

## **The Election of 1800**

### **Facts worth knowing:**

-- Beginning in March 1781, shortly before the end of the Revolutionary War, the US was governed loosely by the Articles of Confederation, which provided for no executive leadership and a Congress of very limited power. The system's weaknesses led to squabbles among the states over territory, trade, taxes, debts, and defense against British-inspired attacks in the American West, and Spanish-sponsored uprisings in the South. In 1787, a convention convened in Philadelphia to revise the Articles. The resulting constitution, familiar to us all, created the framework for a viable central government based on compromises between the big and small states, and checks and balances among the executive, legislature and judiciary. After a bitter fight over ratification, the document was approved and George Washington elected – unanimously – as first president. Washington was sworn in on April 30, 1789, adding at the end of the constitutionally required oath the words, “So help me God.”

-- Until passage of the 20th amendment (1933), the president was inaugurated on March 4, roughly four months after the previous year's November election. During this interim period, the lame duck Congress – not the one just elected – was in session. The new Congress, unless summoned by the president, did not convene until a full 13 months after its members had been chosen.

### **Facts less worth knowing:**

-- In 1790, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton met for dinner. The men were rivals, but still cordial enough to strike a deal. Jefferson agreed that the federal government should assume the debts owed by states, including those of Hamilton's New York. Hamilton agreed that the nation's capital should be moved from Philadelphia south to a federal city to be built on the banks of the Potomac. In 1800, when the capital was moved, the entire US government – 7 boxes - was packed up and re-located.

-- In 1807, former vice-president Aaron Burr was tried for treason; or more specifically, plotting to separate western states from the US and set up a new and independent nation. The Supreme Court found him “not guilty” because,

although he had clearly intended to go to war with the US, there was no proof that he had employed force for that purpose. "His intention to go to war may be proved by words," wrote Chief Justice John Marshall, "but the actual going to war is a fact which is to be proved by open deed." In this case, that was "not proved by a single witness."

### **Opinions on government:**

"It is sometimes said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question." Thomas Jefferson

"We may appeal to history for proof . . . that the people, when they have been unchecked, have been as unjust, tyrannical, barbarous, and cruel as any king or senate possessed of uncontrollable power. The majority has eternally, and without one exception, usurped over the rights of the minority." John Adams

"Of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people, commencing demagogues and ending tyrants." Hamilton

"Women are the surest criterion by which to determine whether a republican government is practical. The Jews, Greeks, Romans, Swiss, and Dutch all lost their public spirit, principles, habits, and republican forms of government when they lost the modesty and domestic virtues of their women." Abigail Adams

### **Judgments on people:**

"He is vain, irritable, and a bad calculator of the force and probable effect of the motives which govern men. This is all the ill which can possibly be said of him. He is so amiable, that I pronounce you will love him, if ever you become acquainted." Jefferson on John Adams

"He built for himself at Monticello a chateau above contact with man. The rawness of political life was an incessant torture to him, and personal attacks

made him keenly unhappy. He shrank from whatever was rough or coarse, and his yearning for sympathy was almost feminine.” Henry Adams on Jefferson

“One of the most detestable of mankind.” Martha Washington on Jefferson

“I have read his heart in his wicked eyes. The very devil is in them.” Abigail Adams on Hamilton

“Monuments will never be erected to me.” John Adams on himself

### **On the French Revolution**

“Dragon’s teeth have been sown in France and come up monsters.” John Adams

“Beautiful.” Jefferson

### **Notes on Diversity**

1) “He (King George III) has waged war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the person of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.” – Jefferson’s anti-slave-trade language, proposed but not accepted for inclusion in the Declaration of Independence (1776).

2) “Sir, there was a time in which you clearly saw the injustice of Slavery and held forth this invaluable doctrine: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” But Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights which he had conferred upon them, that you should at the Same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression.” Excerpt from letter of Washington DC’s Benjamin Banneker, free Black, to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, 1791.

3) The Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance . . . May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.” President George Washington, letter to Hebrew congregation of New Haven (1790)

4) “The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.” Treaty of Tripoli between the US and the Bey of Barbary (Libya) (signed 1796, approved 1797)

5) The closely-contested 1800 election generated a high turnout in New Jersey, including of women voters who, from 1790-1807, had the same right to cast ballots in their state as men. The New Jersey law was unique, and apparently driven by pro-federalist Quakers who hoped to enlarge their share of the vote via women’s suffrage. After 17 years, the NJ law was amended to ban from voting not only women, but also free Blacks and noncitizens. The change was defended at the time as a step toward good government by preventing “easy to manipulate” groups from being herded to the polls.

6) “I have regarded [America’s original inhabitants] with the commiseration their history inspires. Endowed with the faculties and the rights of men, breathing an ardent love of liberty and independence, and occupying a country which left them no desire but to be undisturbed, the stream of population from other regions directed itself to these shores. Without power to contend against it, they have been reduced within limits too narrow for the hunter's state. Humanity enjoins us to teach them agriculture and the domestic arts. We have therefore liberally furnished them with the implements of husbandry and household use; we have placed among them instructors; and shielded them by law against aggressors from among ourselves. But the endeavors to induce them to exercise their reason are combated by their habits, prejudices, and pride, and by crafty individuals among them. These persons inculcate a reverence for the customs of their ancestors; that reason is a false guide, and to advance under its counsel is perilous; in short, my friends, among them also is seen the action and counteraction of good sense & bigotry.

-- Jefferson’s first Inaugural Address, 1801.