worried about questions involving his finances. Burr was out of office the next year—but he still had plenty of political clout.

Burr continued to be a vocal opponent of the Alien and Sedition Acts, and made up for some lost ground among fellow partisans. Nevertheless, the popular choice among most Democratic-Republicans for vice president in 1800 was George Clinton. Luckily for Burr, Clinton didn't want the job, at least not then.

Jefferson also had misgivings about his running mate, but nevertheless used his influence to be sure all 21 Virginia electors would cast their second vote for Burr. He may have worked too hard to ensure those votes, as it turns out.

Burr actively campaigned for Jefferson in several states. At stops in New England, he asserted, "The Matter of V.P—is of very little comparative consequence." He speculated on a Jefferson-Adams administration, and simply insisted he was doing everything possible to ensure a Jefferson presidency.^{vii}

On the other side, Pinckney, born in 1746, came from an aristocratic family that had close ties to the British. His father was the colonial chief justice and a member of the Royal Council. His father even moved to London in 1753 and the young Charles enrolled in Westminster preparatory school, and grew up to practice law being admitted into London's bar in 1769.

After coming to the states, he had a close association with the planter class of South Carolina, which

would seem to make him fit well among Jeffersonians. But he also supported a strong national government—which prompted him to eventually side with the Hamilton faction.

In a time when plenty of elite gentlemen were eager to join the military as a means of boosting their prestige, Pinckney joined the socially elite 1st Regiment of South Carolina militia, which made him lieutenant. He entered elected office in 1770 as part of the South Carolina legislature and was a regional attorney general three years later. He married Sarah Middleton, who was the daughter and sister of South Carolina political leaders, further affirming his gentleman status.

Despite those family and social ties with England, he rejected the British loyalist argument, and happily supported the revolution. He stepped aside as a politician to be a fulltime soldier leading the 1st Regiment as a senior company commander, and was part of the successful defense of Charleston in June 1776 against British forces led by General Sir Henry Clinton and moved up to the rank of colonel. Since hostilities had cooled in the south, Pinckney sought to serve under General Washington near Philadelphia in 1777. Joining Washington's staff also allowed him to build a political network, such as Hamilton and James McHenry.

When South Carolina was under threat from the British again, Pinckney returned in 1778. His defense of Charleston was less successful in 1780, as this time the British invasion was successful, and Pinckney was among those in the state who became a prisoner of war. His British captors sought to persuade him to turn away from the American cause, he famously said:

If I had a vein that did not beat with the love of my country, I myself would open it. If I had a drop of blood that could flow dishonorable, I myself would let it out. ^{viii}

As the fighting had ended, Pinckney was freed in 1782 under a prisoner exchange and promoted to brigadier general. His wife died in 1784 and in 1785, a man named Daniel Huger wounded him in a duel, but he survived. Hamilton might have been wise to learn from Pinckney's misfortune.

Like Hamilton, Pinckney believed the goals of the American Revolution couldn't be achieved unless the states were bound politically, economically, and militarily, putting him solidly in what would become the Federalist camp.

He represented South Carolina at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 and helped establish a South Carolina state Constitution in 1790. He seemed to have retired from politics after that, declining political office from President Washington, but by 1796 he accepted the position of ambassador to France. This put him in the middle of the XYZ Affair. When the French officials pushed the bribe, he famously responded, "not a six pence." ^{ix}

Pinckney considered the French demand for a bribe as an affront to America's honor. He returned home and President Adams appointed him as leader of the Provisional Army the Federalists pushed to raise in response to the troubles with France.

Safe Place for a Bible

The forces behind Adams attacked Jefferson for deism and alleged his lack of religiosity, or a godless Jacobin, as they called him. Jacobin was a term for French radical, stressing Jefferson's backing of the French Revolution. The Connecticut Courant (today the Hartford Courant) even said, a Jefferson presidency would mean:

...murder robbery, rape, adultery and incest will all be openly taught and practiced, the air will be rent with the cries of the distressed, the soil will be soaked with blood, and the nation black with crime.

That's supercharged political hyperbole to be sure, but it was an apt description of what happened after the

French Revolution. That's not likely what Jefferson and other American supporters of the uprising envisioned would be the outcome, but it's very easy to see how being pro-French was cause for alarm during that era.

Those who engage in handwringing every time religion enters the political arena should take a look at 1800.

Timothy Dwight, the Congregationalist clergyman president of Yale University, painted a grim picture of a Jefferson win, predicting the "Bibles will be cast into a bonfire," with children "chanting mockeries against God," and "our wives and daughters the victims of legal prostitution, soberly dishonored, speciously polluted, the outcast of delicacy and virtue; and the loathing of God and man ... our sons the disciples of Voltaire and the dragoons of Marat."

New York pastor John Mason authored the *Voice of Warning to Christians in the Ensuing Election* and declared that Jefferson:

...writes against the truths of God's word; who makes not even a profession of Christianity. ^x

Many other prominent ministers joined in dire warnings against a Jefferson presidency. It might well seem like they were piling on, but again, the French Revolution was very fresh on the minds of the American public. The French Revolution began with high-minded rhetoric before descending mass murderous cleansing of the Christian church in the country. So, while such urgent warning seemed over the top—particularly when in the context of describing so revered a figure as Jefferson, a staunch supporter of religious liberty by the way—French-phobia wasn't unfounded.

In one of the more humorous anecdotes to come out of Paul F. Boller's book *Presidential Elections*, first published in 1984 and subsequently updated, a Connecticut woman fearing a Jefferson victory brought her Bible to the only Jefferson supporter she knew. She told him she feared a Jefferson regime would destroy all Bibles, and wanted her friend to hold on to hers so it would be safe. The man disputed the premise, but said, "...if all Bibles are to be destroyed, what is the use of bringing yours to me? That will not save it when it is found." The woman responded, "It will be perfectly safe with you. They'll never think of looking in the house of a Democrat for a Bible."

It was perhaps to combat the constant godless attack and the French comparisons that Jefferson asserted that year, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man."

Federalists didn't confine their attacks to religion, but hurled several charges at Jefferson to make him untenable. They claimed he was a coward as wartime governor of Virginia; they claimed he cheated British creditors and they claimed he cheated a widow out of an estate valued at tens of thousands of dollars. They even hit him on his alleged affairs with his slaves.

In order to reassure the country, he was not a wild-eyed radical, Jefferson wrote a long "profession of my political faith," and referred it to Elbridge Gerry, a Democratic-Republican standing for governor of Massachusetts and future vice president. The profession, which Gerry was only supposed to circulate among friends, asserted that Jefferson had a strong belief in republicanism, or representative government, as opposed to mob rule. Secondly, that he had a commitment to the U.S. Constitution, with which many in the Democratic-Republican camp were never fully on board. ^{xi}

The Grand Adams-Royals Conspiracy Theory

The Democratic-Republicans didn't treat President Adams any better. Prominent journalist Benjamin Franklin Bache, publisher of the *Philadelphia Aurora* wrote the president, "...old, querulous, bald, blind, crippled, toothless Adams." He also accused Adams of trying to "...gasconade like a bully and to swagger as if he were emperor of all Russians." Pushing the monarch narrative, Bache referred to Adams as his "serene

highness” and said Adams was “a man divested of reason and wholly under the domination of his passions.”^{xii}

Jefferson is widely believed to have put another editor, James Callender, a deeply unethical journalist, on his payroll. Callender wrote the president was “...a repulsive pedant,” and “...hideous, hermaphroditical character which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman.”

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Callender was among those jailed under the Alien and Sedition Act. Though he served as a martyr for the Democratic-Republicans, Jefferson didn’t bail him out when asked because he did not want to be publicly associated with Callender.

Federalists weren’t the only party that could stir hysteria about another country. The Democratic-Republicans concocted a conspiracy theory that Adams wanted to reunite with Britain. Something that likewise would seem outlandish today, but certainly believable in that age given the close time proximity to independence. If nothing else, it fed the narrative of aristocratic Federalists.

Long before the Truthers and Birthers came the theory that went like this: President Adams was conspiring with the Royal Family to reunite the United States of America as a colony of Britain by having one of his sons marry the daughter of King George III. The original story included George Washington, but since Washington could do no wrong in the eyes of most, he was portrayed as a good guy. After making two prior pleas that Adams rejected, Washington came to his successor wearing a Revolutionary uniform and threatened to stab him with his sword if Adams went forward with the diabolical plan.

Apparently unable to stop with a good conspiracy theory, the story elaborates by swiping the running mate, saying Pinckney went to England as part of the deal to procure four mistresses, two for each. Adams simply found this comical.

He joked:

I do declare on my honor, if this be true, General Pinckney has kept them all for himself and cheated me out of my two.

Abigail Adams said that there was enough “abuse and scandal” during the election year “to ruin and corrupt the minds and morals of the best people in the world.”^{xiv}

The bizarre tale has some underpinnings in the realm of policy debate. As many were concerned about Jefferson’s love for France, there was similar concern about Adam’s continued respect for Britain. There was no doubt about his commitment to the American Revolution, but he continued to see merit in a constitutional monarch for other countries, while he believed direct democracy was dangerous—a slippery slope to French anarchy.

Conservatives and Liberals

It’s always tough to impose today’s philosophical views on that of the past, but on balance, Adams, Hamilton and the Federalists were probably conservatives while Jefferson and the Democratic Republicans were liberals. That said, the modern Democratic Party’s lineage to Jefferson is very questionable. The term ‘conservative’ was not widely used in those days, whereas liberal typically meant freedom as in John Locke, who had a libertarian philosophy. Jefferson captured a libertarian spirit well, thus is quite admired by most modern conservatives.

It would be puzzling to many in the modern era to understand how the Federalists—who favored strong central government—would be conservative, while the Democratic-Republicans—who preferred decentralization and States rights—could be liberal. But there were broader issues at stake.

The Federalists favored an industrial modernized economy as supported by most Republicans, from Abraham Lincoln, Dwight Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan and the modern conservative movement. The

Jeffersonians preferred a more limited agriculture-based economy. But this view led to a perspective of using rhetoric to champion the common man and assail the comfortable.

Perhaps most of all, assessing any right-left divide for that time revolved around France.

The French Revolution created an intense fear that something akin to it would come to the young republic of the United States of America. Conservatives felt their task was to defend society from upheaval while the Democratic-Republicans had significant French sympathies. By contrast, the Federalists were conservatives because they sought to defend tradition and civilization for which the French Revolution seemed to pose the biggest risk.

Jefferson was swept up with French civilization and philosophy. Long before the American Revolution. Jefferson heralded reason above traditional institutions.^{xv}

As historian Bernard A. Weisberger, author of *America Afire: Jefferson, Adams and the First Contested Election*, explained in a 2000 C-Span interview:

Adams was a conservative who didn't have a very high opinion of popular judgment. He did believe in self-government, but he also believed that, in the end, people were easily seduced by rank and riches and glamour, and he believed that society was in a constant state of class war; not quite class warfare, but the poor and the rich would always be trying to get the advantage of each other. And so you needed a stable, steady government, particularly a strong executive to hold them in check. While not particularly religious, he respected tradition and authority.

Jefferson, on the other hand, was a philosophical radical, much more of a philosophical than a governmental radical, as it turned out. But Jefferson believed in the triumph of reason; he was a child of the Enlightenment. And he was sure that if humanity got rid of all the superstitions and idolatry, i.e. revealed religion and reverence for monarchy and aristocracy, the world would get better and better. And he thought that in the mass of ordinary people, by whom he meant usually small-land holders, there was a natural elite of intelligence, which could be brought out by a universal system of public education. And if such a system were in place, democracy could prosper without a great deal of authority, without a great deal of government.

So there's an optimistic vs. hard-boiled view of human nature that separated them.^{xvi}

Just as today, the modern Democratic party engages in fiery class-warfare rhetoric. In those days, Jefferson's party took jabs at the class of people they called "stockjobbers," who today would be called fat cats or one-percenters. Democratic-Republicans believed "stockjobbers," or the investor class, gained unearned wealth and held stock in the National Bank, hence the name.

James Madison shared this view that the investor class—or those who weren't farmers—were unproductive and less deserving of wealth. The same class resentment wasn't felt toward wealthy plantation owners or anyone rich from agriculture, who the Democratic-Republicans believed visibly produced something for society. Stockjobbers, Jeffersonians believed, were simply loathsome people that didn't grow things, but rather shuffled papers and drove up prices for the working man.^{xvii}

The Federalists of course had a different point of view, believing the National Bank was important to the wealth of the nation—similar to the Bank of England.

Pulitzer Prize winning author Edward J. Larson, who wrote *A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Tumultuous Election of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign*, contends that it isn't such a difficult distinction when looking at Federalists and the Jeffersonians. Larson said:

Government has little to do with it. Liberals believed in increasing individual freedom, or classic liberalism. Conservatives, or classic conservatives, believed in social order and tradition.

Adam Carrington, a professor of politics at Hillsdale College, sees a good bit of nuance in making the

comparison of liberalism and conservatism then and now. He said:

The modern Republican Party transcends a little bit into both Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian elements. The Republican party certainly believes in giving more power to the states. It's doubtful anyone knew how massive the federal government would grow at the time and questionable as to whether Hamilton would have approved. Hamiltonians were the party of free markets and building up business and free labor. Economically, that would make them more conservative. The modern Democratic party has some crossover as well.

How Burr Delivers the Election

The North was strong for Federalists. New England was easily going to Adams, but Jefferson had a chance of winning if he could carry New York. Without New York, he would have to win New Jersey and Pennsylvania, which the Democratic-Republicans thought nearly impossible. Burr knew the political climate and electorate in the state, and realized the key to controlling the legislature would be winning 13 assembly seats in New York City. He recruited the best candidates for the seats and helped organize and strategize their campaigns. Jefferson repeated Burr's message to Madison that, "if the city election of New York is in favor of the republican ticket, the issue will be republican."

Though it was George Clinton who named Burr to the U.S. Senate, the two would be rivals. Burr talked Jefferson's first choice for a running mate out of political retirement to run for governor of New York. Burr's thinking was that Clinton, a popular six-term former governor, could have enough coattails to sweep Democratic-Republicans into office.

Burr also recognized a gem in a social club known as the Society of St. Tammany, which he helped turn into the first political machine in getting out the vote for Democratic-Republican legislative candidates by holding out the promises of government goodies and jobs on the other side as payback for delivering the vote. After demonstrating the power of New York politicians, it stopped being a social club and became the powerful political force known as Tammany Hall, which defined the New York state Democratic party well into the 20th Century, with immense clout in the national Democratic party. ^{xviii}

On Election Day in May, Burr spent 10 hours campaigning at one New York polling place, and an understudy spent 15 hours at another, all to get the vote out for their party. For his part, Hamilton worked hard to keep the Federalists in charge of New York, but was outflanked by Burr. The Democratic-Republican candidates carried the New York City assembly districts, marking a huge victory for Burr and his party and a severe blow to Hamilton's pride. ^{xix}

It was a far more devastating blow to the Federalists, as the new legislative majority was nearly certain to ensure the Democratic-Republicans carried New York's 12 electoral votes.

The fate of Adams and the Federalists was all but decided by the New York elections. Adams won all 12 of New York's electoral votes in 1796, critical since he won the election by just three electoral votes nationally. The president was devastated by the news.

Burr's clever maneuvering wasn't all that carried the day. There was a significant shift in New York City, the heart of Hamilton's vision for industry and manufacturing. It would seem surprising that such an area would back the party of a farm-based economy, but the Democratic-Republican arguments—what might broadly be called populism or even class warfare—found its appeal in Manhattan.

Hamilton begrudgingly acknowledged that for New York City voters it was "a question between the Rich & the Poor." Many workers, and even newly wealthy business entrepreneurs that didn't come from aristocracy, viewed Federalists as the party of social monarchy. ^{xx}

An absolutely giddy Virginia Congressman John Dawson declared, "The [Federalist] party are in a rage & despair." Meanwhile, Abigail Adams sadly wrote it "is generally supposed that N York would be the balance"

for the election.^{xxi}

In today's context, imagine the news anchors calling the definitive swing state on a presidential election night, all but sealing the deal. In this case, the ultimate swing state was called months before Election Day, with the New York state legislative races serving as a proxy vote to select electors.

Still, Hamilton wouldn't give up. He wrote New York Governor John Jay asking him to call the lame duck Federalist legislature into session to pass a bill taking elector selection away from the newly elected Democratic-Republican legislatures and giving it directly to voters. This, keep in mind, was coming from the party that feared too much democracy.

Hamilton told Jay:

In times like these in which we live, it will not do to be over scrupulous.

He added that it was important to...

...prevent an atheist in religion, and a fanatic in politics, from getting possession of the helm of State.

Jay, however, moved closer to the scrupulous side, never responded to Hamilton, but filed his letter away with the notation, "Proposing a measure for party purposes, which I think would not become me to adopt."^{xxii}

Burr's triumph in New York was in fact a clear demonstration of what we have seen throughout modern presidential elections—the best organization wins. Understanding how to use the media helps even more. There were plenty of Federalist newspapers, but the Democratic-Republicans set up a formal Committee of Correspondence, a national network of sorts for newspapers to promote Jefferson and denounce Adams.^{xxiii}

Let it be One Whom We Can Oppose

While the Democratic-Republicans had strong organization throughout the country, the Hamilton-Adams rift left the Federalists fractured.

It was perhaps Hamilton's propensity to truly loathe political rivals, or even allow his emotions to create heated rivalries, that helped determine this election. He was extremely angry with Adams for being overly moderate and not going to full-scale war with France in 1798, a conflict in which he hoped to be a glorious general.

The break between the moderate Adams Federalists and Hamilton's High Federalists helped make the president's party dysfunctional against the Democratic-Republican well-organized apparatus. America's first and still best Treasury secretary hated Jefferson for being a dangerous radical. As for Burr, it was probably based on more personal and practical reasons. Burr was an old rival in New York politics, whom Hamilton found loathsome and void of any moral compass.

As today, it's easy to imagine elements of either party being so annoyed by sellout candidates they would just as soon lose the election, believing a defeat could even be better for their party's future and ideological strength as opposed to a squishy moderate who will give away the store to the other side. This was essentially how Hamilton felt about the choice of Adams and Jefferson.

Hamilton said:

If we must have an enemy as the head of government, let it be one whom we can oppose, and for whom we are not responsible, who will not involve our party in the disgrace of his foolishness and bad measures...^{xxiv}

So why was he eager to shift the New York election to the Federalists? He had a plan.

As would have been the case with anyone involved, there seemed to Hamilton barely a reason to think Burr would be president. The enemies to focus on would be Jefferson and Adams, and he hatched a plot to ensure neither enemy would head the government.

High Federalists wanted Hamilton to lead the party into battle with Jefferson instead as the presidential candidate. Hamilton knew this was not practical, so he orchestrated a way to get Pinckney elected president instead of Adams. He hit several New England states to push the idea in the heart of Federalism. It is ironic that by happenstance, it was the opposing party that nearly saw the vice presidential designate take the top prize.

During the George Washington administration, Hamilton had the first president's ear while Jefferson was simply tolerated. As president, Adams wouldn't bend to Hamilton's whims. Though the sedition law seemed overly sweeping by most measures, Hamilton and his supporters believed Adams wasn't stern enough. Hamilton was also certain he would have more influence over Pinckney than the more independent Adams.

Hamilton's 50-page letter excoriating Adams leaked into the Democratic-Republican newspapers. The surrounding publicity closed off any future hopes of Hamilton ascending to the presidency—and it didn't do a lot of good for Adams re-election campaign. In a message targeted at Federalists in South Carolina, Hamilton wrote:

Few go as far in their objections as I do. Not denying to Mr. Adams patriotism and integrity and even talents of a certain kind, I should be deficient in candor, were I to conceal the conviction, that he does possess the talents adapted to the administration of government, and that there are great intrinsic defects in his character, which unfit him for the office of chief magistrate.

Burr got a copy and leaked it to Democratic-Republican newspapers around the country. The letter titled *The Public Conduct and Character of John Adams* ran to the great humiliation of the president and Hamilton.

Educator Noah Webster and other political writers jumped to the president's defense. And, just as Hamilton might prefer Jefferson run the country, Adams preferred to serve under Jefferson than to owe any victory to Hamilton.

Adams expressed his own frustration of Hamilton, even blaming him for the loss of New York:

Hamilton is an intrigant, the greatest intrigant in the world—a man devoid of every moral principal—a bastard... Mr. Jefferson is an infinitely better man, a wiser one, I am sure, and if President, will act wisely. I know and would rather be vice president under him or even minister resident at Hague than indebted to such a being as Hamilton for the presidency. ^{xxv}

As it would turn out, Adams wouldn't have to owe anything to Hamilton, but another candidate would.

ⁱ Gary Wills; *Negro President: Jefferson and Slave Power*; Mariner Books; 2005

ⁱⁱ Kenneth Walsh; *The Most Consequential Elections in History: Thomas Jefferson and the Election of 1800*; U.S. News and World Report; Aug. 13, 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ History Central; 1800 Election Results; Jefferson vs. Adams

^{iv} John Ferling; *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800*; Oxford University Press; 2004 p. 15-16

^v Presidential Biographies; www.WhiteHouse.gov

^{vi} Bernard A. Weisberger; *America Afire: Jefferson, Adams and the First Contested Election*; Perennial; 2000; Page

^{vii} Aaron Burr Biography; senate.gov

^{viii} Robert K. Wright Jr and Morris J. MacGregor; *Soldiers and Statesmen of the Constitution*; Center for Military History; 1987

^{ix} Paul F. Boller, Jr.; *Presidential Campaigns from George Washington to George W. Bush*; Oxford University Press; 2004; p. 10

^x Paul F. Boller; *Presidential Campaigns*; Oxford University Press; 2004; Page 12

^{xi} Library of Congress;

^{xii} Phillip G. Henderson; *The Presidency: Then and Now*; Page 143; Rowan & Littlefield; 2000

^{xiii} Joseph Cummings; *Anything for a Vote: Dirty Tricks, Cheap Shots and October Surprises in U.S. Presidential Campaigns*; 2007; Page 26

^{xiv} Paul F. Boller; *Presidential Campaigns from George Washington to George W. Bush*; Oxford University Press; 2004; Page 13

^{xv} C-SPAN Booknotes;

<http://www.booknotes.org/Watch/161310-1/Bernard+Weisberger.aspx>

^{xvi} C-SPAN Booknotes;

<http://www.booknotes.org/Watch/161310-1/Bernard+Weisberger.aspx>

^{xvii} C-SPAN Booknotes

^{xviii} *The Case for Tammany Hall Being on the Right Side of History*; National Public Radio; March 6, 2014

^{xix} Bernard A. Weisberger; *America Afire: Jefferson, Adams and the First Contested Election*; Perennial; 2000; Page 238

^{xx} John Ferling; *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800*; Oxford University Press; 2004 p. 128

^{xxi} John Ferling; *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800*; Oxford University Press; 2004 p. 127

^{xxii} Paul F. Boiler; *Presidential Campaigns*; Oxford University Press; 2004; Page 13

^{xxiii} Joseph Cummings; *Anything for a Vote: Dirty Tricks, Cheap Shots and October Surprises in U.S. Elections*; Quirk Books; 2007; Page 27

^{xxiv} Paul F. Boller Jr.; *Presidential Campaign from George Washington to George W. Bush*; Oxford University Press; 2004; Page 10-11

^{xxv} Ron Chernow; *Alexander Hamilton*; Penguin; 2004; Page 613