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Draft of the Declaration of Independence

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson

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John Adams (October 30 1735 – July 4, 1826) was the second president of the United States (1797–1801), having earlier served as the first vice president of the United States (1789-1797). An American Founding Father, Adams was a statesman, diplomat, and a leading advocate of American independence from Great Britain. Well educated, he was an Enlightenment political theorist who promoted republicanism, as well as a strong central government, and wrote prolifically about his often seminal ideas—both in published works and in letters to his wife and key adviser Abigail Adams. Adams was a lifelong opponent of slavery, having never bought a slave. In 1770 he provided a principled, controversial, and successful legal defense to the British soldiers accused in the Boston Massacre, because he believed in the right to counsel and the "protect[ion] of innocence". Adams came to prominence in the early stages of the American Revolution. A lawyer and public figure in Boston, as a delegate from Massachusetts to the Continental Congress, he played a leading role in persuading Congress to declare independence. He assisted Thomas Jefferson in drafting the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and was its primary advocate in the Congress. Later, as a diplomat in Europe, he helped negotiate the eventual peace treaty with Great Britain, and was responsible for obtaining vital governmental loans from Amsterdam bankers. A political theorist and historian, Adams largely wrote the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, which together with his earlier Thoughts on Government, influenced American political thought. One of his greatest roles was as a judge of character: in 1775, he nominated George Washington to be commander-in-chief, and 25 years later nominated John Marshall to be Chief Justice of the United States. Adams' revolutionary credentials secured him two terms as George Washington's vice president and his own election in 1796 as the second president. During his one term as president, he encountered ferocious attacks by the Jeffersonian Republicans, as well as the dominant faction in his own Federalist Party led by his bitter enemy Alexander Hamilton. Adams signed the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts, and built up the army and navy especially in the face of an undeclared naval war (called the "Quasi-War") with France, 1798–1800. The major accomplishment of his presidency was his peaceful resolution of the conflict in the face of Hamilton's opposition. In 1800, Adams was defeated for re-election by Thomas Jefferson and retired to Massachusetts. He later resumed his friendship with Jefferson. He and his wife founded an accomplished family line of politicians, diplomats, and historians now referred to as the Adams political family. Adams was the father of John Quincy Adams, the sixth President of the United States. His achievements have received greater recognition in modern times, though his contributions were not initially as celebrated as those of other Founders. Adams was the first U.S. president to reside in the executive mansion that eventually became known as the White House.

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