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# “A Passionate Folly”: Alexander Hamilton’s Impact on the Election of 1800

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Alexander Hamilton was famous for his rhetorical abilities. Through his political writings, Hamilton combined both rationality and logic to create an effective emotional argument.<sup>1</sup> During the election of 1800, Hamilton utilized his capabilities by composing, most famously, a letter demeaning fellow Federalist John Adams' character. Although this letter had little effect on the election, it still symbolizes the clashes within the Federalist Party. However, Hamilton's impact in the election was much more significant than one letter. He campaigned tirelessly for month to promote his candidate, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Despite all his effort, Hamilton failed in electing his favored candidate. In degrading Adams, he had unintentionally alienated a sector of the Federalist Party. His impact can be summed up as a "passionate folly," an obsessive desire that inadvertently went awry.

The United States had changed tremendously since declaring its independence in 1776. The population had doubled and was at 5,350,000 including approximately 900,000<sup>2</sup> by the year 1800.<sup>3</sup> Americans had begun to head west across the Appalachian Mountains to settle with the expanding population. The original union of 13 states had grown to 16 states with the entrance of Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee. Although the population had grown tremendously, only one in 25 people lived in a city with a population of at least a thousand. The largest cities in America (Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Boston, and Charleston) were inhabited by people of all walks of life. While some residents were poor laborers others worked as skilled craftsmen and a select few were also doctors and lawyers. Most people still lived in the country and farmers

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<sup>1</sup> Richard B. Morris, "Hamilton as Realist," in *The Federalists: Realists or Ideologues?* ed. George Billias (New York: D.C. Heath and Company, 1970), 77.

<sup>2</sup> John Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 14.

harvested such goods as grain, tobacco, and corn.<sup>4</sup> The American Revolution had created a new and changing world and under this backdrop, a tumultuous election occurred.

Hamilton remains one of the most significant and influential Founding Fathers. Oddly, he is also the most forgotten. While the majority of historians studying early American politics tend to study Jefferson, Adams, and Washington, complete biographies on Hamilton are more difficult to find. However, in the past decade, a renewed interest in Hamilton's life emerged among historians. Ron Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*, is one of the newest and most complete biographic accounts. Although Chernow has a clear bias favoring Hamilton's character, he provides a vivid account of Hamilton's entire life backed by a vast supply of primary sources including Hamilton's early writings and political papers.

Chernow is an acclaimed historian. In 1990, Chernow received the National Book Award for his first book *The House of Morgan* which chronicled the rise of modern banking in America. *Alexander Hamilton* is Chernow's second biography (his first being one on John Rockefeller). Hamilton's life is divided into six main categories: his early life in Nevis, his involvement in the American Revolution, his participation in the Constitutional Convention, his contribution to American finance and banking, his law career, and his downfall. Chernow portrays Hamilton as a "sparkling theoretician and masterful executive."<sup>5</sup> More than any other historian that has written on Hamilton, Chernow adds a third dimension to Hamilton's character by chronicling Hamilton's early development in Nevis. Unlike any historian before him, Chernow fully researched Hamilton using new documents published between 1961 and 1987. Through this

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<sup>4</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 15.

<sup>5</sup>Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 13. Since this biography has been used extensively in my paper, I would simply insert the relevant page number/s enclosed in parenthesis within the text, instead of footnoting ibidems ad nauseam.

addition of twenty-seven volumes of Hamilton's private and political papers, Chernow is able to develop a well rounded analysis.

Although not concentrating on Hamilton specifically, John Ferling's book, *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800*, provides a concise and clear depiction of the struggles between the Federalists and the Republicans. Ferling has written extensively in the area of early American politics. In Ferling's introduction he states that researching the election of 1800 led to a greater appreciation of Hamilton, "Working on this book has led to a richer understanding of Hamilton and greater admiration of him, especially with regard to his colossal talent for leadership and his uncommon vision for truly profound change."<sup>6</sup> Ferling gives thorough attention to the background of the candidates by brief biographies of both Adams and Jefferson. In fact, Ferling gives so much background information that the election of 1800 is not addressed until half way through the book. However, once he does address the election, Ferling writes extensively, primarily on the campaign, the election itself, and the tie between Jefferson and Burr.

Edward Larson's historical work, *A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Tumultuous Election of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign*, also concentrates on the election. Unlike Ferling, however, Larson does not give an extensive background to Jefferson and Adams. Instead, Larson dedicates his entire book to the election. Like Ferling, Larson includes sections on the campaign, the election, and the tie. However, Larson also writes an entire chapter to Hamilton and Burr's relationship. This chapter dives deeply into Burr and Hamilton's differing opinions as well as their opposing efforts during the election.

Hamilton emerged from humble beginnings to become one of the most influential politicians in America's history. Although historians differ on Hamilton's birth year, recent

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<sup>6</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, xix.

historians have accepted a birth year of 1755 because of legal documents found in his birth country. Hamilton was born on a small island named Nevis located in the British Isles. Nevis was a visual fortress, inhibited with lush forests and the remnants of an extinct volcano (7). The island's most important crop was sugar which meant there was a large slave population that greatly outnumbered the white population.<sup>7</sup> Despite the island's beauty, many of its inhabitants were far from saintly. According to a minister of a local Anglican church, the British had colonized Nevis with, "whole shiploads of pickpockets, whores, rouges, vagrants, thieves, sodomites, and other filth and cutthroat of society."<sup>8</sup> Despite some of the unfavorable characters on the island, many immigrants, including Hamilton's father, came to Nevis in dreams of becoming rich in the sugar industry (8).

Hamilton's birth was as controversial as his birthplace. His father, James Hamilton, a Scotsman with a high pedigree but apparently little motivation, moved to Nevis to earn a living (13). Alexander's mother, Rachel Fawcett Levine, had a clandestine affair with his father while still married to her husband Johann Michael Levine. Their liaison resulted in the birth of two illegitimate sons, the elder James and the younger Alexander. When Alexander was still a young child, his father abandoned the family leaving Rachel to care for her two young sons while tending their family store. While it was uncommon for a woman to be a shopkeeper, Rachel was able to make a decent living by selling foodstuffs to planters (22).

Due to his illegitimate birth, young Alexander was not able to attend any school other than a small Jewish school. Hamilton's mother also taught him French to a level of fluency that outmastered Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson who had all spent several years in Paris (17). However, Hamilton's life suddenly changed in 1767. At the age of 12, Alexander

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<sup>7</sup> William S. Randall, *Alexander Hamilton: A Life* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 11.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Hubbard, *Swords, Ships, and Sugar: History of Nevis to 1900* (Corvallis: Premiere Editions International, 1998), 40.

lost his mother to a violent fever. After his mother's death, Hamilton and his brother were placed under the care of their older cousin, Peter Lytton who, two years later, committed suicide (26).

In 1769, Hamilton began to work for the mercantile house of Beekman and Cruger. At this job, Hamilton gained valuable skills at global commerce and inventory. In October of 1771, Nicolas Cruger left young Hamilton temporarily in charge of the shop. During these five months, Hamilton learned leadership abilities that greatly impressed Cruger at his return.<sup>9</sup> During these years, Hamilton began to publish poems in the *Gazette*. However, his most famous piece was not a poem but a letter (originally written to his father) concerning a hurricane. The letter unleashed Hamilton's rhetorical ability, showcasing the hurricane as a divine event, "Death comes rushing on in triumph, veiled in a mantle of tenfold darkness. His relenting scythe, pointed and ready for the stroke."<sup>10</sup> After the letter was printed in the *Gazette*, several of Hamilton's mentors realized his potential and put together a fund to send Hamilton to America for an education. It is likely that the much of this money came from Hugh Knox (one of Hamilton's early mentors), who had mentioned his desire for Hamilton to travel to America. Knox had provided Hamilton with access to his expansive library to continue his education (35). The other donors were likely Hamilton's old bosses: Cruger, David Beekman, and Cornelius Kortright (38).

Hamilton arrived in America in 1772, at the age of 17. He decided to attend King's College in New York (known today as Columbia University) after being rejected from the College of New Jersey (presently known as Princeton University) when he insisted that he be allowed an accelerated workload.<sup>11</sup> Hamilton desired the ability to take a heavy course load in order to graduate as quickly as possible. At King's College, Hamilton studied a variety of

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<sup>9</sup> Randall, *Life*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "Account of a Hurricane. September 6, 1772," idem, *Hamilton Writings* (New York: The Library of Congress, 1961), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Randall, *Life*, 62.

curriculum including Greek and Latin literature, geography, history, and math, while also attending chapel everyday (52). Soon after arriving in America, Hamilton witnessed the revolutionary struggle between the American patriots and the British. Previously, Hamilton had sided with the British. However, after the Boston Tea Party in 1773, Hamilton traveled to Boston and reassessed the situation. He heard patriotic anti-British speeches that changed his position on the war.<sup>12</sup> In late 1774, Hamilton first began publishing anonymous (under the name of a Westchester Farmer) articles named “The Farmer Refuted,” in the *New York Gazetteer* that declared the necessity for Americans to resist British oppression, “That Americans are intitled to freedom, is incontestable upon every rational principle. All men have one common original: they participate in one common nature, and consequently have one common right.”<sup>13</sup> In the spring of 1775, volunteer militia grew rapidly throughout the northern colonies. Hamilton quickly joined and drilled while still attending school. He garnered respect from his superiors and in March of 1776, was made an artillery captain.<sup>14</sup> As an artillery captain, Hamilton often had contact with General George Washington who in 1777, asked him to join his headquarters staff as his aide, and also promoted him to the rank of lieutenant colonel.<sup>15</sup>

After the war, however, Hamilton made his greatest contribution to his new country. After defeating the British, the American patriots needed to devise a stable government. The Articles of Confederation was the first constitution. However, Hamilton believed that it was weak since the states retained sovereignty over functions that were not assigned to the central government. Hamilton felt that if the Articles of Confederation were kept then disaster would

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<sup>12</sup> Darren Staloff, *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 56.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Hamilton, “A Full Vindication of the Measures of the Congress, 1774,” idem *Hamilton Writings* (New York: The Library of Congress, 1961), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Randall, *Life*, 99.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

strike the nation resulting in wars between the states: "...America, if not connected at all, or only by the feeble tie of a simple league offensive and defensive, would by the operation of such opposite and jarring alliances be gradually entangled in all the pernicious labyrinths of European politics and wars..."<sup>16</sup> Another problem he foresaw was the increased difficulty with commerce. Under a stronger government, he argued, commerce could grow and thus revenue for the state would increase (254). One of the most important points that Hamilton outlined was need of the central government to enforce taxation, which Hamilton felt was "an indispensable ingredient in every constitution."<sup>17</sup> Taxes were a necessary evil for the young country to survive since they helped America pay off debts and restore its credit (256).

In the *Federalist Papers* 11 to 13, Hamilton showed the advantages a new government could have in increasing commerce and revenue: "The ability of a country to pay taxes must always be proportioned in a great degree to the quantity of money in circulation, and to the celerity with which it circulates."<sup>18</sup> Hamilton wrote the *Federalist Papers* anonymously, under the alias of Publius, with the help of James Madison and John Jay. Jay soon grew ill, leaving Hamilton and Madison to write the papers at a tremendous rate (an average of four papers a week). The rapid pace of writing did not allow for Madison and Hamilton to review each other's work. Often, the first time they read each others articles was after they were in print (249).

Under Washington's presidency, Hamilton was appointed Secretary of the Treasury from 1789 until 1795. Within his first year, Hamilton wrote five reports that proved to be influential in the realm of finance. One of the most significant reports was the *Report on Public Credit* (January, 1790) The report proposed that the federal government take responsibility for the

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist Papers No. 7, November 17, 1787," idem *Hamilton Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1961), 188.

<sup>17</sup> *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 4, "The Federalist No. 30," December, 28, 1787, 450.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "The Federalist Papers No. 12, November 27, 1787," idem *Hamilton Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1961), 210.



country's debt, which in turn, gave the federal government much more power over the states. Hamilton felt that it was important that the United States be accountable for their \$54 million debt. If handled correctly, Hamilton argued that America would be able borrow at reasonable interest rates and would be respected throughout the world, "States, like individuals, who observe their engagements are respected and trusted, while the reverse is the fate of those who pursue an opposite conduct."<sup>19</sup> In order to lower the debt, Hamilton suggested taxes on wine, spirits, tea, and coffee which proved to be very unpopular (300). In Hamilton's *Report on Manufactures* (December, 1791), he showed his plan of how to turn America from a rural country to one of industry. Of course, a more industrialized country would require a strong federal government to oversee it. This report was greatly criticized by Jefferson and Madison who felt that industry created corruption.<sup>20</sup> However, Hamilton's reputation was badly wounded in 1791 when evidence of his affair with Maria Reynolds surfaced. Hamilton conducted an affair with Reynolds for over a year. However, after Reynolds husband discovered he blackmailed Hamilton. After the rumors swirled, Hamilton publicly admitted the affair in vivid detail thus destroying his character.<sup>21</sup>

Hamilton never traveled to Europe in his life. Yet, he had a tremendous influence in foreign relations. In 1793, France and England went to war. President Washington made a firm decision to stay uninvolved. Despite Britain's unpopularity, Hamilton felt that they made the stronger ally because of trade. In 1794, Hamilton helped to draft a treaty (known commonly as Jay's Treaty) which favored Britain in trade while guaranteeing peace. The Republicans, however, saw the treaty as a betrayal of the American alliance with France (485-86). In 1795,

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "Report of Public Credit, January 9, 1790," idem *Hamilton Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1961), 532.

<sup>20</sup> Staloff, *Hamilton, Adams, and Jefferson*, 98-99.

<sup>21</sup> Randall, *Life*, 406.

Hamilton resigned as the Secretary of the Treasurer, he dedicated the rest of his life to supporting and leading the Federalist Party.

The two party system remains an integral part of the American political system today. However, at the formation of the country's government, patriots viewed political factions negatively because they correlated to the monarchy of England. Hamilton himself stated in the Federalist Papers that, "the spirit of party, in different degrees, must be expected to infect all political bodies."<sup>22</sup> Factions, in Hamilton's mind, favored states interests and thereby hurt the federal government. Since political factions were considered so negatively, politicians at this time often tried their best to not identify themselves as belonging in one. In his Farwell Address (written primarily by Hamilton), Washington denounced political parties, "...they [factions] are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people..."<sup>23</sup>

Ironically, in spite of Hamilton's scorn of political parties initially, he became one of the main leaders of an influential political party: the Federalists. Hamilton earned followers by his charismatic leadership and his beliefs in a strong central government (391). Hamilton's Federalist Party emphasized itself as the party that supported the Constitution while claiming its enemies were those who opposed it. The leaders of the Federalist Party were mostly lawyers, merchants, and rich landowners. However, federalism also found support from farmers living near cities and from town artisans.<sup>24</sup>

The "enemies" of the Federalist Party, made up of such individuals as Jefferson and Madison, united themselves under the name of the Democratic Republicans (not to be confused with the modern Republican Party). However, Hamilton preferred to call them the Anti-

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "No. 26" in *The Federalist Papers*, 180.

<sup>23</sup> George Washington, "Farewell Address," Washington D.C. September, 19 1796.

<sup>24</sup> John Miller, *The Federalist Era* (New York: Harpers & Brothers Publishers 1960), 108

Federalists, hinting that they were against the Constitution. The term Anti-Federalist arose during the establishment of the Constitution. While the Federalist Party favored a strong central government, the Anti-Federalist members believed that a strong central government would threaten state and personal rights.<sup>25</sup> This name, the Republican Democrats, proved to be a symbol as it hinted at the Roman republic, which alluded to the accusation that the Federalists were not true republicans and therefore must favor monarchies (391). The Republicans united themselves as a party that went against Hamilton's system that supported the federal government over state rights. The Republican Party prided itself on reflecting the ideals of the majority that distrusted an overly powerful government. Partially, the negativity towards a strong government originated from the fear that the government would interfere with the institution of slavery. Groups such as the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, in the 1790s, had urged congress to emancipate the slaves which spread fear among slave owning Republicans who economically depended on slavery.<sup>26</sup>

The parties sparred frequently over an assortment of issues and statements. For instance, Hamilton wished to limit the influence of the common men in elections, believing that they would be incapable of successfully choosing effective leaders. This Federalist stance became especially important in the election of 1800 when Hamilton urged that the popular vote be circumvented so that the Federalists would not be defeated.<sup>27</sup> The two parties clashed especially within the cabinet of George Washington. Washington's cabinet included men from various walks of life that were often loyal to a certain party. The strain was particularly obvious between Hamilton, Adams, and Jefferson. Washington's close bond and trust with Hamilton allowed him to have a greater influence on governmental affairs than both Adams and Jefferson. Hamilton

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Smith, *The Origins of the American Party System* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961), 9.

often acted more so like a prime minister than a Secretary of the Treasury. According to Stanford Professor John Miller, “He was no respecter of departmental boundaries: so completely did he dominate Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, that he became hardly more than a minion of the Treasury.”<sup>28</sup> Hamilton deeply mistrusted both men since he felt that Jefferson was a “shifty-eyed Southerner [who] seldom looked directly at people when he addressed them,” and he believed Jefferson was plotting to destroy him politically. Their ill fated political spat resulted in many politically based decisions, one of which included Jefferson arguing that the post office should be under the State Department instead of the Treasury Department.<sup>29</sup> In 1792 the two took their battle to the public.

Adams also did not especially have the most cordial relationship with Hamilton. Although both men were Federalists, they did not think highly of each other. Hamilton claimed that Adams had a violent temperament that made him unapproachable and hindered his ability to lead.<sup>30</sup> Adams opinion of Hamilton was even less appealing, calling Hamilton, “a bastard brat of a Scottish peddler.”<sup>31</sup> Hamilton, being extremely self-conscious of his illegitimate birth, took this comment to great offense. However, the Hamilton-Adams feud had a deeper origin. According to Adams, Hamilton began to sabotage his career right after the Revolutionary War ended. The hostility between them could be attributed to Adam’s support of Horatio Gates over Hamilton’s father-in-law Philip Schuyler as the lead officer in a military campaign.<sup>32</sup> During the first presidential election in 1792, Hamilton took an active role in ensuring that Adams’ electoral votes were reduced so there was no risk that he would defeat Washington. During Hamilton’s

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<sup>28</sup> Miller, *Federalist*, 84.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 62.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Charles, *The Origins of the American Party System* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 56.

appointment as Secretary of the Treasury, Adams was not supportive of Hamilton's proposals, particularly the creation of a National Bank. However, Adams did little to stop its passing. One of most turbulent clashes between the two occurred during Adam's administration. During the Quasi-War Adams (1798-1800) created a provincial army headed by Washington. Washington supported making Hamilton his second in command. Adams was extremely hesitant of this decision since Hamilton and he had differing views on national defense. Hamilton strongly supported building the army while Adams wanted to concentrate his attention upon expanding the navy. Hamilton believed that America could depend on the English navy for defense while Adams felt that America needed its own strong naval unit.<sup>33</sup>

The two disagreed even more over how to handle French relations. Adams supported a peace negotiation to avoid an unnecessary war. On the other hand, Hamilton backed military action. To Hamilton, a war against France (with the support of England and Spain) offered America an opportunity for imperial expansion into Florida and Louisiana.<sup>34</sup> Despite Hamilton's demand, Adams pressed on with peace negotiations and a direct war never did occur. Hamilton felt that America should concentrate its efforts on making England its strongest economic ally, since as Hamilton stated in 1790, England had, "a great commercial capital and an immense trade," unlike America which had "comparatively no commercial capital."<sup>35</sup>

Both Federalist and Republican party members felt that they were doing the best for the nation and saving it from doom. The Federalists argued that they were preventing America from becoming anarchist while the Republicans believed they were saving the country from a counterrevolution (392). However, it must be noted that political parties were not nearly as at

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<sup>33</sup> Charles, *American Party System*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "VI July 8, 22, 1790," ed. S.F. Bemis in *American Secretaries of State* (New York, 1927-29), 111.

strong as in later years. They were more like groups of followers who supported their leader (the Federalists under either Hamilton or Adams and the Republicans under Jefferson). Common citizens typically did not belong to a political party, only politicians.

The two front runners in the election of 1800 were Jefferson and Adams. Jefferson was a rich plantation owner from Virginia who had served in the Continental Congress during the Revolutionary War. He had the appearance of a great leader with his height and athletic build yet he was quiet and lacked assertiveness in public speaking. Despite his weaknesses with public speaking, Jefferson wrote with extraordinary talent. Thus, people turned to him when it was time to write the Declaration of Independence. During Washington's administration Jefferson served as Secretary of State. In 1796, Jefferson ran for the presidency but lost to Adams and became Vice President.

Adams was the oldest son of a farmer from Massachusetts. Like Jefferson, he also served in the Continental Congress. Adams quickly gained a reputation as an irritable man who tried to dominate every conversation.<sup>36</sup> Despite his reputation, Adams effectively served on ninety congressional committees within three years.<sup>37</sup> Adams was regarded as a persuasive speaker who was not afraid to speak about confrontational issues. During the election of 1796 Adams was elected Vice President. When Washington retired, after two terms, Adams ran for office and was elected president in 1796.

The nomination process in 1800 had changed greatly from the previous election. With the development of the parties, several states used legislative caucuses: Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the state legislature chose their electors in 11 of the 16 states. Only five

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<sup>36</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Richard P. McCormick, *The Presidential Game: The Origin of American Presidential Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 60.

states, North Carolina, Kentucky, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Virginia used the popular vote. Caucuses involved negotiations between men of different views. According to historian Joanne Freedman, “Participants sometimes referred to them as “caucuses,” but they also called them “the agreement,” “the promise,” “the compromise,” and “the pledge,” to which they would be “faithful” and “true.”<sup>39</sup> Declaring allegiance to a candidate helped make it more unlikely that one would change sides since the matter of “honor” was at risk.

Other states such as New Jersey and Delaware were experimenting with conventions made of delegates in order to select a candidate. Rival parties soon used these different devices in order to secure nominations and to run campaigns. The legislature had immense power at this time in determining who would become the president. The legislature of each state determined how the electors would be chosen; both parties sought to control the legislature in the year before the election. Before the election, six states changed the way they chose electors in order to give a greater advantage to the dominant party.<sup>40</sup> Legislative control was preferred by the managers of the parties because it ensured that the majority party could choose the electors and that meant the electors would be under the party’s control. The Federalists and the Democratic Republicans bitterly fought each other in deciding which states should use the legislature or district elections. District elections were more democratic since electors were popularly elected. For example, New York, (which was under Federalist control) used the legislative choice. Democratic Republican Aaron Burr unsuccessfully attempted to change the state to choice by district to help favor his party. Election by district gave the minority party a chance to win some electoral votes. However, with the Democratic Republican victories in the state election in April of 1800, he decided that it would be best to keep the legislative choice.

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<sup>39</sup> Joanne Freeman, “The Presidential Election of 1800: A Story of Crisis, Controversy, and Change,” in *History Now: A Quarterly Journal*, September 2004, 1.

<sup>40</sup> McCormick, *Presidential Game*, 60.

Alexander Hamilton was determined to keep New York under Federalist domain. On the May 4<sup>th</sup> caucus of 1800, Hamilton consulted Governor Jay to change the state's rules in order to elect by district elections. However, Hamilton asked Jay for this change after New York's votes had been cast, meaning that this would overturn the election results. However, Jay was easily able to see through Hamilton's plan and declined to enact district elections that would unfairly favor the Federalists.<sup>41</sup> Another example of attempting to change the voting system occurred in Virginia. The Federalists were favored in eight of the nineteen congressional races in 1798. The Republicans wanted to maintain control so they changed from district elections to a general ticket format therefore maintaining their dominance.<sup>42</sup> District elections were the most democratic method of choosing presidential electors. Since mass communication was unavailable, aside from newspapers, many American were unfamiliar with national candidates. Therefore, by voting in district elections voters were more likely to know an electoral candidate.<sup>43</sup>

Attempting to change the voting system was not just limited to the states. Federalist, James Ross circulated a bill through congress. This bill influenced the way that disputes over a states' electoral vote were handled. According to this bill, when the legality of an electoral vote was in question the problem would be referred to a "Grand Committee" of six Senators and six Representatives with a chairman nominated by the Senators and elected by the House. However, at this time the committee would be under the control of the Federalist, something that greatly worried the Democratic Republicans. Fortunately for the Republicans, the bill died because lawmakers could not agree on the amendments.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>42</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 156.

<sup>43</sup> Edward J. Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe: The Turbulent Election of 1800, America's First Presidential Campaign* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 62.



By May of 1800, the two parties began to examine how each states would control the appointment of electors. For the Federalists, New York as well as the majority of New England was under their control. Pennsylvania also looked promising, now that they had recently elected a Federalist Governor. For the Democratic Republicans, Virginia, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee were strongly under their control. However, several states were still being swayed by both parties and could go either way. These states included: Rhode Island, New Jersey, Maryland, North Carolina, and South Carolina.<sup>44</sup>

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1800, the Federalists met for their first caucus to decide who to run for both President and Vice President. They decided that the party would run both Adams and Pinckney without giving preference for one over the other. Hamilton feared that either Adams or Jefferson would win the presidency; but he decided that strategic handling of the election might allow for the dark horse Pinckney to win. Hamilton urged that all presidential electors vote equally for Adams and Pinckney as it, "was the only thing that can possibly save us from the fangs of Jefferson."<sup>45</sup> By gaining equal votes for both men, Hamilton hoped that Pinckney could surpass Adams in the southern states, where Adams was weak, and thereby win the election.<sup>46</sup> This split within the Federalist Party was publicized in Republican newspapers, "asserting that there were now three parties represented in the U.S. Senate – Republicans, Adamites, and Pickeronians – with each having about equal numbers in that body."<sup>47</sup> Federalists such as James Bayard openly struggled with the decision to either support Adams or to back Pinckney and thus risk a Republican winning the presidency.

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<sup>44</sup> McCormick, *Presidential Game*, 63.

<sup>45</sup> "Hamilton to Theodore Sedgwick, May 4, 1800," in Lodge, ed., *Works of Hamilton*, X, 371.

<sup>46</sup> Marvin R. Zahniser, *Charles Cotesworth Pinckney: Founding Father* (Williamsburg: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 216.

<sup>47</sup> Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962) 179.

However, Pinckney's loyalties rested with Hamilton and not Adams which greatly split and weakened the Federalist Party. Hamilton and Pinckney had a strong relationship dating back to their years in the military during the revolution. The two reunited later during the Quasi War with France from 1798-1800 in which Washington recommended both men be made major general (557). Even after the election, Hamilton and Pinckney shared a deep bond since Pinckney was the one Hamilton turned to after his son Philip's sudden death. To ease Hamilton from despair, Pinckney compassionately wrote Hamilton consoling him on his "irreparable loss...which only religion and time can alleviate."<sup>48</sup> Hamilton's eldest son, Philip, died in a duel in 1801. After Philip's premature death, Hamilton's eldest daughter, Angelica, suffered a mental breakdown. When her breakdown occurred, Hamilton turned to Pinckney asking for watermelons and three or four parakeets to soothe his daughter.<sup>49</sup>

Pinckney was the brother of former presidential Federalist candidate Thomas Pinckney and was a well known man from South Carolina. He was also a lawyer like Hamilton. When the Revolution broke out, Pinckney participated in South Carolina's Committee of Correspondence and also drilled militiamen. He earned his rank as a Captain and campaigned in southern states such as Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. After winning independence, Pinckney participated in the Constitutional Convention. Since he was both a southerner and a slave owner he refused to sign a constitution that would limit or prohibit the slavery system. Like Hamilton, Pinckney also favored a strong central government that would help expand commerce.

The fact that Pinckney was a southerner was important since it would help balance the ticket and garner support from southern states. However, in many ways cross-regional tickets could be risky since the north and south greatly distrusted each other. The south valued slavery

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<sup>48</sup> "Hamilton to Pinckney, Dec. 29, 1802, in Lodge, ed., *Works of Hamilton*, X, 444-45.

<sup>49</sup> *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, "Letter to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, December 29, 1802."

since slavery upheld their economy, while, many northerners were appalled by the slave system. In order for one to work successfully electors would have to be more loyal to their party than to their state. In Hamilton's mind the fact that Pinckney was from the south meant that he could beat Adams. If South Carolina voted for Pinckney and all other voters in the north also voted for him, he would come out ahead of Adams and win the presidency. Adams was angered when he discovered Hamilton's plan and denounced him publicly, calling him a "man devoid of every moral principle – a Bastard, and as much a foreigner as Gallatin."<sup>50</sup> According to Congressman Fisher Ames, Adams often used language against Hamilton that was "bitter even to outrage and swearing."<sup>51</sup> Even Adams' wife, Abigail, chided Hamilton and his followers as, "boys of yesteryear who were unhatched and unfledged when the venerable character they are striving to pull down was running every risk of life and property to serve and save a country of which these beings are unworthy members."<sup>52</sup> When the word of Hamilton's deceit spread to Adams's Federalist allies, they vowed to undermine Pinckney's electoral campaign in their area. Hamilton quickly tried to assure Adams's supporters that no such plot existed. However, it was too late because the Federalist Party was deeply divided between the candidates.<sup>53</sup>

The Republican Party was less divided in choosing candidates: Thomas Jefferson was their presidential candidate and Aaron Burr was their vice presidential candidate. There was some question as to Burr's character as a politician and Jefferson did announce his hesitations and mistrust in Burr since Burr was accused of past shady behavior in dealing with political finances. In 1799, Burr allegedly encouraged the Holland Company to bribe the state of New York in order to ease restrictions placed on foreign companies (589). However, the party still

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<sup>50</sup> McCormick, *Presidential Game*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> Ellis, *Passionate Sage*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 545.

<sup>53</sup> Zahniser, *Pinckney*, 218.

went ahead in naming Burr as the running mate. Burr was the youngest of all the candidates and was a Princeton graduate. During the Revolution he soldiered, advancing to the rank of colonel. After his military career, Burr settled into a law career. It was not until his later in life that he found an interest in politics. In 1784 he served one term in the New York legislature. Years later he served in the New York Senate and later in 1796 he unsuccessfully campaigned to become the Republican presidential candidate.<sup>54</sup>

Campaigning for the 1800 election began in 1799 (thirteen months before Election Day). This was different from past elections that lacked a concrete campaigning period because the political parties were not then fully developed. For example, in the election of 1796, campaigning did not begin until approximately 100 days before the election when Washington announced his intent to retire.<sup>55</sup> Jefferson oversaw his election by laying out his political platform. Jefferson stated that he would remain loyal to the Constitution and remain loyal to the states. He also wanted a reduction in the national debt and a limited military. He favored peaceful relations with foreign countries yet he did not want any political connections that could force the country into an unwanted war.<sup>56</sup> As Jefferson stated in a letter , “I am for a government rigorously frugal and simple and for retiring the national dept, eliminating a standing army and relying to the militia to safeguard internal security , and keeping the navy small, lest it drag the nation into “eternal wars.”<sup>57</sup> His sentiments were spread throughout the nation so that citizens could see his values. Other journalists contributed to Jefferson’s cause, such as James Callender who endorsed the Republicans through his articles in *The Prospect Before Us* (appearing in early 1800) which asked the people to choose “between Adams, war and beggary, and Jefferson, peace

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<sup>54</sup> Nancy Isenberg, *Fallen Founder: The Life of Aaron Burr* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 220.

<sup>55</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> McCormick, *Presidential Game*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 140.

and competency.”<sup>58</sup> This article criticized Adam’s administration while expressing hope for Jefferson’s future administration.

In order to spread his message through the country Jefferson relied on newspapers and pamphlets. By the year 1800 there were roughly 200 newspapers in circulation. Several papers were Republican based, amounting to 40 percent of the nation’s newspapers.<sup>59</sup> Many of these papers became involved in the campaign by publishing propaganda that bashed Adam’s administration through political cartoons while praising Jefferson.

On the other hand, Federalist controlled publications focused on ruining Jefferson’s image by declaring him to as a spineless French supporter that lacked religious principles.<sup>60</sup> In this smear campaign Federalists brought up such topics as Jefferson’s sexual immorality with his slaves. Since Jefferson was not protected under the sedition law, the attacks made against him were often more reckless and some historians, including McCormick, believe that the personal attacks were some of the most vicious in American presidential history.<sup>61</sup>

In June of 1800, Hamilton began his own political campaign on behalf of Pinckney. Hamilton traveled to New England under the pretext of speaking to his crumbling army. However, at every opportunity, Hamilton argued passionately that if the wrong president were chosen, a bloody, French-style revolution would occur (616). Often, Hamilton would state that “first class men” were for Pinckney, while “second-class men” were for Adams.<sup>62</sup> During that summer Hamilton also visited the home of the Rhode Island Governor Arthur Fenner and stated that only Pinckney would have both the support of the North and the South. When Fenner asked

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<sup>58</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 134.

<sup>59</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 144

<sup>60</sup> McCormick, *Presidential Game*, 66.

<sup>61</sup> Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal*, 479.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander Hamilton, “Letter to Oliver Wolcott Jr., July 1, 1800,” idem *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 4.

why Adams should not win the presidency, Hamilton boldly replied that “Adams was out of the question” and that Jefferson was even preferable to Adams.<sup>63</sup> Hamilton’s Federalist allies including James McHenry and Timothy Pickering warned him that his actions were backfiring. However, he did not listen and went on with merciless attacks.

One of the most controversial moments of the election was Hamilton’s attempt to defame Adams publically in a 54 page pamphlet entitled *Letter from Alexander Hamilton Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq. President of the United States* (October 24, 1800). Originally it was not meant for the public eye. However, once it did reach the public it hindered Adams’ campaign. Award winning historian Ron Chernow has dubbed Hamilton’s letter as “a form of political suicide that blighted the rest of his career” (619). Henry Cabot Lodge, a nineteenth century historian, also felt that Hamilton’s letter affected him negatively while calling his letter “a piece of passionate folly.”<sup>64</sup> While this letter hurt Adams it also damaged the Federalists since it gave the Republicans an edge in popularity because it demonstrated the turmoil within the Federalist Party.

Hamilton’s and Adams’ relationship had soured because of the former’s acerbic remarks made in private as well as in public. Through President Adams’ cabinet members, such as Oliver Wolcott, McHenry, and Timothy Pickering, Hamilton gathered confidential information regarding Adams to earn credibility. Although it was almost certain that the three men would be charged with treason, Hamilton felt that their help was absolutely necessary. Wolcott stated to Hamilton in a letter in the year 1800, someone had to expose the president for who he was although, “the people believe that their president is crazy.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Alexander Hamilton, “Conversation with Arthur Fenner, June 25-26 1800,” idem *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 596.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Cabot Lodge, *Alexander Hamilton*. American Statesmen Series (New York: Chelsea House, 1980), 229.

<sup>65</sup> John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 397.

Hamilton wanted to highlight Adams' violent temper, which was well known by Federalist factions but unknown to others (620). The summer before the letter was written Adams and Hamilton exchanged harsh words at each other. In July of 1800, Adams accused Hamilton of trying to control the press and his government.<sup>66</sup> Hamilton responded boldly next month demanding the evidence for the president's allegations. Adams never did respond back to Hamilton but once Hamilton's fire was ignited it was difficult to stop.

Many Federalists, including George Cabot and Wolcott, believed that a letter against Adams, if done carefully and without strong emotional appeals, could help urge support for Pinckney. However, it would be unwise to completely abandon Adams this close to the election because it could cause a damaging division of the Federalist Party. Stubbornly, Hamilton pushed on with the letter. It was not planned that the letter be published publicly but rather that it be circulated among the influential Federalist members. However, John Beckley, one of Hamilton's political enemies, the man who disclosed the Maria Reynolds pamphlet (in which Hamilton admitted adultery), leaked the letter to the *Aurora* newspaper (622).

Since only small sections of the letter were published, that, without more context could be misinterpreted, Hamilton chose to have the entire letter re-published. In this bold move, Hamilton publically admitted that he was the writer of this piece, thus breaking his usual practice of publishing anonymously (622).

In the letter itself Hamilton used persuasive language in order to undermine Adams' campaign and promote Pinckney. The letter begins by looking at Adams' role in the Revolution and then as president. During the Revolutionary War, Hamilton accused Adams specifically of favoring "the enlistment of our troops annually, or for short periods, rather than for the term of

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<sup>66</sup> *Aurora, General Advertiser*, July 12, 1800.

the war” which was under the recommendation of Washington.<sup>67</sup> This costly move, he said, could have caused the war to have been lost. In regards to Adams’ temper, Hamilton made several references and examples to exhibit the dangers of electing Adams for a second term. During his presidency, Hamilton charged Adams with being, “liable to paroxisms of anger, which deprive him of self command, and produce very outrageous behavior to those who approach him.”<sup>68</sup> After emphasizing Adams’ faulty personality, Hamilton moved on to a subject much more intriguing and in some ways more damaging – Adams’ dismissal of several of his cabinet members.

After the Federalist defeat in New York, Adams began to suspect that his cabinet members, Pickering, Wolcott, and McHenry, were more loyal to Hamilton than to himself. He also suspected them as supporters of the British. Adams began to purge his office of these supposedly untrustworthy members. The manner in which the President’s men were purged provided Hamilton an opportunity for his journalistic campaign. Gathering sympathy for McHenry, Hamilton wrote, “Ill treatment of Mr. M’HENRY cannot fail to awaken the sympathy of every person well acquainted with him. Sensible, judicious, well-informed, of an integrity never questioned, of a temper, which, though firm in the support of principles, has much moderation and integrity.”<sup>69</sup> Oddly, Hamilton never suggested that fellow Federalists should withhold their vote from Adams. Instead he pleaded for equal votes for Adams and Pinckney. Hamilton believed that if the Federalist Party remained equally united behind Adams and Pinckney, that Jefferson would not be able to win (623).

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander Hamilton, Letter from Alexander Hamilton, Concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams, Esq. President of the United States, October 24, 1800,” idem, *Hamilton Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1961), 935.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 960.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 963.



Despite Hamilton's past history of being an insightful master of prose, this letter proved to be, as Ron Chernow has stated, "a crazily botched job, an extended tantrum in print" (623). Instead of critiquing Adams, Hamilton chose to add personal grievances into the letter which weakened his argument. Adams was certain that Hamilton's letter was the cause of his electoral defeat. However, the letter may not have made as big of an impact as Adams thought. By the time that Hamilton's letter was released, many of the states that chose electors through the state legislatures, had already voted. In his letter, Hamilton had hoped that he could sway South Carolina to vote for Pinckney. However, the Republicans won the state by a landslide. Therefore, instead of helping Pinckney, the letter did the opposite: it helped Jefferson and Burr. Republicans printed the letter in their newspapers to show the weaknesses in the Federalist Party that were tearing it apart.

The Republican press, in many respects, was gentler on Adams than was Hamilton. The Republicans believed that Adams' reelection was doomed so they concentrated their energy on Adams' character, calling him a monarchist who had abandoned the revolution and wished to establish a hereditary system for the presidency. Republicans also concentrated their efforts on Pinckney who they felt was the biggest threat. Pinckney was labeled an untalented soldier whose "temper was ill suited to fit the exalted station of the presidency," and in one instance, Pinckney was characterized "as the stalking horse that would permit Caesar [Hamilton] to govern."<sup>70</sup>

Other than smear campaigning, Jefferson relied on promoting his party. In the Republican newspaper, the *Aurora*, the differences between the Federalist and Republican parties were listed with a clear bias. Republicans were said to be against monarchical systems of government, favoring the separation of church and state, and supporting a free press, while the Federalists were allegedly monarchist, wanted established churches, and were in favor of the Sedition Act

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<sup>70</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 145-146.

which destroyed freedom of the press. The Republican Party tried to make the election of 1800 appear as the saving grace of the American Revolution.<sup>71</sup> In order for American patriot principles to prevail, voters were told that they needed to vote for Jefferson. Supporters claimed that Jefferson would bring a new era to the country just as 1776 had ushered in an era of freedom.

On the Federalist side of the campaign, Adams used influential supporters such as John Jay and Noah Webster to defend his image. These prominent Federalists portrayed Adams as a trustworthy president who supported the Patriot's beliefs through his presidency. Since many Federalists believed that Pinckney had a better chance of winning the presidency, the campaign also promoted Pinckney's image as a war hero and a committed Federalist. Smear campaigning compared the Republican Party to the French Revolution, thus depicting Jefferson as a radical extremist. Federalists also found a way to damage Jefferson's reputation through a letter he had written to Phillip Mazzei. In this famously known "Mazzei Letter," Jefferson insulted Washington and the Federalists in Congress. Federalist campaign workers introduced this letter to the public emphasizing that Jefferson harbored hatred towards Washington, who was a well-loved past president and a war hero.<sup>72</sup>

America was a predominately Christian nation in which voters reflected their religious values through their vote. Before the revolution, several colonies required officeholders to profess their faith in God. After the revolution, many politicians, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Jefferson, turned towards Deism which acknowledged that God created the world but denied that He intervened in human lives. However other politicians such as Washington, Adams, and Hamilton still supported religion. Hamilton himself was a zealous

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>72</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 39.

believer in the doctrines of Christianity and prayed both in the morning and at night (53). The Federalist Party tended to value religion because leading Federalists believed it created social, economic, and political order. Republicans, on the other hand, felt that religion was a personal matter and they supported religious freedom. Jefferson's deist beliefs were a major weak point that the Federalists happily attacked. Jefferson had once written, "...it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."<sup>73</sup> This statement was printed in several Federalist newspapers such as the *Gazette of the United States*, to prove that Jefferson lacked morals and hated all religion.

Some attacks went even further paralleling the election of Jefferson to Armageddon. Religious political leaders believed that God was needed in politics; otherwise as Timothy Dwight (America's leading evangelical minister) stated, "If our religion were gone, our state of society would perish with it, and nothing would be left which would be worth defending."<sup>74</sup> Both Adams and Pinckney were able to use Jefferson's deism to carry more votes. Adams projected a Christian image as he regularly attended church and often referenced God in his political speeches. Fellow Federalist, Pinckney, was also an active church member who later went on to become a vice president of the American Bible Society.<sup>75</sup>

Although slavery did not play a major role in presidential elections until later in the 1800s, it was still an important issue in the election of 1800. As a child, Hamilton witnessed the horrors of slavery in the West Indies and therefore had become a strict abolitionist. His experiences taught him that blacks and white should be legally equal (210). In 1785, Hamilton was involved with the New York Manumission Society (an abolitionist organization) in which he supported emancipating slaves (214-215). However, Hamilton was also a realist in that he knew

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes of Virginia*, 159.

<sup>74</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 169.

<sup>75</sup> Zahniser, *Pinckney*, 272.

that in order to win southern votes, the Federalists could not run under an anti-slavery banner. Likewise, Adams was a staunch opponent of slavery, and he was the only one of the main four candidates (Jefferson, Pinckney, Burr, and Adams) who never owned a slave. Adams believed that slavery was “an evil of colossal magnitude” yet he still appointed three slave owning men to his cabinet. Adams knew that he needed support from the southern states in order to win reelection; thus, he was more apt to appoint slave owners from those states. Through the campaign period neither candidate devoted much attention to the slavery issue. While Adams expressed his dislike for the system he was not about to use the abolition of slavery as his platform. Jefferson, who owned many slaves, did not take a strong stand for or against slavery. However, he often promoted his desire for gradual emancipation in order to gain northern support.

Both candidates also took further steps to spread their message by traveling. Jefferson frequently visited Philadelphia to conference with congressmen about his progress in the campaign. While he was at home in Virginia Jefferson received reports to inform him of his progress. Adams also traveled to gain supporters, speaking of the successes of his administration. Instead of going directly to Washington from Philadelphia, Adams visited Lancaster, York, Fredrick, and Baltimore, which enabled him to campaign through Federalist dominated regions.<sup>76</sup> Even vice presidential candidate Aaron Burr campaigned up north to gain support in Federalist controlled districts. Burr proved to be an excellent campaigner as he was very detailed when it came to gaining votes. He even created a roster with the name of every New York voter, along with their financial status and political inclination.<sup>77</sup> From this list Burr mobilized

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<sup>76</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 141

<sup>77</sup> Freeman, *A Story of Crisis*, 2.

supporters who literally campaigned door to door. He even sent German speakers to German-speaking areas to promote his platform (607).

Like Burr, Hamilton also campaigned heavily in New York. According to a Republican newspaper the *Aurora*, “Hamilton harangues the astonished group. Every day he is seen in the street, hurrying this way and darting that.”<sup>78</sup> He also rode horseback through Republican strongholds in the state shouting “scoundrel” and “villain” when he entered Republican precincts.<sup>79</sup>

The Federalists also participated in political gatherings in which patriotic songs were sung in support of Adams. Many Federalist shows also depicted military images, obviously to evoke the memory of Washington’s presidency.<sup>80</sup> The Republican Party also hosted political dinners such as one in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in which guests made 16 toasts— one for each state. Other gatherings burned images of Adams and planted liberty trees and poles.

There was no national campaign in 1800; rather, the campaign was made up as a series of contests, even though the results were decided months prior. Election Day was simply the day that electors cast their votes in their state. The election results showed that Adams received 86 percent of his electoral votes from the northern states while Jefferson received approximately 75 percent of his votes from the southern states.<sup>81</sup>

Adams succeeded in northern states, namely Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Jefferson won: Georgia, Kentucky, New York, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. When it came down to the wire, it was clear that

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<sup>78</sup> Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 232.

<sup>79</sup> Milton Lomask, *Aaron Burr: The Years from Princeton to Vice President* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 246.

<sup>80</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 101.

<sup>81</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 164.

the election would hinge on Pennsylvania. It was not until December 2<sup>nd</sup> that a deadlock between the two Pennsylvanian Houses broke down into a compromise. It was decided that the legislature would choose eight Democratic Republican electors and seven Federalist electors. North Carolina and Maryland (both of whom chose electors by district) also split their votes between the candidates. The outcome of the election was a Republican victory while the Federalist Party lost. Hamilton's wish that Pinckney would outvote Adams did not become reality as one vote in Rhode Island went for John Jay, making Adams final tally 65 votes to Pinckney's 64.<sup>82</sup>

The election law stated that the electoral vote certificates were to be opened on the second Wednesday in February. Thus, no action to break the tie could begin before then. Electors began their balloting on February 11<sup>th</sup>. Eight states were in support of Jefferson (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee), six for Burr (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, and South Carolina), and two could not come to a consensus (Maryland and Vermont). It took a majority of nine states in order to make a decision. Throughout February 11<sup>th</sup> the electors cast their votes for their candidate. However, at the end of the day a decision had still not been made thus the country was at a standstill.

Unfortunately for Jefferson, both he and Burr had tied in the number of electoral votes. The National Intelligencer had stated in a report that Jefferson was the clear winner since both Federalist candidates had not received any votes in South Carolina.<sup>83</sup> Jefferson assumed that one of the electors in Georgia would throw his vote to George Clinton instead of Burr. However, that did not happen, and thus the country was put into political turmoil for two months. When it was

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<sup>82</sup> Malone, *Ordeal of Liberty*, 493.

<sup>83</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 163.

discovered that both Burr and Jefferson had tied in the number of electors, the decision went to the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives was under Federalist control (which was bitterly against Jefferson). The Federalists began to discuss their options. Many Federalists wanted to tie the House up to prevent either Republican candidate from being elected. Without a president the Federalist president pro tempore of the Senate could be elected president. The Constitution stated that if both positions of president and vice-president remained vacant then the pro tempore acted as president.<sup>84</sup> Other Federalists wanted to use their majority in the House to invalidate electoral votes and elect Adams president. Votes in South Carolina and Georgia were allegedly irregular yet there was not much evidence to investigate, and furthermore, declaring the result to be false would cause an enormous crisis. Meanwhile, rumors spread that the Republican dominated state of Virginia threatened to secede if Jefferson was not elected. Other Republicans talked about holding another Constitutional Convention in order to amend it to reflect the “democratic spirit of America.”<sup>85</sup> With the country on the edge of civil war the electors met to decide the fate of the country.

The majority of the Federalists made the decision to support Burr. However, Hamilton believed otherwise and in December of 1800, went against Burr, proclaiming that, “Jefferson is to be preferred. He is by far not so dangerous a man; and he has pretensions to character.”<sup>86</sup> However, many Federalists dismissed Hamilton’s claims believing that he had become malicious. After his failed attempt to warn Federalist congressmen, Hamilton carefully directed his attention to James Bayard (a 33 year old representative from Delaware). Bayard was Delaware’s sole House member and that gave him the power to decide his state’s vote.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 245.

<sup>85</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 188

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Sisson, *The American Revolution of 1800* (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc, 1974), 412.

<sup>87</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 253.

However, Bayard was not easy to sway. Hamilton worked strenuously writing letters to Bayard to convince him to vote for Jefferson. He outlined the negativities of Burr's character, "...he is a man of *extreme & irregular* ambition – that he is *selfish* to a degree which excludes all social affections & that he is decidedly *profligate*.”<sup>88</sup> While attempted to sway Bayard's vote, Hamilton also negotiated with Republicans. In turn for the Federalist support of Jefferson, Hamilton asked that the current financial system remain the same, the navy remained and grow in power, and for some Federalists to remain in their appointed positions.<sup>89</sup> Many ballots followed for seven days afterwards but no change was made to the outcome. Bayard realized that a decision needed to be made quickly to ensure that the union did not fall apart. He told Adams, "I was compelled by the obligation of a sacred duty, so to act, and not to hazard the Constitution upon which the political existence of the state depends.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, taking Hamilton's position, he gave his support to Jefferson. Bayard proposed a bargain to the Republicans. He would abstain from voting for his state Delaware if Jefferson would accept the terms that Hamilton outlined. Samuel Smith informed Jefferson of Bayard's plan and Jefferson allegedly said that his plan agreed with his views and intent.<sup>91</sup> However, after Jefferson won the presidency he refused to admit that he had cut deals with the Federalist Party. It was not until February 17<sup>th</sup> after the 36<sup>th</sup> ballot that a decision was made that declared Jefferson as president.<sup>92</sup> On the 17<sup>th</sup> Delaware did not vote. Also, none of the Federalists from Maryland, Vermont, and South Carolina voted. Thus Maryland and Vermont were included in Jefferson's final tally of ten states versus Burr's four

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<sup>88</sup> "To James Bayard, January, 16 1801," *Alexander Hamilton: Writings* (Washington D.C.: The Library of America, 1961), 978.

<sup>89</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 254.

<sup>90</sup> James A. Bayard to John Adams, February 19, 1801, "Correspondence of Bayard," 129-130.

<sup>91</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 191.

<sup>92</sup> McCormick, *e Presidential Game*, 69.



and the two abstained states of Delaware and South Carolina. Jefferson had been elected as the third president of the United States.

Jefferson was inaugurated on March 4<sup>th</sup>. The shift of power was remarkable since political power was shifted from the Federalists to the Republicans without bloodshed or warfare.<sup>93</sup> A peaceful turnover in power demonstrated that young America had potential to succeed since it was able to resolve political hurdles. Jefferson's inauguration speech stated, "We are all republicans, we are all federalists" alluding to his hope that political party members temporarily abandon their grievances and come together as Americans.<sup>94</sup> Jefferson never admitted to accepting a bargain to win the presidency yet he stuck to the points that Hamilton outlined. Despite his hatred for Hamilton's economic system he never got rid of the bank. Jefferson did not remove Federalists in appointed positions. He did reduce the navy but only with the limits set by the Federalists. These compromises suggest that Jefferson understood and followed the deals being made to assure him the presidency.

The tie between Burr and Jefferson eventually led to an amendment in the Constitution in 1804. Under this amendment, there was to be two different ballots. One was to be for the president, specifically, while the other was for the vice president. This way there would be no future ties between presidential and vice presidential candidates. This would also assure that the vice president and president would not be of opposing parties like in the election of 1796 in which Adams and Jefferson were in office together.<sup>95</sup>

The peaceful transition of power ushered in a new phase of American politics. Thankfully for the future of country, America did not enter into a violent revolution as had France.

Hamilton's plan to elect Pinckney backfired. Instead of uniting his party, Hamilton divided it as

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<sup>93</sup> Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 201

<sup>94</sup> Thomas Jefferson, March 4, 1801, *Annals of the Congress*, 10:763-64.

<sup>95</sup> Larson, *Magnificent Catastrophe*, 275.

he insulted Adams' character in a publicized letter. After both Burr and Jefferson tied in electoral votes, Hamilton once again got involved by pushing legislators to support Jefferson. Although, Hamilton's original intention of a Federalist victory did not occur, his involvement in the election of 1800 was significantly important.