

Opponent of Stamp Act 1765

Adams first rose to prominence as an opponent of the Stamp Act of 1765. In that year, he drafted the instructions which were sent by the inhabitants of Braintree to its representatives in the Massachusetts legislature, and which served as a model for other towns to draw up instructions to their representatives. In August 1765, he anonymously contributed four notable articles to the Boston Gazette (republished in The London Chronicle in 1768 as True Sentiments of America and also known as A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law), in which he explained that the opposition of the colonies to the Stamp Act was because the Stamp Act deprived the American colonists of two basic rights guaranteed to all Englishmen by Magna Carta: rights to be taxed only by consent and to be tried only by a jury of one's peers. The "Braintree Instructions" were a succinct and forthright defense of colonial rights and liberties, while the Dissertation was an essay in political education.

In December 1765, he delivered a speech before the governor and council in which he pronounced the Stamp Act invalid on the ground that Massachusetts, being without representation in Parliament, had not assented to it.

[edit] Boston Massacre: 1772

In 1772, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson announced that he and his judges would no longer need their salaries paid by the Massachusetts legislature, because the Crown would henceforth assume payment drawn from customs revenues. Boston radicals protested and asked Adams to explain their objections. In "Two Replies of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Governor Hutchinson" Adams argued that the colonists had never been under the sovereignty of Parliament. Their original charter was with the person of the king and their allegiance was only to him. If a workable line could not be drawn between parliamentary sovereignty and the total independence of the colonies, he continued, the colonies would have no other choice but to choose independence.

In Novanglus; or, A History of the Dispute with America, From Its Origin, in 1754, to the Present Time Adams attacked some essays by Daniel Leonard that defended Hutchinson's arguments for the absolute authority of Parliament over the colonies. In Novanglus Adams gave a point-by-point refutation of Leonard's essays, and then provided one of the most extensive and learned arguments made by the colonists against British imperial policy. It was a systematic attempt by Adams to describe the origins, nature, and jurisdiction of the unwritten British constitution. Adams used his wide knowledge of English and colonial legal history to show the provincial legislatures were fully sovereign over their own internal affairs, and that the colonies were connected to Great Britain only through the King.

[edit] Continental Congress

Massachusetts sent Adams to the Continental Congress from 1774 to 1778.[7] In June 1775, with a view of promoting the union of the colonies, he nominated George Washington of Virginia as commander-in-chief of the army then assembled around Boston. His influence in Congress was great, and almost from the beginning, he sought permanent separation from Britain. On October 5, 1775, Congress created the first of a series of committees to study naval matters. .[8]HYPERLINK \l "_note-8"[9]

On May 15, 1776 the Continental Congress, in response to escalating hostilities which had climaxed a year prior at Lexington and Concord, urged that the states begin constructing their own constitutions.

John Adams

HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:JohnAdams.jpg"PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=John Adams"HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:JohnAdams.jpg"

2nd HYPERLINK "/wiki/President_of_the_United_States"President of the United States

In office

HYPERLINK "/wiki/March_4"March 4, HYPERLINK "/wiki/1797"1797 - HYPERLINK "/wiki/March_4"March 4, HYPERLINK "/wiki/1801"1801

Vice President(s) HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson"Thomas Jefferson

Preceded by HYPERLINK "/wiki/George_Washington"George Washington

Succeeded by HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson"Thomas Jefferson

1st HYPERLINK "/wiki/Vice_President_of_the_United_States"Vice President of the United States

In office

HYPERLINK "/wiki/April_21"April 21, HYPERLINK "/wiki/1789"1789 - HYPERLINK "/wiki/March_4"March 4, HYPERLINK "/wiki/1797"1797

President HYPERLINK "/wiki/George_Washington"George Washington

Preceded by None

Succeeded by HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson"Thomas Jefferson

Born HYPERLINK "/wiki/October_30"October 30, HYPERLINK "/wiki/1735"1735

HYPERLINK "/wiki/Quincy%2C_Massachusetts"Quincy, HYPERLINK "/wiki/Massachusetts"Massachusetts

Died [HYPERLINK "/wiki/July_4"July 4](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1826"1826](#) (aged 90)
[HYPERLINK "/wiki/Quincy%2C_Massachusetts"Quincy](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Massachusetts"Massachusetts](#)
Nationality [American](#)
Political party [HYPERLINK "/wiki/United_States_Federalist_Party"Federalist](#)
Spouse [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Abigail_Adams"Abigail Smith Adams](#)
Children [Abigail Jr. \(Nabby\)](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/John_Quincy_Adams"John Quincy Adams](#), [Susanna](#), [Charles](#), [Thomas](#)
Alma mater [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Harvard_College"Harvard College](#)
Occupation [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Lawyer"Lawyer](#)
Religion [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Unitarian"Unitarian](#)
Signature [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:John_Adams_Signature.png"PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=John Adams's signature"HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:John_Adams_Signature.png"](#)
[John Adams, Jr.](#) ([HYPERLINK "/wiki/October_30"October 30](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1735"1735](#) - [HYPERLINK "/wiki/July_4"July 4](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1826"1826](#)) served as America's first [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Vice_President_of_the_United_States"Vice President](#) (1789-1797) and as its second [HYPERLINK "/wiki/President_of_the_United_States"President](#) (1797-1801). He was [HYPERLINK "/wiki/U.S._presidential_election%2C_1800"defeated for re-election in the "HYPERLINK "/wiki/United_States_presidential_election%2C_1800"Revolution of 1800"](#) by [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson"Thomas Jefferson](#).
Adams was a sponsor of the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/American_Revolution"American Revolution](#) in [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Massachusetts"Massachusetts](#), and a diplomat and a rebel in the 1770s. He was a driving force for independence in 1776: in fact, he was the "Colossus of Independence" in Jefferson's understanding. As a statesman and author, he helped define a set of core [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Republicanism_in_the_United_States"republican](#) ideals that became central to America's political value system: the rejection of [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Hereditary_monarchy"hereditary monarchy](#) in favor of rule by the people, hatred of corruption, and devotion to civic duty. As President, he was frustrated by battles inside his own [HYPERLINK "/wiki/United_States_Federalist_Party"Federalist party](#) against a faction led by [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Alexander_Hamilton"Alexander Hamilton](#), but he broke with them to avert a major conflict with [HYPERLINK "/wiki/France"France](#) in 1798, during the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Quasi-War"Quasi-War](#) crisis. He became the founder of an important family of politicians, diplomats and historians, and [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Historical_rankings_of_United_States_Presidents"in recent years his reputation has been good](#). Historian Robert Rutland concluded, "[HYPERLINK "/wiki/James_Madison"Madison](#) was the great intellectual ... [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson"Jefferson](#) the ... unquenchable idealist, and [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin"Franklin](#) the most charming and versatile genius... but Adams is the most captivating founding father on most counts."[HYPERLINK "\ "_note-0"\[1\]](#)

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[[\] Early life](/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=1)

John Adams was born the oldest of three brothers on October 22, 1735 (October 19, 1735 by the Old Style, [\), in \[, Massachusetts, though in an area which became part of \\[, Massachusetts in 1792. His birthplace is now part of \\\[. His father, a farmer, also named John \\\\(1690-1761\\\\), was a fourth-generation descendant of Henry Adams, who immigrated from \\\\[, \\\\\[, England, to \\\\\\[in about 1696. His mother was Susanna Boylston Adams.\\\\\\\[\\\\\\\\[2\\\\\\\\]\\\\\\\]\\\\\\\(#\\\\\\\)\\\\\\]\\\\\\(/wiki/Massachusetts_Bay_Colony\\\\\\)\\\\\]\\\\\(/wiki/Somerset\\\\\)\\\\]\\\\(/wiki/Barton_St_David\\\\)\\\]\\\(/wiki/Adams_National_Historical_Park\\\)\\]\\(/wiki/Quincy%2C_Massachusetts\\)\]\(/wiki/Braintree%2C_Massachusetts\)](/wiki/Julian_calendar)

Young Adams went to [at age fifteen. Instead of getting a degree in theology, as his father desired, he studied to become a lawyer. \[\\[3\\]\]\(#\) After graduating in 1755, he taught school for a few years in \[, and then practiced law in the office of James Putnam. In 1758, he was admitted to the bar. From an early age, he developed the habit of writing descriptions of events and impressions of men. The earliest known example of these is his report of the 1761 argument of \\[in the superior court of Massachusetts as to the legality of \\\[its of Assistance. Otis's argument inspired Adams with zeal for the cause of the American colonies.\\\\[\\\\\[4\\\\\]\\\\]\\\\(#\\\\)\\\]\\\(/wiki/Writ_of_Assistance\\\)\\]\\(/wiki/James_Otis\\)\]\(/wiki/Worcester%2C_Massachusetts\)](/wiki/Harvard_College)

In 1764, Adams married [\(1744-1818\), the daughter of a \[minister, at \\[, Massachusetts. Their children were \\\[\\\\(1765-1813\\\\); future president \\\\[\\\\\(1767-1848\\\\\); \\\\\[; instead, his influence emerged through his work as a constitutional lawyer and his intense analysis of historical examples,\\\\\\[\\\\\\\[5\\\\\\\]\\\\\\]\\\\\\(#\\\\\\) together with his thorough knowledge of the law and his dedication to the principles of \\\\\\[. Adams often found his inborn contentiousness to be a restraint in his political career.\\\\\\]\\\\\\(/wiki/Republicanism\\\\\\)\\\\\]\\\\\(/w/index.php?title=Susanna_Adams&action=edit "Thomas Boylston \\\\\(1772-1832\\\\\); and Elizabeth \\\\\(1775\\\\\) who died at birth. Adams was not a popular leader like his second cousin, <a href="\\\\\)\\\\]\\\\(/wiki/John_Quincy_Adams\\\\)\\\]\\\(/wiki/Abigail_Adams_Smith\\\)\\]\\(/wiki/Weymouth%2C_Massachusetts\\)\]\(/wiki/Congregationalism\)](/wiki/Abigail_Adams)

Adams wanted to secure approval from the public, and he saw his chance in the British/colonial conflict. He became well known for his essays and energetic resolutions against British taxation and regulation. In 1774 he entered the [. In 1775 war broke out between the colonies and the British empire. Adams was one of the first few delegates to recognize that a compromise with the British was pointless. In 1776 he worked hard to break away from Britain by using a formal declaration of independence. On July 2, 1776 Congress voted to accept the \[.\]\(/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence\)](/wiki/Continental_Congress)

[[\] Politics](/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=2)

[[\] Opponent of Stamp Act 1765](/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=3)

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other towns to draw up instructions to their representatives. In August 1765, he anonymously contributed four notable articles to the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Boston_Gazette" Boston Gazette](#) (republished in *The London Chronicle* in 1768 as *True Sentiments of America* and also known as *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*), in which he explained that the opposition of the colonies to the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Stamp_Act" Stamp Act](#) was because the Stamp Act deprived the American colonists of two basic rights guaranteed to all Englishmen by *Magna Carta*: rights to be taxed only by consent and to be tried only by a jury of one's peers. The "Braintree Instructions" were a succinct and forthright defense of colonial rights and liberties, while the *Dissertation* was an essay in political education.

In December 1765, he delivered a speech before the governor and council in which he pronounced the Stamp Act invalid on the ground that Massachusetts, being without representation in Parliament, had not assented to it.[HYPERLINK "\ "_note-5"\[6\]](#)

[[HYPERLINK "/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=4"edit](#)] [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Boston_Massacre" Boston Massacre: 1772](#)

In 1772, Massachusetts Governor [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Hutchinson" Thomas Hutchinson](#) announced that he and his judges would no longer need their salaries paid by the Massachusetts legislature, because the Crown would henceforth assume payment drawn from customs revenues. Boston radicals protested and asked Adams to explain their objections. In "Two Replies of the Massachusetts House of Representatives to Governor Hutchinson" Adams argued that the colonists had never been under the sovereignty of Parliament. Their original charter was with the person of the king and their allegiance was only to him. If a workable line could not be drawn between parliamentary sovereignty and the total independence of the colonies, he continued, the colonies would have no other choice but to choose independence.

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[[HYPERLINK "/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=5"edit](#)] Continental Congress
Massachusetts sent Adams to the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Continental_Congress" Continental Congress](#) from 1774 to 1778.[HYPERLINK "\ "_note-6"\[7\]](#) In June 1775, with a view of promoting the union of the colonies, he nominated [HYPERLINK "/wiki/George_Washington" George Washington](#) of Virginia as commander-in-chief of the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Continental_Army" army](#) then assembled around Boston. His influence in Congress was great, and almost from the beginning, he sought permanent separation from Britain. On [HYPERLINK "/wiki/October_5" October 5](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1775" 1775](#), Congress created the first of a series of committees to study naval matters. [HYPERLINK "\ "_note-7"\[8\]](#)[HYPERLINK "\ "_note-8"\[9\]](#)

On [HYPERLINK "/wiki/May_15" May 15](#), [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1776" 1776](#) the Continental Congress, in response to escalating hostilities which had climaxed a year prior at Lexington and Concord, urged that the states begin constructing their own constitutions.

[HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Declaration_independence.jpg" PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=John Trumbull's famous painting depicts the five-man drafting committee presenting their work to the Congress. John Adams is standing in the center of the painting."HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Declaration_independence.jpg"](#)

[HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Declaration_independence.jpg" PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT="HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Declaration_independence.jpg"HYPERLINK "/wiki/John_Trumbull" John Trumbull's famous painting depicts the five-man drafting committee presenting their work to the Congress. John Adams is standing in the center of the painting.](#)

Today, the Declaration of Independence is remembered as the great revolutionary act, but Adams and most of his contemporaries saw the Declaration as a mere formality. The resolution to draft independent constitutions was, as Adams put it, "independence itself."[HYPERLINK "\ "_note-9"\[10\]](#)

Over the next decade, Americans from every state gathered and deliberated on new governing documents. As radical as it was to actually write constitutions (prior convention suggested that a society's guiding principles should remain uncodified), what was equally radical was the nature of American political thought as the summer of 1776 dawned.[HYPERLINK "\ "_note-10"\[11\]](#)

[[HYPERLINK "/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=6"edit](#)] [Thoughts on Government](#)

At that time, Adams penned his [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thoughts_on_Government" Thoughts on Government](#) (1776), which was subsequently influential in the writing of many state constitutions. [HYPERLINK](#)

["/wiki/Thoughts_on_Government"](#)Thoughts on Government stood as the clearest articulation of the classical theory of mixed government and, in particular, how it related to the emerging American situation. Adams contended, with remarkable force and persuasion, the necessary existence of social estates in any political society, and the need to precisely mirror those social estates in the political structures of the society. For centuries, dating back to Aristotle, a mixed regime balancing monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, or the monarch, nobles, and people was required to preserve order and liberty.[HYPERLINK \l "_note-11"](#)[12]

Adams, viewing the world through an [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Enlightenment"](#)Enlightenment mind-set, thought all American state constitutions needed to exhibit a wise balance much like the ancient English Constitution had for so long. What was problematic with the English version, and indeed what plagued the entire ancient regime, was its understanding of the hereditary aristocracy. Adams and his fellow American political thinkers strongly rejected any hereditary nobility holding political power by virtue of birth. Such people lacked the necessary virtue to balance the people in the legislature, Adams thought, and were prone to corruption.[HYPERLINK \l "_note-12"](#)[13]

Using the tools of [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Republicanism_in_the_United_States"](#)Republicanism in the United States the patriots believed it was corrupt and nefarious aristocrats, in the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Parliament_of_England"](#)English Parliament and stationed in America, who were guilty of the British assault on American liberty. Unlike others, Adams thought that the definition of a republic had to do with its ends, rather than its means. He wrote in [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thoughts_on_Government"](#)Thoughts on Government, "there is no good government but what is republican. That the only valuable part of the [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Constitution_of_the_United_Kingdom"](#)British constitution is so; because the very definition of a republic is 'an empire of laws, and not of men.'" Thoughts on Government defended [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Bicameralism"](#)bicameralism, but in place of an inherited aristocracy based on birth, a "natural aristocracy" based on merit and talent would suffice. It would not be hereditary and its political power depended on the votes of the people. A distinguished group of independent, virtuous gentlemen, as Adams put it, could adequately balance the passions of the people represented in the lower house of the legislature. Thoughts on Government's new rendition of the classical theory of mixed government was enormously influential and was referenced as an authority in every state-constitution writing hall.

[[HYPERLINK "/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=7"edit](#)] Declaration of Independence On [HYPERLINK "/wiki/June_7"](#)June 7, [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1776"](#)1776, Adams seconded the resolution introduced by [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Richard_Henry_Lee"](#)Richard Henry Lee that "these colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent states," acting as champion of these resolutions before the Congress until their adoption on [HYPERLINK "/wiki/July_2"](#)July 2, [HYPERLINK "/wiki/1776"](#)1776.[HYPERLINK \l "_note-13"](#)[14]

He was appointed on a [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Committee_of_Five"](#)committee with [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson"](#)Thomas Jefferson, [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin"](#)Benjamin Franklin, [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Robert_Livingston_%281746-1813%29"](#)Robert R. Livingston and [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Roger_Sherman"](#)Roger Sherman, to draft a [HYPERLINK "/wiki/United_States_Declaration_of_Independence"](#)Declaration of Independence. Although that document was largely drafted by Jefferson, Adams occupied the foremost place in the debate on its adoption. He deferred the writing to Jefferson believing it would be better received having been written by him. Adams believed Jefferson wrote ten times better than any man in Congress, and he himself was "obnoxious and disliked." Many years later, Jefferson hailed Adams as, "The Colossus of that Congress the great pillar of support to the Declaration of Independence, and its ablest advocate and champion on the floor of the House."[HYPERLINK \l "_note-14"](#)[15] In 1777, Adams resigned his seat on the Massachusetts Superior Court to serve as the head of the Board of War and Ordinance, as well as many other important committees.

[[HYPERLINK "/w/index.php?title=John_Adams&action=edit§ion=10"edit](#)] Vice Presidency [HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Adamstrumbull.jpg"PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=John Adams, portrait by John Trumbull."](#)[HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Adamstrumbull.jpg"](#)

[HYPERLINK "/wiki/Image:Adamstrumbull.jpg"](#)John Adams, portrait by John Trumbull. While Washington was the unanimous choice for president, Adams came in second in the electoral college and became Vice President in the presidential election of 1789. He played a minor role in the politics of the early 1790s and was reelected in 1792. Washington never asked Adams for input on policy and legal issues.[23]

In the first year of Washington's administration, Adams became deeply involved in a month-long Senate controversy over what the official title of the President would be, favoring grandiose titles such as "His Majesty the President" or "His High Mightiness" over the simple "President of the United States" that won the issue. The pomposity of Adams's stance, and his being overweight, led to the nickname "His Rotundity."

As president of the Senate, Adams cast 31 tie-breaking votes a record that only John C. Calhoun came close to tying, with 28.[24] His votes protected the president's sole authority over the removal of appointees and influenced the location of the national capital. On at least one occasion, he persuaded senators to vote against legislation that he opposed, and he frequently lectured the Senate on procedural and policy matters. Adams's political views and his active role in the Senate made him a natural target for critics of the Washington administration. Toward the end of his first term, as a result of a threatened resolution that would have silenced him except for procedural and policy matters, he

began to exercise more restraint. When the two political parties formed, he joined the Federalist Party, but never got on well with its dominant leader Alexander Hamilton. Because of Adams's seniority and the need for a northern president, he was elected as the Federalist nominee for president in 1796, over Thomas Jefferson, the leader of the opposition Democratic-Republican Party. His success was due to peace and prosperity; Washington and Hamilton had averted war with Britain by the Jay Treaty of 1795

Election of 1796

Main article: United States presidential election, 1796

During the presidential campaign of 1796 Adams was the presidential candidate of the Federalist Party and Thomas Pinckney, the Governor of South Carolina, his running mate. The federalists wanted Adams as their presidential candidate to crush Thomas Jefferson's bid. Most federalists would have preferred Hamilton to be a candidate. Although Hamilton and his followers supported Adams, they also held a grudge against him. They did consider him to be the lesser of the two evils. However, they thought Adams lacked the seriousness and popularity that had caused Washington to be such a great president, and also feared that Adams was too vain, opinionated, unpredictable, and stubborn to follow their directions. Adams' opponents were former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, who was joined by Senator Aaron Burr of New York on the Democratic-Republican ticket.

Adams stayed in his home town of Quincy because he wanted to be a silent spectator who had no direct involvement in the campaign. He wanted to stay out of what he called the silly and wicked game. His party, however, campaigned for him, while the Republicans campaigned for Jefferson.

It was expected that Adams would dominate the votes in New England, while Jefferson was expected to win in the Southern states. In the end, Adams won the election by a narrow margin of 71 electoral votes to 68 for Jefferson (who became the vice president).