

THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF JOHN ADAMS'S DECADE IN EUROPE
ON HIS POLICIES AS VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT

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To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kenna S. Giffin entitled "The Possible Effects of John Adams's Decade in Europe on His Policies as Vice President and President." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Government.


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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:






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ABSTRACT

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THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF JOHN ADAMS'S DECADE IN EUROPE ON HIS POLICIES AS VICE PRESIDENT AND PRESIDENT

DECEMBER 2008

John Adams was comfortable with the fact that the American colonies were governed by a monarch living several thousand miles away, as long as the monarch governed through the colonial legislative bodies. When the British Parliament imposed taxes on the colonies, however, Adams knew it was time to fight, first for the colonists' rights as British citizens, and later for America's sovereignty. Adams was instrumental in planning the break from Britain, in negotiating the peace treaty with Great Britain, in negotiating commercial treaties with the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, and other countries, and as the first minister plenipotentiary from the United States to Great Britain. Adams had a decade in which to listen, observe, ask questions, read papers, and generally absorb the essence of French and British thinking, so that during his vice presidency and presidency, as America teetered on the brink of war with France and Great Britain, Adams was uniquely able to lead his country to peace and security by insisting on neutrality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From various discords to create
The music of a well-tuned state, . . .
And the soft, silent harmony that springs
From sacred union and consent of things.¹

(Pope, “Ode for Music on St. Cecilia’s Day,” stanza 3)

The experience John Adams (1735-1826) gained while negotiating the Anglo-American peace treaty in France and commercial treaties in The United Provinces of the Low Countries, then while serving as U.S. minister to Great

¹ Alexander Pope, “Ode for Music on St. Cecilia’s Day,” written for Steele, 1708, quoted in John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams, *Life of John Adams*, vol. 2 (New York: Cosimo, 2005; originally published by Lippincott, 1871), 197-198. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 13 March 1796. Stanza 3, lines 4, 5, 9 and 10 of text as set to music by Maurice Greene for his *doct. mus.* degree from Cambridge, and performed at the Public Commencement July 6, 1730. Reproduction of “Ode on St. Cecilia’s Day, MDCCVIII. And Other Pieces for Music” retrieved from <http://books.google.com/>, accessed 15 February 2008. Adams was referring to his life of public service, through which he felt unable to exert enough influence on the U.S. House and Senate to act in the best interests of the United States, because of influence from other factions.

Britain, was instrumental and inherent in his foreign policy involvement concerning the United States, France, and Great Britain during his terms as vice president, 1789-1797, and as president, 1797-1801.

This thesis explores the development of John Adams's attitudes toward Great Britain and France while serving the United States in both countries. To set the stage, the thesis briefly follows Adams's move from loyalist to revolutionary, notes the interplay of balance of power, mercantilism, and economic liberalism theories with Adams's attitudes, and brings in some of his experiences as a negotiator of the Treaty of Paris and of commercial treaties in Holland. The primary content of the thesis presents Adams's activities during his term at the Court of St. James's. It examines Adams's foreign policy decisions during his vice presidency and presidency for evidence that the experience of serving as an American diplomat in France, the Netherlands, and Great Britain affected those foreign policy decisions.

Early Development of Adams's Attitudes Toward Great Britain

Adams developed his foreign affairs expertise, especially his knowledge of and attitudes toward Great Britain, long before his years in Europe, and those attitudes deserve a brief examination because some of them served him well, and some of them failed him. His education at home, community school, and Harvard laid the foundation for his interest in government generally and the British form in particular, even though he first intended to go into the ministry, and even earned

an M.A. from Harvard in that area. After a year of teaching school in Worcester, he decided he was more inclined toward the law than the ministry. He then began reading law with James Putnam in Braintree, shift in his reading choices from theology and moral philosophy to law and legal philosophy. His diary entries mention studying Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV*,² Bolingbroke's *Idea of a Patriot King*,³ Virgil,⁴ Dr. Cowell's *Institutes of the Laws of England, Naval Trade and Commerce*.⁵ Adams described Cowell's treatise "relating to his Majesties Customs, Merchants, Masters of Ships, Mariners, Letters of Marque, Privateers, Prizes, Convoys, Cruizers &c. are particularly considered and treated with due care," probably not realizing at the time how valuable this information would become as he dealt with the details and nuances of commercial trade in the treaties he negotiated many years later. The information would also serve him

² Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 1, *Diary 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 31. François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XIV*, 1751. First scholarly history to include a history of the arts as well as military and government topics.

³ Ibid., 35. Sir Henry St. John Bolingbroke, *The Idea of a Patriot King*, 1738. Bolingbroke presents his ideas of the duties of a monarch in a limited monarchy.

⁴ Ibid., 37-38. Publius Vergilius Maro, *Aenid*, ca. 29 B.C.E. Roman poet.

⁵ Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 1, *Diary 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 52-53.

well in establishing the U.S. navy and in dealing with British and French privateers.

Adams was influenced by the French and Indian War (1754-1763), connecting its outcome to the revolution to come almost as direct cause and effect. He noted in his *Autobiography Part One*, that in 1759:

. . . the Conquest of Canada was compleated by the surrender of Montreal to General Amherst. This Event, which was so joyfull to Us and so important to England if she had seen her true Interest, inspired her with a Jealousy, which ultimately lost her thirteen Colonies and made many of Us at the time regret that Canada had ever been conquered. The King sent Instructions to his Custom house officers to carry the Acts of Trade and Navigation into strict Execution.⁶

Adams summed up the entire situation between Great Britain and her Colonies:

The Views of the English Government towards the Collonies and the Views of the Collonies towards the English Government, from the first of our History to that time, appeared to me to have been directly in Opposition to each other, and were now by the imprudence of Administration, brought to a Collision. England proud of its power and

⁶ Ibid., 275.

holding Us in Contempt would never give up its pretentions. The American devoutly attached to their Liberties, would never submit, at least without an entire devastation of the County and a general destruction of their Lives. A Contest appeared to me to be opened, to which I could foresee no End, and which would render my Life a Burden and Property, Industry and every Thing insecure.⁷

At the time of the war, at Worcester October 12, 1755, Adams wrote to Nathan Webb, his grammar-school playmate, Harvard colleague, and relative:

Soon after the Reformation a few people came over into this new world for Conscience sake. Perhaps this (apparently) trivial incident, may transfer the great seat of Empire into America. It looks likely to me. For if we can remove the turbulent Gallicks, our People according to the exactest Computations, will in another Century, become more numerous than England itself. Should this be the Case, since we have (I may say) all the naval Stores of the Nation in our hands, it will be easy to obtain the mastery of the seas, and then the united force of all Europe, will not be able to subdue us. The only way to keep us from setting up for ourselves, is to disunite Us. Divide et impera. Keep us in distinct colonies, and then,

⁷ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:276.

some great men, in each Colony, desiring the Monarchy of the Whole, they will destroy each others influence and keep the Country in Equilibrio.⁸

Footnote 1 explains:

The characteristic reflections in this early, but later celebrated, letter had at least two identifiable sources. One was the course of the current French and Indian war, in which the British had recently suffered serious reverses, notably in Braddock's defeat near Fort Duquesne and in other actions on and around the lakes above the Hudson. Thus, JA [John Adams] mentions just below, the "dire [evils, sufferings] of war." The possibility of the fall of the British empire brought on a line of thought popular throughout the 18th century . . . the prospect of America's succeeding England as the seat of empire, or becoming itself a powerful independent empire, was a natural inference for JA to draw [if, as has been suggested, he had also been reading Benjamin Franklin's essay, "Observations concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c." written 1751, published 1755, wherein Franklin predicted that

⁸ Robert J. Taylor, ed. *The Adams Papers: Volume I September 1755-October 1773* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press & Massachusetts Historical Society, 1977), 4-6.

America would rapidly overtake England in population.⁹ When one adds this kind of thinking to the drive to restore British civil rights to the Colonists, in part by eliminating Parliament from a role in governing the overseas colonies, the resulting conclusion seems not far away from requiring a demand for independence from the crown.

The events and political fallout of the war for the American colonies seemed to act as a bit of a reality check on Adams, who was at that point in life when he could begin to be actively involved in his community as well as beginning a profession, and thus the local politics in particular could take on new meaning for him in very memorable ways, and could lay the groundwork for future political involvement. It could also have laid part of the foundation for his understanding of British political thought and action, which then allowed him to add to his knowledge by his service in France and Great Britain. The experience and synthesis of the knowledge, especially over an expanse of decades, could reasonably be expected to influence how Adams understood the actions of Great Britain in the 1790s, the years of his vice presidency and presidency. With so many opportunities to observe how America responded to Great Britain's actions, and how Great Britain responded to America's responses, by the 1790s Adams

⁹ Ibid., 7, fn1.

could expect to have a reasonably thorough understanding of what made Great Britain “tick,” especially when combined with his years as minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain and the opportunity that provided to observe British government in process and up close.

After establishing himself as a lawyer, Adams (naturally) became involved in local politics in Braintree and Boston. Adams claimed to have turned down Governor Bernard’s 1768 offer of a temporary appointment to the Office of Advocate General in the Court of Admiralty because he did not want to put himself under “restraints, or Obligations of Gratitude” to the government he increasingly opposed:

. . . the British Government, including the King, his Ministers and Parliament, apparently supported by a great Majority of the Nation, were persevering in a System, wholly inconsistent with all my Ideas of right, Justice and Policy, and therefore I could not place myself in a Situation in which my Duty and my Inclination would be so much at Variance.¹⁰

Adams recalled that he was squarely on the side of the colonies in the 1773 controversy relating to the independence of judges, when the King granted Superior Court judges a salary, then prohibited them from receiving their salaries

¹⁰ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:288.

from the House of Representatives, Council and Governor, as they had done until this point. This made them completely dependent upon the Crown for their salaries as well as their appointments.¹¹ The Governor and the Council were in danger of succumbing to the same situation. Adams claimed he came up with a solution the problem in the case of the judges: impeaching the Chief Justice. He found the authority for the procedure in the Charter:

which gives Us, in Words as express, as clear and as strong as the Language affords, all the Rights and Priviledges of Englishmen: and if the House of Commons in England is the grand Inquest of the Nation, the House of Representatives is the Grant Inquest of this Province, and the Council must have the Powers of Judicature of the House of Lords in Great Britain.¹²

He further described the basis for his use of the Charter, showing his growing familiarity with and affinity for constitutional government, especially that which the colonies already had in place:

That our Constitution was a Miniature of the British: that the Charter had given Us every Power, Jurisdiction and right within our Limits which

¹¹ Ibid., 3:297.

¹² Ibid., 3:300.

could be claimed by the People or Government of England, with no other exceptions than those in the Charter expressed.¹³

Adams began developing his ideas on government within a constitutional framework in time for the First Continental Congress of September 1774. After discussing the concept of a union of the colonies, the Congress divided itself into two committees: one, on which Adams served, to prepare a bill of rights or declaration of the rights of the colonies, and the second to prepare a list of infringements or violations of the rights. The first committee then divided into a subcommittee to draft a set of articles, all but one of which were agreed to easily. The problem article was whether or not Parliament had authority over the colonies for *all* matters, or for all matters except taxation. The subcommittee finally prevailed upon Adams to draft the final article denying Parliament's authority over all taxation of the colonies.

The colonies had considerable historical precedents to work from. For example, it was traditional that a monarch ruled each separate territory with advice from a legislative body in the territory. For the American colonies, this meant that the colonial legislatures had, or should have had, considerable input about colonial matters that was conveyed to the king, including issues concerning

¹³ Ibid., 3:301.

taxation. Instead, Parliament more or less stuck its collective nose into the matter by levying taxes without input from the colonial legislatures.¹⁴ Had Parliament backed off, and had the same taxes been levied by the king via the colonial legislatures, there might have been no revolution. In short, it was not necessarily the taxes per se to which (some) colonists objected, it was the fact that the levy came from Parliament, not the king via colonial legislatures. This usurpation by Parliament pushed many colonists, such as Adams, first to demand recognition of their rights as British citizens, then to rebel when they might not have done so otherwise. After all, the colonial legislatures existed to manage the affairs within the colonies. What more important issue could arise than that of taxing colonists to help pay for their defense against the French? What might appear to twenty-first century Americans as a distinction without a difference appeared to be a matter of principle to the eighteenth-century colonists – a demand to be heard by government, not necessarily a change in the outcome.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jeremy Black, *George III: America's Last King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 221.

¹⁵ Compare this reaction to those of some American protestors of the 1960s regarding various issues. In many cases, the point of the protests was that elected officials, and other people in power, should listen to and consider the requests and comments of the people, even if the ultimate results did not completely incorporate the requests or comments. The current equivalent is clearly

As Jeremy Black, history professor at the University of Exeter and author of *George III: America's Last King*, described it:

An assembly in one territory of a composite state claimed no authority over an assembly in another. The British parliament was the first to do so . . . with the Declaratory Act . . . in 1720. . . . by the mid-eighteenth century, the British parliament was working out a complicated theory of the unified sovereignty over the empire of the king-in-parliament, the Westminster parliament. The Americans, in contrast, had no initial problem with *royal* sovereignty, but were clear that the king should tax them through their own assemblies, rather than through the Westminster parliament.¹⁶

The article survived the committee's debate, then the Congressional debate, and became the fourth article of the Declaration of Rights of the Colonies as finally adopted.¹⁷ Adams put the articles into final form, and they were accepted.

shown in the apparently widespread opposition of American citizens to the war in Iraq, which was so contemptuously brushed aside by Vice President Cheney, in his March 19, 2008, interview with Martha Raddatz of ABC News. When asked about the American citizens' consensus opposing the war, Cheney looked directly at Raddatz and said, "So?"

¹⁶ Black, *George III*, 221.

¹⁷ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:308-310.

Adams returned to Philadelphia in May 1775 for the Second Continental Congress, now well aware of the increasing incidents of violence between British troops and Americans, especially Bostonians. By this point, even Adams was convinced that separation from Great Britain was probably the only rational course.¹⁸ He was not completely at ease with some of the personal and pointed attacks on the king as they were made in the Declaration of Independence – Black noted that Adams claimed it contained “expressions which I would not have inserted, if I had drawn it up, particularly that which called the King tyrant.”¹⁹ However, the attacks did not dissuade Adams from supporting the break, although it appears he did not want as complete and final a break as some of the hotter heads. Even at this stage, Adams the diplomat apparently wanted to raise the ante but not upend the table and walk away from the game. He essentially suggested creating negotiating room, or bargaining chips, rather than taking a line-in-the-sand position. This interpretation can be derived from his claim that he thought at the time,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Black, *Geroge III*, 227. Source: Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “If Others Will Not Be Active, I Must Drive”: George III and the American Revolution, *Early American Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 1; John Adams to Timothy Pickering, 6 August 1822, Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, (Boston: Little and Brown, 1853) 2:514..

That We ought to recommend to the people of all the States to institute Governments for themselves, under their own Authority, and that, without Loss of Time. That We ought to declare the Colonies, free, Sovereign and independent States, and then to inform Great Britain We were willing to enter into Negotiations with them for the redress of all Grievances, and a restoration of Harmony between the two Countries, upon permanent Principles. All this I thought might be done before We entered into any Connections, Alliances or Negotiations with foreign Powers. I was also for informing Great Britain very frankly that hitherto we were free but if the War should be continued, We were determined to seek Alliances with France, Spain and any other Power of Europe, that would contract with Us.²⁰

This retrospective suggests that Adams by that point already understood the importance the colonies played in the balance of power between Great Britain and France, and was already using that knowledge to try to get the best possible deal for the colonies in terms of financial and military or naval support from any European power that would agree to an alliance with the colonists, even a former “enemy” such as France.

²⁰ Butterfield, *Autobiography*, 3:315.

Balance of Power, Mercantilism, and Economic Liberalism

From the European point of view, eighteenth-century balance of power assumptions not only included the colonies but considered them the decisive counter in the balance (that is, the additional weight that gave an advantage to one country among countries otherwise fairly evenly balanced in power) – “The true balance of power really resides in commerce and America”²¹ – because of the importance of the colonies in providing exclusive sources of raw materials for the manufacturing industries of the European imperial powers: England, Spain, France, Portugal, and Holland. Without raw products obtained in the colonies, the imperial powers would have been considerably more limited in what they could trade, which would concomitantly limit their powers.²² Adams and his cohorts were to a great extent, therefore, making use of the eighteenth-century European outlook on power, which centered on the balance of power among nation states as

²¹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 1-2; Gilbert, *Farewell Address*, 105-106.

²² James E. Dougherty & Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr. *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), 418. Mercantilism was practical doctrine, not a serious economic theory. It was designed to generate money for the royal treasuries and thus enhance state military abilities, court splendors, and aristocratic lifestyles, not to promote the general prosperity of the population. It required heavy taxes, price fixing, and legislative protection against foreign competition.

the sole arbiter of political action, for the benefit of the American colonies.²³ The economic theory enmeshed with balance of power political theory was mercantilism,²⁴ “which measured national power by national wealth and considered commerce as the source of both.”²⁵

However, the late eighteenth century was also undergoing a shift to economic liberalism, which saw international trade not as a zero-sum game, where one state gained only at the expense of another, but as an activity that could benefit all participants.²⁶ This idea became extremely useful to the American statesmen as they gained support for their independence by means of commercial treaties. As will be seen in his correspondence cited in later chapters, Adams became a solid proponent of free trade, even while he understood mercantilism well enough to negotiate commercial treaties to benefit the fledgling country when necessary.

²³ James H. Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 1; Felix Gilbert, *To the Farewell Address: Ideas of Early American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 1961), 89, 95-98.

²⁴ Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories*, 418-419.

²⁵ Hutson, *John Adams*, 1; Max Savelle, *The Origins of American Diplomacy: The International History of Anglo-America, 1492-1763* (New York, 1967), 228-229.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 419.

James H. Hutson pointed out in *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution* that had Adams and his colleagues not been attentive to power in politics by virtue of their study of English political theory, they would have been well aware of the importance of it because of the long conflict with the French in North America. Great Britain and France had skirmished or openly fought for power over the northeastern part of the North American continent for nearly a century. Usually, the colonies requested British assistance against the French, reminding Britain that the colonies were the source of its national power and of its weight in the European balance.²⁷ In short, the nation that controlled North America would hold “the hegemony of power over the rest of Europe.”²⁸

Adams concluded that if Britain and America stayed united, the European balance would be destroyed, to the detriment of France, Spain, and the Netherlands. On the other hand, if France and Spain monopolized American commerce, the balance of power would tip against Britain.²⁹ British ministry did not disagree; they had been playing the game long enough to recognize the potential pitfalls. The Earl of Carlisle predicted, in 1776, that if Britain lost America, she would “sink into obscurity and insignificance, falling at length a

²⁷ Hutson, *John Adams*, 2.

²⁸ Hutson, *John Adams*, 4; Savelle, *Origins of American Diplomacy*, 553.

²⁹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 10-11.

prey to the first powerful or ambitious state, which may mediate a conquest of this island.”³⁰ Adams also believed that America was a match for the united forces of Europe, as long as the colonies worked together as a confederacy. Loyalists, however, believed that the dangers inherent in independence far exceeded the ability of the colonies, even if strongly united, to preserve their union. They feared that America would end up partitioned like Poland in 1772, conquered and divided by France and Spain.³¹ And, indeed, there were moments when that seemed possible.

However, by 1774, Adams, and the rest of the group known as Whigs, believed that if America properly manipulated the European balance of power, it would come as close to guaranteeing her national security as could be hoped. The way to achieve that manipulation, they believed, was to establish free trade between America and Europe.³² After 1774, if not before that point, Adams devoted his efforts to promoting free trade so as to secure American safety, as soon as independence was achieved and recognized.³³

³⁰ Hutson, *John Adams*, 11; Ian R. Christie and Benjamin W. Labaree, *Empire or Independence, 1760-1776* (New York, 1976), 253, 254.

³¹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 7, 13-14.

³² *Ibid.*, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

To that end, Adams was chosen to draft the plan of treaties, called the Model Treaty, to be offered to foreign nations, which he reported to Congress July 18, 1776. Passed September 17, 1776, the Model Treaty's goal was to dissolve the British monopoly of American commerce and to invite all nations, including Great Britain, to trade with the United States on equal terms; this would provide for American security by using American commerce to maintain the European balance of power.³⁴ That is, the United States would not favor either France or Great Britain in commerce, so that neither France nor Great Britain would have a commercial advantage importing American products less expensively, and no cause to use such commercial favoritism as an excuse for war of any scale. The United States would not be bound in anything like colony status to Great Britain or to France, but would be treated like a bona fide sovereign nation that, if neutral, would not tip the balance of power in favor of either France or Great Britain, but maintain the status quo of both, which was a fairly even match. Adams was under no illusion that Britain and America could become "friends" after independence; that was gone, to be replaced by animosity and the desire for vengeance, at least in the short term.³⁵ However, it was in the interest of the United States to develop fair trade with Great Britain, as the two might need to

³⁴ Ibid., 27-28.

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

join forces against France in the future.³⁶ If the Model Treaty worked, Britain and France would both be strong enough to prevent each other from destroying American independence as well, he concluded. Beyond the balance of power, however, Adams and the other Founders also believed in military deterrence: possession of power and willingness to use it guaranteed peace.³⁷

In summary, Adams's foreign affairs expertise was nourished and informed by his schooling, the French and Indian War, his experience working with British government officials (crown-appointed executives and judges, for example), disputes between Massachusetts Colony and the British monarch, participation in the Continental Congresses of 1774 and 1775, and reading and thinking about political and economic systems/theories such as balance of power, mercantilism and economic liberalism. Adams believed that, because of the position of the British American colonies in the European balance of power game, as long as those colonies worked within a confederacy they could successfully form a separate country and maintain independence by manipulating the European balance of power and focusing on free trade with Europe. To that end, he developed the Model Treaty as a prototype for commercial treaties to be negotiated with European nations. The treaties would act as a means to balance

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 30-31.

British and French powers in particular so that neither country could destroy American independence.

Adams in Europe

Adams, the founder of one government and critic of its predecessors, became at age 42 a diplomat. Alliance with France turned out to be a necessity, as did arranging for loans from Holland. Adams assisted with both of these goals and with negotiating the provisional/definitive treaty to end the war between Great Britain and the United States of America (the Treaty of Paris). Only three months after the new Congress agreed to form a fairly united front and to legislate under the Articles of Confederation,³⁸ he first left New England February 13, 1778, to sail for the Court of Louis XVI in France, where he replaced Silas Deane as one of the commissioners elected by Congress. His interaction with other diplomats was governed by a correlative suspicion – the term “jealousy” was usually used in the eighteenth century in such instances – that there was a British ministerial conspiracy to enslave Americans. Adams, like others, developed this general attitude of suspicion (directed at most if not all European powers in relation to American affairs) during the Revolution, and applied the concept to both the

³⁸ Mount, S. “Articles of Confederation.” USConstitution.net. Retrieved April 30, 2008, from <http://www.usconstitution.net/articles.html> (Dec. 3, 2001). Congress agreed to the Articles November 15, 1777; they were ratified and in force March 1, 1781.

Court of Louis XVI and to the British ministry.³⁹ This suspicion he made painfully clear in a letter to Abigail, in which he expressed his worst fears of what carelessness might cause:

It would be an easy thing for me to ruin you and your Children by an indiscreet Letter – and what is more it would be easy, to throw our Country into Convulsions. . . . You know not – you feel not – the dangers that surround me, nor those that may be brought upon our Country. . . . I have no security that every Letter I write you will not be broken open and copied and transmitted to Congress and to English News papers. They would find no Treason nor Deceit in them it is true, but they would find Weakness and Indiscretion, which they would make as ill an Use of. . . . There are Spies upon every Word I utter, and every Syllable I write – Spies planted by the English – Spies planted by Stockjobbers – Spies planted by selfish Merchants – and Spies planted by envious and malicious Politicians. I have been all along aware of this, more or less, but more so now than ever.⁴⁰

³⁹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 34. *Works of JA*, 3:464.

⁴⁰ James Bishop Peabody, *The Founding Fathers: John Adams: A Biography in His Own Words*. Vol. 2. (New York: Newsweek: 1973), 238-239. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 20 February 1779.

The other American commissioners had signed treaties of alliance and commerce with Louis XVI on February 6, 1778, before Adams even sailed for Europe. Adams kept himself busy taking care of the ministerial duties of the commission until September 14, 1778, when Congress abolished the three-member commission of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams in place of Silas Dean, and Arthur Lee, and appointed Franklin as the sole minister.⁴¹ After spending months in Paris playing commission secretary and existing in limbo, Adams returned to Boston August 2, 1779. By September he was completely involved in creating a constitution for Massachusetts, and quite content to have played such a stellar role.⁴² In mid-October he was surprised to learn that on September 27, 1779, Congress had elected him minister plenipotentiary to negotiate treaties of peace and commerce with Great Britain. He accepted what he considered the most important commission Congress had yet issued with apparent pride and a twinge of doubt, owing to his (completely erroneous and egotistical) assumption that Franklin would be quite envious of the appointment.⁴³

Adams apparently already saw himself in the position of first U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, as he wrote to Arthur Lee on March 31, 1780: “To

⁴¹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 36-41.

⁴² Ibid., 51. This constitution would become the model for the Constitution of the United States.

⁴³ Ibid., 51-52.

be minister at the Court of St. James's is an object that will tempt numbers who would not care about any other. Nothing less than this is the Amount of my present Commission."⁴⁴ This showed his respect for diplomatic positions in general and possibly for the importance of this one specifically as well as his fitness to do the job. He left Boston November 13, 1779, arriving in France again February 9, 1780.⁴⁵

Dutch Negotiations

While waiting for the situation to develop to the point where Adams could fulfill his duty to negotiate with Great Britain, he received French permission to go to the Netherlands to negotiate a loan, which would lessen American dependence upon France. He also hoped to accelerate peace negotiations with Great Britain, although that process faced even more impediments. Arriving in

⁴⁴ Hutson, *John Adams*, 52-53. Source: Lyman Butterfield and Robert Taylor, *The Adams Papers: The Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1977) microfilm ed., reel 96; found in Robert J. Taylor, ed., *The Adams Papers: Series III, General Correspondence, March 1779-February 1780*, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977-), 100. John Adams to Arthur Lee, 31 March 1780.

⁴⁵ Hutson, *John Adams*, 55-56; Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 4:240. The ship sprang a leak during the crossing and put in at Ferrol, Spain on December 8, 1779. Adams then traveled over land to Paris, lodging at the Hotel Valois on the Rue de Richelieu. He refused to stay with Franklin at Passy.

Amsterdam August 10, 1780,⁴⁶ he discovered that, because of considerable pro-British policy on the part of the Dutch, a loan was out of the question until the States General of the United Provinces of the Netherlands recognized American independence.⁴⁷ The States General was on the brink of war with Great Britain, partly because Great Britain was less than pleased when the Dutch allowed Adams and other Americans to stay in the Netherlands. The Dutch did not want to align with France because France would not be willing to protect Dutch possessions as Great Britain had done.⁴⁸

However, Adams received a Congressional commission to negotiate a treaty of amity and commerce with the Dutch government on February 25, 1781. He immediately went to work on the project, which failed dismally at this point because of the political situation and because of Adams's lack of knowledge about that situation. Because he so distrusted the French minister, the Duc de la Vauguyon, Adams avoided contact with him as much as possible.⁴⁹ The British were angry at the Netherlands for having any contact with Adams and other Americans, whom the British considered to be rebellious traitors. British anger

⁴⁶ Ibid., 75. He stayed there for the next twenty months.

⁴⁷ Hutson, 77-78.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

then caused the Dutch officials to reverse policy and have nothing to do with Adams.⁵⁰

On July 12, 1781, Congress revoked Adams's commission to negotiate a commercial treaty with Britain. Adams saw this as a revocation of his commission as minister to Britain as well.⁵¹ On October 15, 1781, he sent his resignation from all his appointments in Europe in hopes of forcing Congress to restore the British minister commission, although it included a strong plea that an American minister be appointed to London to negotiate the treaty of commerce and take care of other tasks.⁵² However, Adams did not pursue his resignation, but stayed in the Netherlands to negotiate the commercial treaty with the Dutch (who, by this time, and thanks to French pressure, were ready to negotiate with Adams) and to open a loan for the United States.

France, via back channel communication by the Duke, assisted him by encouraging the French-leaning Dutch provinces to recognize American independence,⁵³ and encouraged Adams to demand recognition by the Dutch States General as minister plenipotentiary from the United States of America.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 87, 94.

⁵¹ Ibid., 129.

⁵² Butterfield, 3:142-143n2.

⁵³ Hutson, *John Adams*, 103-105.

France believed, or hoped, this would irritate Britain enough to preclude a treaty between Britain and the Netherlands.⁵⁴

Early in 1782, the States General considered the question.⁵⁵ However, because France had captured the Dutch colonies of Saint Eustatia, Demarara, and Essequibo from the British, the Dutch could not make peace with Britain if France did not approve.⁵⁶ Luckily, France was all for the measure. Thanks to French back channel influence, in great part, Friesland, one of the seven united provinces of the Netherlands, became the second European state to recognize American independence on February 26, 1782. Holland followed suit on March 28. On April 19, 1782, the States General made the official declaration recognizing the United States as a country, once all seven provinces had consented. Adams was then admitted as the minister plenipotentiary, as much a result of French desire to prevent reconciliation of England and the Netherlands as of Dutch desire to recognize a new country.⁵⁷

The Dutch recognition was expedited by the British Parliament's resolution of February 27, 1782, (the second such attempt within two weeks),

⁵⁴ Ibid., 104-106.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Hutson, *John Adams*, 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 106-108, 110.

which “denounced as enemies of the King and country all those attempting to carry on ‘offensive war in America’ and granted leave to bring in an Enabling Act authorizing the King to make a peace or truce with ‘the revolted colonies of North America.’”⁵⁸ A Dutch loan was negotiated in the name of the United States in the spring of 1782, while the amity and commercial treaty with the Dutch was concluded October 8, 1782, also with considerable if unobtrusive support from the French.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, Adams received considerable, if possibly insincere, praise from French aristocrats for his diplomatic accomplishments:

In the Antichamber before Dinner some French Gentlemen came to me, and said they had seen me two Years ago. Said that I had shewn in Holland that the Americans understand Negotiation, as well as War.

The Compliments that have been made me since my Arrival in France upon my Success in Holland, would be considered as a Curiosity, if committed to Writing. Je vous felicite sur votre [I congratulate you on your] Success, is common to all. One adds, Monsieur, Ma Foi, vous avez reussi bien merveilleusement. Vous avez fait reconnoire votre

⁵⁸ Richard Brandon Morris, *The Peacemakers* (New York, 1935), 253. “‘At last,’ George III conceded, ‘the fatal day is come.’” Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 112-113.

Independence. Vous avez fait un Traité, et vous avez procuré de l'Argent. Voila un Succès parfait. [Sir, my faith, you have succeeded marvelously. You have made your independence recognized. You have made a treaty and you have procured money. There it is, a perfect success.]--Another says, vous avez fait des Merveilles en Hollande. Vous avez culbuté le Stathouder et la Partie angloise. Vous avez donné bien de Mou[ve]ment. Vous avez remué tout le Monde. [you have done miracles in Holland. You have knocked over {beaten} the Statholder and the English party. You have achieved movement. You have moved {changed} the entire world.]--Another said Monsieur vous etes le Washington de la Negotiation. [Sir, you are the Washington of negotiation {diplomacy}].--This is the finishing Stroke. It is impossible to exceed this.

Compliments are the Study of this People, and there is no other so ingenious at them.⁶⁰

Adams then turned his attention to the Congressional commission of August 16, 1781, which ordered him to propose a triple alliance among France, the Netherlands, and the United States. Spain could be included if Spain wished to

⁶⁰ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:50. Diary entry of Sunday, 10 November 1782.

Translation by Kenna Giffin.

join. Adams believed he had inspired the idea of the alliance as a way to help form a connection with the United Provinces.⁶¹ In reality, France had told Congress that she, France, was willing to encourage and promote a Dutch-American coalition. France was therefore rather offended that Congress would order Adams to propose an alliance among America, France and the Netherlands, and so opposed Adams's 1781 and 1782 attempts to negotiate the triple alliance.⁶² These French rebuffs reinforced Adams's conviction that the French were not truly on the side of the new United States, and that the French diplomats specifically worked against him.⁶³

Peace Negotiations

Finally, in September, 1782, Jay informed Adams that Britain had acknowledged American independence and had agreed to negotiate a peace treaty. He urged Adams to join the other commissioners in Paris, so Adams left The Hague for Paris in mid-October.⁶⁴

During the peace negotiations, Adams consistently believed that France wanted to weaken the United States (which were still independent states, although

⁶¹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 112-113

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 116.

cooperating under the Articles of Confederation) and to keep them dependent upon her. This turned out to be true, although not for the reasons Adams originally believed. The methods France used were not the evidence that proved Adams's conviction.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Adams was determined to steer the United States on a middle course between Great Britain and France, the two European powers that always seemed to be fighting about something, as he explained to the British peace negotiator, Richard Oswald, and his secretary, Caleb Whitefoord:

For my own Part I thought America had been long enough involved in the Wars of Europe. She had been a Football between contending Nations from the Beginning, and it was easy to foresee that France and England both would endeavor to involve Us in their future Wars. I thought [it] our Interest and Duty to avoid [them] as much as possible and to be compleatly independent and have nothing to do but in Commerce with either of them. That my Thoughts had been from the Beginning constantly employed to arrange all our European Connections to this End, and that they would be continued to be so employed and I thought it so important to Us, that if my poor labors, my little Estate or

⁶⁵ Hutson, *John Adams*, 122-123.

(smiling) sizzy blood could effect it, it should be done. But I had many fears.⁶⁶

While waiting for Parliament to consider the American proposals in November 1782, Adams recorded in his diary an unusually direct conversation with British negotiator Richard Oswald:

You are afraid says Mr. Oswald to day of being made the Tools of the Powers of Europe. – Indeed I am says I. – What Powers says he. – All of them says I. It is obvious that all the Powers of Europe will be continually maneuvering with Us, to work us into their real or imaginary Ballances of Power. . . . But I think it ought to be our Rule not to meddle, and that of all the Powers of Europe not to desire Us, or perhaps even to permit Us to interfere, if they can help it.⁶⁷

Once the definitive peace treaty (Treaty of Paris) between the United States of America and Great Britain was signed September 3, 1783, by British minister David Hartley and the American commissioners, the United States officially joined “the family of nations.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:52.

⁶⁷ Peabody, *John Adams*, 304. Adams diary entry of 18 November 1782.

⁶⁸ Hutson, *John Adams*, 135.

Treaty of Commerce with Great Britain

On December 4, 1782, Adams resigned all his appointments in Europe. This was a major part of his overall strategy to force Congress to restore his commission as minister to Great Britain. He had retracted his previous resignations from the peace commission, but this time he used the tactic to try to force Congress to restore the appointment as minister because, even though peace had been made with Great Britain, Congress still needed a diplomat in Great Britain.⁶⁹ “I have an incontestible Right to be Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Great Britain. Because I have had such a commission in my Portefeuille these four years,” he wrote to Charles Dumas, who assisted Adams in The Hague.⁷⁰ However, to Abigail he wrote on March 29, 1783, that he feared that the people who got his commission revoked might be afraid that Adams could do more harm in America than in England, and that they would therefore send him to London as the lesser of the two evils.

I tremble when I think of such a Thing as going to London. If I were to receive orders of that sort, it would be a dull day to me. No Swiss ever longed for home more than I do. I Shall forever be a dull Man in Europe. . . . Our foreign Affairs, are like to be in future as they have been

⁶⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Adams to Charles Dumas, 28 March 1783.

in times past an eternal Scène of Faction. The fluctuation of Councils at Philadelphia have encouraged it, and even good Men Seem to be Seized with the Spirit of it.⁷¹

Abigail responded from Braintree on June 20, 1783, that he had indeed been named to the joint commission to conclude a commercial treaty with Great Britain, and in light of his previous comments, she wondered if he would accept it. She made her position clear: “I do not wish you to accept an Embassy to England, should you be appointed. This little Cottage has more Heart felt satisfaction for you than the most Brilliant Court can afford.”⁷²

On September 7, 1783, Adams learned that Congress had appointed him to head a commission to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Great Britain. While Adams was reluctant to leave his wife and comfortable home, he could not pass up the chance to play a part in such an important task. Adams and his eldest son, John Quincy, traveled to Britain in October 1783 for an extended visit, during which, on November 15, 1783, British minister and negotiator David Hartley⁷³

⁷¹ Margaret A. Hogan and C. James Taylor, eds. *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 278.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 287.

⁷³ Hutson, *John Adams*, 130. The minister designated by Great Britain to negotiate the definitive peace treaty.

informally introduced Adams to the some of the leading writers and politicians of the day, many of whom had influenced Parliament in its dealings with the United States: The Duke of Portland,⁷⁴ Mr. [Edmund] Burke,⁷⁵ and Mr. [Charles James] Fox.⁷⁶ Because it was an informal introduction, Adams did not “ask favours or receive any thing but cold formalities from ministers of state or ambassadors.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck, 3d Duke of Portland (1738-1809), associated with the Rockingham Whigs; prime minister 1783, 1807-1809. 10 Downing Street, *Prime Ministers in History*, Duke of Portland, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page123.asp>, accessed 11 February 2008; David Wilkinson, “Bentinck, William Henry Cavendish Cavendish-, third duke of Portland (1738-1809),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004, online ed. 2008), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2162> (accessed 23 March 2008).

⁷⁵ Black, *George III*, 45, 68, 216, 219. Edmund Burke (1730-1797), Rockingham Whig, critic of George III, urged “magnanimity in politics” regarding the American colonies’ rebellion.

⁷⁶ Charles James Fox (1749-1806), Rockingham Whig leader, friend of Burke, antislavery advocate, supporter of American and French revolutions, supporter of Parliamentary reform; formed alliance of convenience with Lord North, 1783; first foreign secretary (1782, 1783, 1806). L.G. Mitchell, “Fox, Charles James (1749-1806),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004; online ed., 2007), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10024> (accessed 23 March 2008).

⁷⁷ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:150n3. Adams’s last autobiographical communication to the *Boston Patriot*, dated at Quincy, 17 February 1812.

During this visit, Adams had the chance to spend time in the king's library, which he greatly admired, and he attended the king's speech to the House of Lords at the opening of Parliament on November 11, 1783, at which the Prince of Wales was formally introduced. Then a most amazing thing happened. While Adams was standing in the lobby of Lords before the opening, an usher appeared. He called for Adams as "Lord Mansfield's friend," then conducted Adams to his seat.⁷⁸ Adams reported on the event:

A gentleman said to me the next day, 'how short a time has passed, since I heard that same Lord Mansfield say in that same house of lords, "My Lords, if you do not kill him, he will kill you."' Mr. West said to me, that this was one of the finest finishings in the picture of American Independence. . . . my admiration of the learning, talents and eloquence of Mansfield had been constantly increasing, though some of his opinions I could not approve. His politics in American affairs I had always detested.

⁷⁸ William Murray, 1st Earl of Mansfield (1705-1793), created Earl of Mansfield 1776, Speaker of House of Lords 1783, Chief Justice of King's Bench from 1788 until retirement, protector of rights of conscience, founder of English mercantile law, moderate Tory. James Oldham, "Murray, William, first earl of Mansfield (1705-1793)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004; online ed. 2008) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19655> (accessed 23 March 2008).

– But now I found more politeness and good humor in him than in Richmond, Cambden, Burke or Fox.”⁷⁹

Adams and his son left London January 3, 1784. They crossed the channel en route to The Hague, then stopped off in Amsterdam where Adams tried to arrange for a new loan for the struggling fledgling nation to cover drafts drawn by Congress that had exhausted the loan obtained the previous summer.⁸⁰ In July 1784, he learned from Thomas Jefferson that the two had been commissioned by Congress to negotiate commercial treaties with the powers of Europe, in Paris. Adams moved there in August, joined by his wife for the first time in four years.⁸¹

On February 24, 1785, Congress finally voted to make Adams minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain. He learned of the appointment at the end of April, and went immediately to London.⁸² Also in February 1785, John Temple was appointed British consul general to the United State; Congress recognized him as such on December 2, 1785, following a major discussion about Britain’s right to appoint a representative without treaty authority.⁸³

⁷⁹ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:151.

⁸⁰ Hutson, *John Adams*, 152.

⁸¹ Hutson, *John Adams*, 138-139.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:174n2.

In summary, Adams began his diplomatic career at age 42 by sailing to France to assist with the French alliance, Dutch loans, and the peace treaty with Great Britain. As a result of this experience, he deeply distrusted the French diplomats with whom he worked. He returned to Boston after a year and a half, helped create the Massachusetts constitution, then returned to France in February 1780, two years after his first arrival. He tried to negotiate a Dutch loan, but failed until the political situation in the United Provinces changed. He negotiated a treaty of amity and commerce with the Dutch, but Dutch ratification stalled until the French diplomats quietly pressured the Dutch. In short, he experienced the bumps and pulls of a small country – i.e., the Netherlands – operating within the large nations’ power plays when he tried to deal with the Dutch. This experience is precisely the type of experience that could have strongly reinforced Adams’s determination to steer the United States in the course of neutrality to avoid the buffeting inherent in shifting alliances, whether he realized it or not at the time.

Adams’s commission to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain was revoked, and he resigned his other commissions, to France and the United Provinces, several times, but retracted them and continued working on loans and treaties.

Adams’s proposal, inappropriately ordered by Congress, for a triple alliance of the United States, France, and the United Provinces merely irritated the French. However, once the Dutch finally recognized the United States as

independent, the way opened for negotiating the peace treaty with Great Britain. Once the definitive Treaty of Paris with Great Britain was signed in September 1783, Adams was again appointed to negotiate a commercial treaty with Great Britain. He visited London in October 1783, then spent 1784 negotiating more loans in the Netherlands and, with Thomas Jefferson, commercial treaties with other European countries. Finally, in February 1785, Congress appointed Adams minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain, the position Adams wanted, feared, and thought he deserved. It would prove to be among the most important learning experiences of his life, or so his later political actions suggest.

CHAPTER II
MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY TO GREAT BRITAIN
1785-1788

Adams next began acquiring valuable experience for his later handling of relations with Great Britain when, during the winter of 1784, the British government indicated that an American minister would be welcome to reside constantly at the Court of St. James's.⁸⁴ This hands-on experience would later assist Adams in understanding British thinking and actions as he worked to maintain American neutrality between France and Great Britain when both were trying to involve the United States in war (again) to weaken the new country.

More than a year had passed from the signing of the Definitive Treaty on September 3, 1783, (in which Great Britain acknowledged the United States to be free, sovereign and independent states), and John Adams remained in France that year to negotiate commercial treaties for the new country. After assuming his new post in London, Adams focused on getting Great Britain to admit American goods to its ports, one of the major goals of the United States in its efforts to find ways to convince the British to agree to a commercial treaty. The British refused to

⁸⁴ David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 323.

bargain, even though young William Pitt⁸⁵ tried to repeal all laws prohibiting trade with America. The proposal was rejected overwhelmingly in the spring of 1783. The Fox-North⁸⁶ government repealed the Prohibitory Acts so that British merchants could sell their wares in American ports, but a July 1783 order-in-council kept American ships from taking American goods to British ports, including those in the West Indies. Before 1775, New England merchants had sold enormous quantities of grain, fish, and lumber in the West Indies, so the

⁸⁵ 10 Downing Street, *Prime Ministers in History*, 'William Pitt 'The Younger,' <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page161.asp>, accessed 11 February 2008. William Pitt "the Younger" (1759-1806). Youngest-ever prime minister at age 24; served 1783-1801 and 1804-6 as a Tory; led the country through the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; regained financial stability for Britain after the American War of Independence; brought about Union with Ireland; joined with Whig politician Charles Fox in calling for peace with the Americans; later joined the Opposition so that Fox became a fierce rival; helped to define the role of the Prime Minister as the supervisor and coordinator of the various Government departments; a son of Pitt the Elder, the Earl of Chatham.

⁸⁶ 10 Downing Street, *Prime Ministers in History*, Lord North, <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page165.asp>, accessed 11 February 2008. Frederick North, 2nd Earl of Guilford (1732-1792), prime minister 1770-1782, Tory; led Britain into the American war of Independence, made tactical errors that led to the defeats at Saratoga in 1777 and Yorktown in 1781; PM during Gordon Riots of 1780; allied with Charles James Fox; died, ironically, at a residence in Grosvenor Square, where Adams had a house while in London.

embargo definitely affected the New England economy. The only commodities allowed by the decree were American oil, naval stores, and tobacco.⁸⁷

Adams thought that most of Europe would soon open ports to American ships, and that Whitehall's policy (of excluding the United States from trading with the British West Indies, Canada, and Nova Scotia, and from carrying to Great Britain trade items in ships of the thirteen States) would be fatal, eventually, to Great Britain but would not harm the United States.⁸⁸ He also suggested that the United States sever all trade with Britain until the British government reestablished full economic relations with the United States,⁸⁹ and that the United States send an ambassador to each European capital, including the Court of St. James's.⁹⁰ Success would happen if the ambassadors were able to court the powerful and seek to influence public opinion.⁹¹ For example, Adams wrote to

⁸⁷ John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992), 274; Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States During the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 158-162.

⁸⁸ Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With A Life of the Author*, vol. 8 (Boston: Little and Brown, 1853), 74. John Adams to U.S. Secretary [of Foreign Affairs Robert] Livingston, 23 June 1783.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 8:98. John Adams to Secretary Livingston, 14 July 1783.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8:107. John Adams to Secretary Livingston, 18 July 1783.

⁹¹ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 274.

U.S. Secretary for Foreign Affairs (under the Articles of Confederation) Robert Livingston on July 18, 1783:

In order to induce both to allow us our natural right to the carrying trade, we must negotiate with the Dutch, Danes, Portuguese, and even with the empires; for the more friends and resources we have, the more we shall be respected by the French and English; and the more freedom of trade we enjoy with the Dutch possessions in America, the more will France and England find themselves necessitated to allow us.⁹²

On September 5, 1783, Adams, still in Paris, addressed the President of Congress, Elias Boudinot, on the matter, explaining that Congress must first send a minister to Great Britain because “The Emperor never sends first, nor will England ever send a minister to America until congress hall [*sic*] have sent one to London.”⁹³ Again on April 13, 1784, while in Auteuil, Adams told Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay that one of the first things British minister Hartley had told them was to exchange ministers between Congress and St. James’s immediately. The British foreign minister, the Marquis of Carmarthen, had made the formal proposal for the same, and the British had appointed Temple as consul general:

⁹²Adams, *Works*, 8:107.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 8:146.

. . . a still stronger indication of a real wish in the ministry that this measure may be pursued, and of a secret consciousness that they shall be obliged to treat. In their refusal to treat here [France], they would be justified by all the courts and diplomatic bodies in the world. I make no scruple, no hesitation to advise that a minister may be sent, nor will I be intimidated from giving this advice by any apprehension that I shall be suspected of a design or desire of going to England myself. Whoever goes will neither find it a lucrative nor a pleasant employment, nor will he be envied by me. I know that for years, if he does his duty, he will find no personal pleasure or advantage. But the measure of sending a minister to England, appears to me the corner stone of the true American system of politics in Europe; and, if it is not done, we shall have cause to repent it for a long time, when it will be too late.⁹⁴

This would not be the last time Adams would counsel his country to at least maintain a presence in European capitals, rather than to pull back into complete isolation, as some people appeared to prefer. Once again, Adams's European experience appeared to put him at odds with his colleagues, but proved to be the wiser course of action when dealing with Great Britain and France in the 1790s.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 8:234-235.

Finally, on April 24, 1784, Adams wrote to Secretary Jay from Auteuil that sending a U.S. minister to London seemed to be important and necessary: and although the gentleman who may be sent there, whoever he may be, will probably find himself in a thicket of briars, from which he will hardly get free without tearing his flesh, yet I am persuaded that the appearance of an American minister at the British Court will have good effects upon our affairs, . . . especially upon the British and American nations.⁹⁵

Adams seems to suggest here that the presence of an American minister would favorably influence British policy. Could he have realized at this point that the experience of working at the British court would also benefit the American minister and his country upon his return to the United States? Whether or not he was thinking in such terms, for the moment, Adams, in his usual professional manner, formally acknowledged the appointment by writing to Secretary Jay from Auteuil on May 4, 1785, noting that the appointment “Demands my most grateful acknowledgements to congress, and the utmost care and diligence in the execution of it.

It is not the first time that a public trust of some importance has been committed to me, but I do not know that any ever made a deeper

⁹⁵ Ibid., 8:236.

impression upon my spirits, or gave me more serious reflections. To do my duty to our country and her allies, and to reconcile the Americans and English upon principles and terms which may give satisfaction to all, is no easy task. I can promise nothing but industry; the prospect of success is far from being encouraging. The measure of sending a minister had become indispensable.⁹⁶

And to his friend and colleague in The Hague, Charles William Frederick Dumas,⁹⁷ Adams wrote on May 11, 1785, from Auteuil:

Whether this mission to St. James's is a subject of felicitation or not, I know not. One thing I know. I quit the situation in Europe the most

⁹⁶ Adams, *Works*, 8:239-240.

⁹⁷ Dumas was a Swiss scholar who lived many years in The Netherlands and was received in the Diplomatic circles at The Hague. He actively encouraged recognition of the American colonies at times when they were little noticed in Europe. He was Benjamin Franklin's confidential agent in Europe, and assisted with many U.S.-European negotiations before and after the Revolution. Recognizing the importance of diplomatic representatives having official residences, he acted as agent for Adams in purchasing an official residence at the Hotel d'Amérique in The Hague in 1782, reporting that "This purchase, besides the economy of it, has produced, politically, very good effects." His knowledge of key people and issues in the years 1774 to 1794 "contributed much to the success of American negotiations in Europe." George Grafton Wilson, "Influence of Dumas," *The American Journal of International Law*, 32 no. 2 (1938): 346-47.

to my taste and the most for my health, for one that will probably be agreeable to neither. I exchange a quiet, cheerful mind, for an anxious one, and a life of ease for a scene of perplexity, confusion, and fatigue. If the public, however, should derive any benefit from it, I shall not regret it.⁹⁸

By some accounts, Jefferson delivered the good news to Adams on the evening of April 26, 1785, riding from Paris to Auteuil with the letter from Elbridge Gerry. Adams, officially named minister to the Court of St. James's, was to be in London no later than June 4, 1785, the King's birthday.⁹⁹ By other accounts, Col. William Stephens Smith, appointed secretary to the legation "to his Britannic Majesty" on March 1, 1785,¹⁰⁰ appeared on the Adams's doorstep in Auteuil, complete with a bulging packet of congressional documents, and gave Adams the news.¹⁰¹

In any event, Adams then consulted the British ambassador to France, the Duke of Dorset, about the proper procedure a minister should follow.

⁹⁸ Adams, *Works*, 8:246.

⁹⁹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 328.

¹⁰⁰ W.C. Ford, ed., *The Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904-37), 28:111, 149-150.

¹⁰¹ Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adam*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961) 177n1; Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 275.

He said that Lord Carmarthen was their Minister of foreign Affairs, that I must first wait on him, and he would introduce me to his Majesty. But that I should do Business with Mr. Pitt very often. . . . He said I should be stared at a good deal. I told him I trembled at the Thoughts of going there, I was afraid they would gaze with evil Eyes. He said no he believed not.¹⁰²

French Foreign Minister Vergennes, in the final meeting with Adams, commented that it was “a great Thing to be the first Ambassador from your Country to the Country you sprung from. It is a Mark.”¹⁰³

Adams and his family, who had joined him in Europe in August 1784, left for London May 20, arriving May 26, 1785. On May 30, 1785, Adams wrote Secretary Jay from London that some gentlemen who had seen “the ministers” (specific ministers were not named) had told him that “the ministry and the King

¹⁰² Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:176, entry of Auteuil 3 May 1785. David Wilkinson, “Osborne, Francis, fifth duke of Leeds (1751-1799)” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison Oxford: OUP, 2204, online ed. 2008), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20876> (accessed 23 March 2008). Francis Godolphin Osborne, 5th Duke of Leeds (1751-1799), Marquess of Carmarthen 1751-1789; Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs December 1783-April 1791 under William Pitt the Younger.

¹⁰³ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:176; Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 275.

considered the appointment of a minister as a proof of a conciliating disposition; that it was a relief to them from an anxiety, &c., and that they were fully determined to receive me in all respects like all the other foreign ministers. This, I believe is true; but we must be cautious what consequences we draw from it.”¹⁰⁴

This kind of inside information would have been difficult if not impossible to have without an American minister present in Great Britain, and was the kind of information that might have changed American interpretation of British actions by its absence. It is exactly this kind of subtle information that was valuable to Adams at the time, and could have been valuable later as a reminder to be very cautious in assuming an interpretation of another country’s actions, as Adams plainly states.

Congress issued instructions to Adams on March 7, 1785, that he was to “insist, that the United States be put without further delay in possession of all the posts and territories within their limits which are now held by British Garrisons.”¹⁰⁵ The question of British occupation of posts on the northern lakes was the first priority of Adams’s London mission, but the British did not evacuate them until after 1812, possibly for reasons British peace treaty negotiator David Hartley hinted at two years earlier: laws passed by American states that impeded

¹⁰⁴ Adams, *Works*, 8:253-254.

¹⁰⁵ Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 28:123.

collecting debts due British creditors in violation of Article IV of the peace treaty.¹⁰⁶

Adams included in his diary a list of some visits paid and returned in London during June and July 1785, most of them informal visits.¹⁰⁷ The Dutch minister, D. W. Lynden van Blitterswyck, informed Adams that in London, the new minister received the first visit from foreign ministers, then notified them formally of his reception. Adams also received visits from people who had American connections, old friends or former acquaintances, and British citizens who thought favorably of America.¹⁰⁸ Arriving in London May 26, 1785, Adams announced his presence to Foreign Secretary Lord Carmarthen, and was received the next day.¹⁰⁹ Carmarthen informed Adams that the King would receive Adams on June 1, 1785.

According to historian David McCullough, King George III and John Adams had surprising common interests and similarities. Both enjoyed farming; the King was as happy inspecting his farms or talking crops and Merion sheep with Windsor farm workers as Adams was when practicing husbandry in

¹⁰⁶ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:178n1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:180n1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Braintree. Both men had a passion for books, although the King's library, being one of the treasures of Britain, consisted of considerably more volumes than Adams's library. Adams had toured the King's library during an earlier visit to London, commenting that he wished he could stay a week perusing the King's collection.¹¹⁰

Knowing the historical importance of the occasion, for both countries, Adams set to work on a brief complimentary speech to deliver to the King. By the time the day of the audience arrived, a typically rainy English day, he knew it by heart.¹¹¹

Adams rode to St. James's Palace in Lord Carmarthen's carriage with the foreign minister. Adams made the requisite three bows – “reverences” – as instructed: one upon entering the King's bedchamber/formal reception room, another bow halfway, and a third before the King himself.¹¹² As Adams recalled the event in a letter to Secretary Jay:

I . . . addressed myself to his majesty in the following words: ‘Sir, the United States have appointed me their minister plenipotentiary to your majesty, and have directed me to deliver to your majesty this letter, which

¹¹⁰ McCullough, *John Adams*, 333.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 335.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

contains the evidence of it. It is in obedience to their express commands, that I have the honour to assure your majesty of their unanimous disposition and desire to cultivate the most friendly and liberal intercourse between your majesty's subjects and their citizens, and of their best wishes for your majesty's health and happiness, and for that of your royal family.

The appointment of a minister from the United States to your majesty's court, will form an epoch in the history of England and America. I think myself more fortunate than all my fellow-citizens, in having the distinguished honour to be the first to stand in your Majesty's royal presence in a diplomatic character; and I shall esteem my self the happiest of men, if I can be instrumental in recommending my country more and more to your Majesty's royal benevolence, and of restoring an entire esteem, confidence, and affection, or in better words, the old good nature, and the old good humour, between people who, though separated by an ocean, and under different governments, have the same language, a similar religion, and kindred blood. I beg your Majesty's permission to add, that although I have sometimes before been entrusted by my country, it was never in my whole life in a manner so agreeable to myself.'

The king listened to every word I said, with dignity, it is true, but with an apparent emotion. Whether it was the nature of the interview, or whether it was my visible agitation, for I felt more than I did or could

express, that touched him, I cannot say, but he was much affected, and answered me with more tremor than I had spoken with, and said:

‘Sir, the circumstances of this audience are so extraordinary, the language you have now held is so extremely proper, and the feelings you have discovered so justly adapted to the occasion, that I must say, that I not only receive with pleasure the assurances of the friendly disposition of the people of the United States, but that I am very glad the choice has fallen upon you to be their minister. I wish you, sir, to believe, and that it may be understood in America, that I have done nothing in the late contest but what I thought myself indispensably bound to do by the duty which I owed to my people. I will be very frank with you, I was the last to consent to separation; but the separation having been made, and having become inevitable, I have always said, as I say now that I would be the first to meet the friendship of the United States, as an independent power. The moment I see such sentiments and language as yours prevail, and a disposition to give this country the preference, that moment I shall say, let the circumstances of language, religion and blood, have their natural and full effect.’

I dare not say that these were the king’s precise words, and it is even possible that I may have, in some particular, mistaken his meaning; .

. . this I do say, that the foregoing is his majesty's meaning, as I then understood it, and his own words, as nearly as I can recollect.¹¹³

After the official statements ended, the King and Adams exchanged a few words that only highlighted the similarities of the two statesmen. "There is an opinion among some people that you are not the most attached of all your countrymen to the manners of France," George III told Adams, who replied, supposedly a bit embarrassed, "I must avow to your Majesty, I have no attachment but to my own country." "An honest man will never have any other," the King replied, and signaled the end of the audience with a bow.¹¹⁴

George III, at 47 on June 4, 1785, was two years younger than Adams, taller, comparably overweight, and similarly an early riser. Both men kept full schedules and were known for their loquaciousness; Adams would later say the king was the greatest talker Adams had known. His Majesty was – again quite like the new minister – obstinate, affectionate, devoted to wife and children (all 15 of them, in the King's case), deeply religious and sincerely patriotic.¹¹⁵

Much of the London press was not as gracious as the King, however. The *Public Advertiser* said, "An ambassador from America! Good heavens what a

¹¹³ McCullough, *John Adams*, 335-337.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 337.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 333.

sound!”¹¹⁶ and decried the King’s receiving an ambassador from the United States, especially one who had been a rebel determined to cut England’s throat.¹¹⁷ The *Daily Universal Register* judged the audience as being a “cool reception” toward Adams, while the *Morning and Daily Advertiser* said that Adams was embarrassed enough to be tongue-tied.¹¹⁸ While Adams was in no danger of suffering physical harm, it appeared, neither was he warmly welcomed to Mother Britain, although the *London Chronicle* reported that “his Excellency John Adams was . . . most graciously received.”¹¹⁹

The press continued to attack Adams as a nobody, as not having enough money to act as a proper minister, as a typical American coward, murderer, and traitor, or so said the *Public Advertiser*.¹²⁰ Adams wrote Secretary Jay on July 19, 1785, from Grosvenor Square, Westminster:

The popular pulse seems to beat high against America. The people are deceived by numberless falsehoods industriously circulated by the gazettes and in conversation, so that there is too much reason to believe

¹¹⁶ McCullough, *John Adams*, 337.

¹¹⁷ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 280.

¹¹⁸ McCullough, *John Adams*, 337.

¹¹⁹ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 280.

¹²⁰ McCullough, *John Adams*, 346.

that, if this nation had another hundred millions to spend, they would soon force the ministry into a war against us. The court itself, whatever may be thought of it, appears at present to be the principal barrier against a war, and the best disposed towards us; and whether they are restrained by any thing beside their own poverty may be justly questioned.¹²¹

Many British officials spoke often of the assumption that sooner or later, America would return to the British fold. Adams found this idea irritating.¹²² Despite Adams's attempts to emphasize the new world order, British statesmen could not or would not see it, and continued their hostile attitude toward America. One Englishman even declared that he preferred that America had been annihilated than that she won her independence.¹²³ Adams thought that the American Loyalists in London spread much of the hostility, as, for example, when former Massachusetts treasurer Harrison Gay said in a letter to the press that if he had the choice, he would have John Adams hanged.¹²⁴

Adams stayed calm, composed, and away from Loyalists generally. He focused on the matters still in controversy between Britain and the United States

¹²¹ Adams, *Works*, 282.

¹²² McCullough, *John Adams*, 348.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

of America, most of them stemming from the Treaty of Paris. The British wanted Americans to pay debts as agreed, while the Americans wanted compensation for slaves and property confiscated by the British as well as the removal of British troops in America. The new country had paper money that was essentially worthless, a destroyed economy, and was desperate for trade but without the power or prestige to obtain trade by demand or request. The British, on the other hand, simply sat back and waited, seeing no reason to rush to fulfill any agreement, nor to do anything that might lessen their primacy at sea. American vessels were still excluded from Canada and the West Indies as well as from Britain. No American products could be shipped anywhere within the British Empire except in British vessels.¹²⁵ Adams encouraged Congress to pass a navigation act excluding British imports, which, he thought, would force the British to open its ports to American commodities.

 Their attachment to their navigation act, . . . is grown so strong, and their determination to consider us as foreigners, and to undermine our navigation, and to draw away our seamen, is so fixed, in order to prevent us from privateering, in case of a war, that I despair of any equal treaty, and, therefore, of any treaty, until they shall be made to feel the necessity

¹²⁵ McCullough, *John Adams*, 350.

of it. It cannot, therefore, be too earnestly recommended to all the States to concur with the State of New York, in giving to congress full power to make treaties of commerce, and, in short, to govern all our external commerce; for, I really believe, it must come to that.¹²⁶

In short, America would have to continue proving her mettle, but via commerce rather than on the battlefield, thus in a sense continuing the Revolutionary war after the Treaty of Paris. Now, John Adams was the general in charge – even more so the “Washington of negotiation” – and with somewhat less cooperation from the confederated states than Washington got from the struggling colonies, or so it sometimes must have seemed.

But Congress could not muster the unanimous vote to enact a navigation act for the entire confederation, mostly because the opponents of a more centralized U.S. government prevented every move attempted in the mid-1780s to enable the national government to regulate foreign commerce.¹²⁷

Adams had the first of many meetings with Lord Carmarthen, the foreign secretary, on June 17, 1785, in which the two diplomats focused on the principal political issues and points to be adjusted between the United States and Great

¹²⁶ Adams, *Works*, 281-282. Adams to Jay, 19 July 1785.

¹²⁷ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 284-285.

Britain.¹²⁸ He wrote often to Carmarthen on the disputed topics. In late August, he obtained an interview with Prime Minister William Pitt, but told Secretary Jay on October 15, 1785, that he could “obtain no Answer from the Ministry to any one demand, Proposal or Inquiry.”¹²⁹ On October 20, Adams and Carmarthen conversed again about the familiar topics of the western posts, British trade restrictions, missing slaves, and American debts to British creditors, among others. Carmarthen, although civil, still did not respond. Adams submitted a memorial during an interview on December 8, requesting that British garrisons in the Northwest be withdrawn, per Article VII of the Definitive Treaty. Carmarthen answered three months later that most of the American states had erected impediments to collecting debts due British creditors, a violation of Article IV of the Treaty. The situation was at a stalemate, and remained there until the Jay Treaty of 1794.¹³⁰

Adams’s primary mission was to open British ports to American ships, but in this he failed, despite regular meetings with Lord Carmarthen at Whitehall and visits to 10 Downing Street to discuss matters with the 24-year-old prime

¹²⁸ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:181n1.

¹²⁹ Library of Congress, *Adams Papers: Diplomatic Correspondence, 1783-1789*, 2:479, quoted in Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:181n1.

¹³⁰ Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography*, 3:181n1.

minister, William Pitt, the Younger. No one responded to Adams's inquiries.¹³¹

Adams expected no other response; his first meeting with Pitt had convinced him that "Britain would never willingly give up the forts, any more than they would open the way to American trade with the West Indies."¹³² Nor would England compensate slave owners for their property losses, and America certainly did not have the power to compel the British government to keep its end of the bargain.¹³³

Adams's talk of commercial reciprocity was considered naïve by the British.

Finally, he suggested to Jefferson that closer connections with France might be helpful. But that option was equally as closed, as Jefferson was having little better luck negotiating trade agreements with France than Adams with Britain, and the British did not seem to be the least unnerved at the suggestion that the United States might strengthen its commercial ties with France.¹³⁴ Although balance of power theory might suggest that Britain should have been concerned, British pride seemed to have become more important than countering any possible U.S.-French alliance. Considering the efficiency of the British intelligence network in France at the time, another possibility is that Britain knew the United States wasn't

¹³¹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 350-351.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 351.

¹³³ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 285.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 351.

making any headway with France, either, and thus knew there was no reason to shift positions.

Adams reasoned that both nations would profit from a long period of peace between them. In addition, the advantages for America might have proved useful as talking points during negotiations. America could stabilize; lucrative trade with America “would diminish London’s inclination toward adventurism in Europe, thereby lessening the likelihood of still another Anglo-French war into whose vortex America might be sucked;” and Britain “would avoid a ruinous war and resume a close relationship with the nation ‘destined beyond a doubt to be the greatest power on earth, and that within the life of man.’”¹³⁵ However, British officials disagreed, declining the chance to reestablish cordial ties with the United States. Adams finally understood that “the official air of solicitude masked deep-seated anti-American feelings.” Adams was surprised to learn that many Englishmen “desired another war with America if only some means could be found by which France might be neutralized during such a conflict.”¹³⁶

Considering the hostility Adams saw in the press and among Loyalists, perhaps the resentment should not have surprised him. However, if it helped him realize the extent of the official mask, it could have become another important

¹³⁵ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 284.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

learning experience that he could draw upon later in managing U.S. foreign policy.

This status quo apparently continued through 1786, the year in which Jefferson arrived in London in March to continue American negotiations with the Barbary States, conclude a negotiation with the minister from Portugal in London (it lapsed, unratified), and to assist Adams with the U.S.-British commercial negotiations.¹³⁷ They had more success with the Barbary negotiations than the commercial treaty with Great Britain. Jefferson thought that Lord Carmarthen insulted him and seemed to not want to have anything to do with the Americans.¹³⁸ When presented to the King on March 15, 1786, Jefferson thought that George III was ungracious toward the American envoys, according to Adams biographer David McCullough.¹³⁹

Jefferson left for Paris on April 26, 1786. Adams spent his time writing his thoughts about government and the future of the new country. He could gain no ground concerning the withdrawal of British troops from the American Northwest while Americans still owed debts to British creditors. The best that could be said was that Carmarthen told Adams, “whenever America shall manifest a real

¹³⁷ Butterfield, 3:183n2.

¹³⁸ McCullough, *John Adams*, 354.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 355.

determination to fulfill her part of the treaty, Great Britain will not hesitate to prove her sincerity”¹⁴⁰ in fulfilling her own treaty obligations. This experience could be part of the basis for Adams’s later determination that the United States should fulfill its treaty obligations so that the other side could not use the lack of fulfillment to renege on its promises. Of course, this is a practice that lawyers learn early in their legal careers; it comes under the heading of the “clean hands” doctrine.

Adams believed that American reluctance or inability to pay the debts was disgraceful and a big political mistake, and opposed state laws that prohibited compliance with the treaty. However, he also recognized that behind the Whitehall assurances, the British believed that there was still no proper American government so that there was no point in attempting serious transactions until one existed.¹⁴¹ As a result of refusing to acknowledge the authority and sovereignty of the confederation of states, the British had not thought it necessary to appoint an fully politically enabled ambassador to the United States, a point that offended Adams.¹⁴² Still, he continued hosting Lord Carmarthen and other British

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 366.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid. Britain did send John Temple, appointed February 1785 as consul general, but this was not a fully empowered minister plenipotentiary or ambassador.

dignitaries for dinner, as expected, and entertained the other ambassadors to the Court of St. James's, also as expected.¹⁴³

Adams had also been pondering the effects his new nation had and might have in the future on the balance of power in Europe, and how the United States would fit into the balance of power in its own right. Although the British apparently had decided to do nothing about restoring relations with the United States for the moment, partly because of the remaining bitterness against the rebellious young country, Adams feared that Britain might later forge an alliance with Prussia and Holland, then attack France. America's interest in that event would be neutrality, but "the United States could not afford to see France destroyed, lest the weak, new nation be left to stand alone against a victorious Britain."¹⁴⁴ In that case, Adams reflected, it would be best for the United States to sustain the balance of power by keeping close ties with France, the Netherlands, and Spain. Against these four former cobelligerents, Britain was unlikely to seek another war:

Every thing is calculated, as it appears to me, to involve us in a war with England. Cries and prejudices are fomented in England and America, which have no other tendency but to involve us in a war long before we

¹⁴³ Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 280.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

shall be ready. Ten or fifteen years hence we shall have nothing to fear from a war with England, if they should be mad enough to force us upon it. At present, it would distress us extremely, although it would ruin England. My system is a very simple one; let us preserve the friendship of France, Holland, and Spain, if we can, and in case of a war between France and England, let us preserve our neutrality, if possible. In order to preserve our friendship with France and Holland and Spain, it will be useful for us to avoid a war with England. To avoid a war with England, we should take the regular diplomatic steps to negotiate, to settle disputes as they rise, and to place the intercourse between the two nations upon a certain footing The real thing the English have to fear is our joining their enemies against them in a future war. She has no alliance to hope from us, unless Spain should force us into a war; and, even then, we ought not to ask or accept aid from England, if we could avoid it, unless France, from the family compact, should join Spain.¹⁴⁵

And yet, other events could push Europe into war, the mostly likely being the increasing number of revolutions in Spain's South and Central American colonies, Adams speculated; possibly, he already knew about the interest some

¹⁴⁵ Adams, *Life and Works*, 8:235-236.

Americans already harbored to help foment more revolutions of Spanish colonies. The cause of war mattered not, however. The problem was that the United States was endangered until at least 1800, when she might be recovered enough from the long Revolutionary War to stand alone, as Adams's comments about needing ten or fifteen years of peace indicate.¹⁴⁶

By autumn 1786 there was still no forward motion in the relations with the British, although Adams did manage to help negotiate commercial treaties with Portugal and Prussia and travel to the Netherlands to secure more loans for the United States.¹⁴⁷ The news of Shays's Rebellion caused many people in Britain to think that the new nation was already disintegrating even before it was properly organized. Americans reading the reports were distressed, wondering if another revolt was in progress.¹⁴⁸

The result was growing support for a stronger central government, a constitutional convention, and motivation for Adams to write more of his thoughts on government. Part I of Adams's *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America* went to the printer in January 1787. It was, in great part, an expanded case for checks and balances in government with an even

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.; Ferling, *John Adams: A Life*, 285.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 285.

¹⁴⁸ McCullough, *John Adams*, 368.

stronger argument than Adams had written in *Thoughts on Government* or had put into the draft of the Massachusetts constitution.¹⁴⁹

As he worked on the *Defence*, Adams came to the conclusion he could accomplish nothing more while in London, despite all his good-faith attempts to convince the British to negotiate. Soon after *Defence* was printed in early 1787, he wrote to Jay, asking to be recalled. Finally, near the end of 1787, the recall was approved by Congress, and Adams and family made plans to return to the United States. In his July 25, 1787, letter to Adams, Jay conveyed his approbation of Adams's work and regret that Adams believed the recall necessary:

Your experience in affairs, your knowledge of characters, and your intimate acquaintance with the concerns and interests of this country, together with other circumstances and considerations, induce me to wish that all questions between us and Court of London, as well as other affairs in Europe, could be arranged and adjusted before you leave it. . . . You have, my good friend, deserved well of your country; and your services and character will be truly estimated, at least by posterity, for they will know more of you than the people of this day.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 374.

¹⁵⁰ Adams, *Works*, 8:445–46.

Adams responded in his final correspondence to Jay as first minister plenipotentiary December 16, 1787, that he agreed that America lacked only union and unified government for diplomatic purposes. To Adams, “The United States now stand in an elevated situation, and they must and will be respected and courted, not only by France and England, but by all other powers of Europe, while they keep themselves neutral.”¹⁵¹

Adams paid a final call at Whitehall during the first week of February, 1788, and had his “audience of leave” with George III on February 20. “Mr. Adams,” the King said, according to Adams, “you may with great truth, assure the United States that whenever they shall fulfill the treaty on their part, I, on my part, will fulfill it in all its particulars.”¹⁵²

Adams and family left London Sunday, March 30, 1788. Reporting the departure, the *Whitehall Evening Post* observed that: “That gentleman settled all his concerns with great honor; and whatever his political tenets may have been, he was much respected and esteemed in this country.”¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 8:467.

¹⁵² McCullough, *John Adams*, 382.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 383.

CHAPTER III

THE ADAMS VICE PRESIDENCY (1789-1797)

AND PRESIDENCY (1797-1801)

Adams began putting his European experiences to good use in the United States immediately upon his election as vice president in 1789. Because Adams was the *first* vice president of the United States, he was instrumental in setting the style and tone for the office – indeed, he created the job description in great part. As vice president, Adams served as president of the U.S. Senate at a time when there were, initially, only 22¹⁵⁴ senators who were nearly equally divided between factions (Federalists vs. what would become the Anti-Federalists or Democratic Republicans). Because of the nearly equal numbers of the two main philosophies,

¹⁵⁴ As of the first session of the U.S. Senate, beginning March 4, 1789, eleven states had ratified the “Constitution of Government for the United States” as proposed by the Convention at Philadelphia September 17, 1787: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia. *Journal of the First Session of the Senate of the United States, Begun and Held at the City of New York, March 4, 1789*, vol. 1. Accessed April 2, 2008 from The Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875*, at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/>

Adams had the opportunity to break more tie votes than any other vice president to date.¹⁵⁵

Very seldom was the majority on disputed points more than two; and four times, during this [first] session [of the First Congress], the numbers stood nine against nine. At the second session his [Adams's] casting vote was called for, twelve, and at the third, four times, making twenty times during the first congress, and always upon points of importance in the organic laws. The services thus rendered make little figure on the records; but the effect of them, in smoothing away, at a critical moment, many of the obstacles to the establishment of the government, will continue to be felt so long as the form itself shall endure.¹⁵⁶

This great power lodged with the Vice-President has never been brought into exercise by any subsequent occupant of the presiding chair of

¹⁵⁵ Senate Historical Office, *Occasions When Vice Presidents Have Voted to Break Tie Votes in the Senate*, December 21, 2005, <http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/VPTies.pdf>, accessed 11 February 2008. Adams cast 29 tie-breaking votes during his terms, one more than John C. Calhoun cast during his terms of office, 1825-1832.

¹⁵⁶ John Quincy Adams & Charles Francis Adams, *Life of John Adams*, vol. 2 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005; originally published by Lippincott in 1871), 144.

the senate to the same extent that it was whilst Mr. Adams filled the office. An examination of the journals shows that this took place almost entirely during his first term of office. It happened to him, however, to be called upon six times during the session now in question [first session of first Congress], after which the federalists gained enough upon their opponents to prevent its use so often. But three cases occur in the remaining three years.¹⁵⁷

In contrast to some modern vice presidents, Adams attended nearly all meetings of the Senate and listened to the discussions and debates therein, even though he could not join in, at least in theory. He could certainly use procedural means to affect the flow of Senate business, in addition to using his tie-breaking vote to determine the outcome of ferociously contended votes. Therefore, what happened during the eight years Adams served as vice president had some bearing on his subsequent term as president, and the effects and/or influence of his service as U.S. ambassador to Great Britain can, perhaps, be seen in his views of and/or actions in events occurring during all twelve years in executive offices. According to his son and grandson, Adams gravitated to the Federalist camp, favoring the Constitution of 1789, because of “his bitter experience of the want of a

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 155.

government to sustain the national honor in Europe, and his lifelong attachment to the tripartite or English theory, combined.”¹⁵⁸

The Adams Vice Presidency

The initial issue during Adams’s tenure as vice president was that of titles, mainly that of how to address the president in formal situations. The U.S. House took care of the matter simply and quickly: George Washington would the President of the United States.¹⁵⁹

The fledgling U.S. Senate had a bit more to say on the subject; the entire topic caused an unusual amount of discussion and emotion. In fact, the arguments got quite heated, and Adams was right in the middle of it all. Amazingly enough, this seemingly modest Yankee statesman thought the title of “president” was too ordinary, and he turned out to be the leader among those advocating more titles such as “His excellency,” “His majesty the President,” or “His Highness the President of the United States of America, and Protector of their Liberties,” both of which lost out to “The President of the United States” without addition of

¹⁵⁸ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 134. In other words, because of Adams’s dedication to three branches of government with checks and balances, to constitutional government, and to the American states joining together to the point where they had a national government strong enough to make some (trade) decisions for all the states, and to enforce the decisions.

¹⁵⁹ David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 404-405.

title.¹⁶⁰ This caused the issue to take nearly a month to resolve (May 14, 1789) rather than the few days it probably deserved.¹⁶¹ However, the incident does suggest that Adams absorbed a bit of class-consciousness in London (and probably Paris and Amsterdam as well) as he was negotiating treaties and representing the country to French and British officials who sported a variety of titles.

Adams maintained that his interest was in doing everything possible to promote the dignity and respect for the central government, and to thereby strengthen the union. As early as November 1782, he described his position on rank to then-Secretary of State Robert Livingston in response to an accusation that he, Adams, had an open, avowed contempt of all rank:

There are times, . . . when a man's duty to his country demands of him the sacrifice of his rank, . . . In ordinary times, the same duty to his country obliges him to contend for his rank, as the only means indeed,

¹⁶⁰ *Journal of the First Session of the Senate of the United States, Begun and Held at the City of New York, March 4, 1789*, vol. 1, entry of Friday, May 8, 1789, p. 23, and entry of Thursday, May 14, 1789, p. 25. Retrieved 2 April 2008 from The Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875*, at [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(sj0011\)\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(sj0011))).

¹⁶¹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 404-405

sometimes, by which he can do service; and the sacrifice would injure his country more than himself. When the world see a man reduced to the necessity of giving up his rank, merely to serve the public, they will respect him, and his opinions will have the more weight for it; but when the same world see a man yield his rank for the sake of holding a place, he becomes ridiculous. . . . Ranks, titles, and etiquettes, and every species of punctilios, even down to the visits of cards, are of infinitely more importance in Europe than in America, and therefore congress cannot be too tender of disgracing their ministers abroad in any of these things, nor too determined not to disgrace themselves.

If we conduct ourselves with caution, prudence, moderation, and firmness, we shall succeed in every great point; but if congress or their ministers abroad suffer themselves to be intimidated by threats, slanders, or insinuations, we shall be duped out of the fishery, . . . It is for the determinate purpose of carrying these points, that one man, who is submission itself, is puffed up to the top of Jacob's ladder in the clouds, and every other man depressed to the bottom of it in the dust.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Charles Francis Adams, ed. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With A Life of the Author*, vol. 8 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1853), 3-5.

Titles of federal office should indicate that the central government was to have more authority and importance than the state governments, Adams noted. The office of president should be adorned with dignity and splendor, he added, and titles were symbolic of both.¹⁶⁴

Adams realized, however, that the issue had taken on a much larger appearance than it warranted, and that he himself had made a rather inauspicious start as President of the Senate.¹⁶⁵ He did not prove himself to be a monarchist, despite being so accused by several people.¹⁶⁶ This was partly a misinterpretation of his statements in his “Discourses on Davila,” a series of articles published in the *Gazette of the United States* in 1790 and 1791, in which Adams described his belief that “the history of Europe showed that men had turned invariably to monarchy to avoid the horrors of anarchy.”¹⁶⁷ At about the same time he also wrote to his Republican friend Dr. Benjamin Rush, who also apparently misinterpreted Adams’s views on monarchy:

¹⁶⁴ McCullough, *John Adams*, 404-405.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 408.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ James Bishop Peabody, *The Founding Fathers: John Adams: A Biography in His Own Words*. Vol. 2. (New York: Newsweek, 1973), 334.

My friend Dr. Rush will excuse me, if I caution him against a fraudulent use of the words *monarch* and *republic*. I am a mortal and irreconcilable enemy to monarchy. I am no friend to *hereditary limited* monarchy in America. This I know can never be admitted without an hereditary Senate to control it, and a hereditary nobility or Senate in America I know to be unattainable and impracticable. I should scarcely be for it, if it were. Do not, therefore, my friend, misunderstand me and misrepresent me to posterity. I am for a balance between the legislative and executive powers, and I am for enabling the executive to be at all times capable of maintaining the balance between the Senate and House, or in other words, between the aristocratical and democratical interests. Yet I am for having all three branches elected at stated periods, and these elections, I hope, will continue until the people shall be convinced that fortune, providence, or chance, call it what you will, is better than election.¹⁶⁸

Adams admitted at one point that, because of the many different appointments he had served in France and Britain, he had been out of the country too long. That admission certainly did nothing to decrease the suspicion that he

¹⁶⁸ Peabody, *John Adams*, 345. John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 18 April 1790.

was a monarchist at heart,¹⁶⁹ even in the eyes of his former friend and future competitor, Thomas Jefferson,¹⁷⁰ to whom he declared unequivocally:

You are afraid of the one, I, of the few. We agree perfectly that the many should have a full, fair, and perfect representation. You are apprehensive of monarchy, I, of aristocracy. I would, therefore, have given more power to the president, and less to the senate [in the new American Constitution]. The nomination and appointment to all offices, I would have given to the president, assisted only by a privy council of his own creation; but not a vote or voice would I have given to the senate or any senator unless he were of the privy council. Faction and distraction are the sure and certain consequence of giving to the senate, a vote in the distribution of offices. You are apprehensive that the president, when once chosen, will be chosen again and again as long as he lives. So much the better, as it appears to me. You are apprehensive of foreign interference, intrigue, and influence. So am I. But as often as elections happen, the danger of foreign influence renews. The less frequently they happen, the less danger; and if the same man may be chosen again, it is possible he will be, and the danger of foreign influence will be less. . . . Elections, my

¹⁶⁹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 409.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 433.

dear sir, to offices which are a great object of ambition, I look at with terror. Experiments of this kind have been so often tried, and so universally found productive of horrors, that there is great reason to dread them.¹⁷¹

Adams had already explained his views to Roger Sherman, one of the framers at the Constitutional Convention, who preferred decentralization of power and a government with sovereignty located in the legislative branch. Adams, on the other hand, thought that sovereignty should be divided among the branches to prevent power from consolidating, dominating, and excluding.¹⁷²

[A republic is] *A government whose sovereignty is vested in more than one person. Governments are divided into despotisms, monarchies, and republics. . . . A monarchy is a government where the legislative and executive are vested in one man, but the judicial in other men. In all governments the sovereignty is vested in that man or body of men who*

¹⁷¹ Adams, *Works*, 8:465. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, London, 6 December 1787. Adams was called upon to break a tie vote in the Senate on the subject of whether or not the president might, as part of his powers, dismiss his appointments that had been made with the consent of the Senate. Despite his support for the Constitution, Adams voted to allow the president to dismiss his cabinet appointments without Senate approval.

¹⁷² John Patrick Diggins, ed., *The Portable John Adams* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 395.

have the legislative power. In despotisms and monarchies, therefore, the legislative authority being in one man, the sovereignty is in one man. In republics, as the sovereignty, that is, the legislative, is always vested in more than one, it may be vested in as many more as you please. . . . It is essential to a monarchical republic, that the supreme executive should be a branch of the legislative, and have a negative on all the laws. Let us now inquire, whether the new constitution of the United States is or is not a monarchical republic, like that of Great Britain. The monarchical and the aristocratical power in our constitution, it is true, are not hereditary; but this makes no difference in the nature of the power, in the nature of the balance, or in the name of the species of government. It would make no difference in the power of a judge or justice, or general or admiral, whether his commission were for life or years. His authority during the time it lasted, would be the same . . . A nation in the same manner might create a simple monarchy for years, life, or perpetuity, and in either case the creature would be equally a simple monarch during the continuance of his power. . . their government would be a monarchical republic, or, if you will, a limited monarchy, during its continuance.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ “Three Letters to Roger Sherman, on the Constitution of the United States” in Diggins, *A*

While Adams was adamant about the need for a strong executive, he admitted that the presidency was more than a figurehead:

The duration of our president is neither perpetual nor for life, it is only for four years; but his power during those four years is much greater than that of an avoyer, a consul, a podestà, a doge, a stadtholder; nay, than a king of Poland; nay, than a king of Sparta. I know of no first magistrate in any republican government, excepting England and Neuchatel, who possesses a constitutional dignity, authority, and power comparable to his. The power of sending and receiving ambassadors, or raising and commanding armies and navies, of nominating and appointing and commissioning all officers, of managing the treasurer, the internal and external affairs of the nation; nay, the whole executive power, coextensive with the legislative power, is vested in him, and he has the right, and his is the duty, to take care that the laws be faithfully executed.¹⁷⁴

However, Adams thought that the presidency, because of the additional legislative-related duties, including the veto of legislation, suffered from being too closely combined with the legislative branch. Indeed, Adams considered the major presidential duties to place the president more as a third subdivision

Portable John Adams, 2:397. Adams to Sherman, July 1789.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 399.

(branch) within the legislative branch, than as a branch co-equal with the legislative.¹⁷⁵

Adams also responded to accusations made by John Taylor, a Virginia political philosopher who wrote a rebuttal in 1814 to the early Adams writings. Adams in turn wrote:

What, Mr. Taylor, is the resemblance of a president or a governor to a monarch? It is the resemblance of Mount Vernon to the Andes; of the Tiber at Washington to the Ganges or Mississippi. A president has the executive power only, and that under severe restrictions, jealous restrictions; and as I am too old to court popularity, I will venture to say, in my opinion, very pernicious restrictions; restrictions that will destroy this constitution before its time. A president has no legislative power; a monarch has it all.

What resemblance has an American senate to a hereditary order? It has a negative upon the laws. In this, it resembles the house of lords in England; but in nothing else. It has resemblance to any hereditary order. . . . There is nothing hereditary in it.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 399-405.

¹⁷⁶ Diggins, "Letters. To John Taylor," *A Portable John Adams*, 7:420.

Later in life, when Adams and Jefferson renewed their friendship in an extensive exchange of letters, Adams asked of Thomas Jefferson,

If You suppose that I have or ever had a design or desire, of attempting to introduce a Government of King, Lords and Commons, or in other Words an hereditary executive, or an hereditary Senate, either into the government of the United States or that of any Individual state, in this Country, you are wholly mistaken. There is not such a Thought expressed or intimated in any public writing or private Letter of mine, and I may safely challenge all Mankind to produce such a passage and quote the Chapter and verse. if you have ever put such a Construction on any Thing of mine, I beg you would mention it to me, and I will undertake to convince you, that it has no such meaning¹⁷⁷

Now, I will forfeit my Life, if you can find one Sentence in my Defence of the Constitutions, or the Discourses on Davila, which by a fair construction, can favour the introduction of hereditary Monarchy or Aristocracy into America. They were all written to support and strengthen the Constitutions of the United States.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Diggins, *A Portable John Adams*, 466. Adams to Jefferson, 29 July 1791.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 491. Adams to Jefferson, 13 July 1813.

Adams also elaborated upon his ideas about aristocracy, opining that they did not differ much with Jefferson on this point:

You suppose a difference of Opinion between You and me, on the Subject of Aristocracy. I can find none. I dislike and detest hereditary honours, Offices Emoluments established by Law. So do you. I am for ex[c]luding legal hereditary distinctions from the U.S. as long as possible. So are you. I only say that Mankind have not yet discovered any remedy against irresistible Corruption in Elections to Offices of great Power and Profit, but making them hereditary.¹⁷⁹

Taking other clues into consideration, it did sometimes appear that Adams leaned toward monarchy. When Rush was confronted with the charge that Adams had been corrupted by his years in Europe, he said he saw no change at all in Adams.¹⁸⁰ However, “corruption” is much farther along the scale than “influence” is, so the fact that Adams’s years in London and other European cities failed to “corrupt” him does not necessarily mean that what he saw and heard there did not influence his views upon his return home. The influence could push both ways, however, as Abigail Adams explained to Washington in a July 1789 visit:

¹⁷⁹ Lester J. Cappon, ed. *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 401. Adams to Jefferson, 15 November 1813.

¹⁸⁰ McCullough, *John Adams*, 411.

He [Washington] . . . asked me how I could Relish the simple manners of America after having been accustomed to those of Europe. I replied to him that where I found simple manners I esteemed them, but that I thought we approachd much nearer to the luxury and manners of Europe according to our ability, than most persons were sensible of, and that we had our full share of taste and fondness for them.¹⁸¹

Further confusing the issue was the stance of Alexander Hamilton, a relative newcomer to the political scene but one who stood out immediately. Hamilton, a Federalist like Adams, at least in some respects, disliked and distrusted the French (which Adams certainly did as well), and strongly favored better relations with Great Britain for the good of the American economy.¹⁸²

Jefferson, on the other hand, and typically so, disliked and distrusted the British. For him, the French and their Revolution of 1789 were the “embodiment of the highest ideals of the American Revolution.”¹⁸³ Partly for that reason, Jefferson, James Madison and Philip Freneau, among others, took to calling themselves Republicans, partly as a way to imply that the Federalists were not supporters of a republic but were monarchists – or, as Jefferson tagged them,

¹⁸¹ Peabody, *John Adams*, 339. Abigail Adams to Mrs. Richard Cranch, 12 July 1789.

¹⁸² McCullough, *John Adams*, 436.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

monocrats. Even an anonymous fellow traveler at a stop Adams made in a Hartford inn in 1792, as Adams was heading back to Philadelphia for the next session of Congress, offered the observation that John Adams had been “too long in Europe” and “got tainted.”¹⁸⁴ Adams, without revealing his identity, told the irate citizen that if Mr. Adams had done the job that the people sent him to do, and got tainted in the process, then the people ought to pay him for the damage done by the taint.¹⁸⁵

Other Senate issues involved settling questions of governmental organization and procedure under the new Constitution, such as whether or not the president had the power to remove persons at the head of the bureaus (that is, what now would be called department secretaries or cabinet officers) without ratification by the Senate, as was required for their appointment. There was some concern that, if the president could not dismiss his advisers at will, over time the government might become an oligarchy in which the president became merely an instrument of whatever faction was strongest in the Senate. The House voted to allow the president the power to dismiss at will; the Senate vote was tied at nine votes each side. Vice President Adams was then called upon to cast the deciding vote, his first, which he cast in favor of giving the president absolute dismissal

¹⁸⁴ McCullough, *John Adams*, 439. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 24 November 1792.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

power.¹⁸⁶ Considering Adams's belief in a strong executive, which was a major reason he was accused of being a monarchist as explained above, the outcome was predictable.

The most important issue to consume Adams's time and effort during his last term as vice president and into his presidential term was that of the United States and its increasing rocky relationships with France and Great Britain. During the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, as in previous centuries, any event that affected the major powers in Europe also affected their former and current American colonies.

Therefore, when Great Britain (allied with Spain in this particular dispute) declared war on France on February 1, 1793, the repercussions were felt strongly in the United States. For example, the most recent British war against France resulted in Edmund Charles "Citizen" Gênet's April 1793 arrival in the United States to request American support for France, and to encourage privateering against British shipping by American seamen.¹⁸⁷

In response, President Washington issued, on April 22, 1793, the Proclamation of Neutrality, which affirmed what Adams had said about keeping

¹⁸⁶ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 143.

¹⁸⁷ McCullough, *John Adams*, 444.

the United States free from the affairs of Europe.¹⁸⁸ On this point, Washington and Adams agreed completely, perhaps partly due to Adams's reports from Europe. For example, as early as July 10, 1783, Adams wrote to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Robert Livingston from Paris that the French were trying to persuade the English to deprive the United States of their trade in the West Indies, and thus disrupt any attempt at friendship between the United States and Great Britain. Adams related a conversation he had a few weeks previously with the Duc de la Vauguyon concerning the West India trade. Adams tried to convince the Duke that France and England ought to let the United States trade freely with the islands of both countries; the Duke gave arguments why the trade should not be allowed. Adams had pointed out that if the English excluded the American trade, there would be another war between America and Great Britain in fifteen or twenty years.

The Duke responded:

Tant mieux! tant mieux! je vous en félicite,” [So much the better, so much the better, I congratulate you] cried the Duke, with great pleasure.

“Tant mieux pour nous,” [So much the better for us] said I. Because we shall conquer from the English, in that case, all their islands, the

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 444-445.

inhabitants of which would now declare for us, if they dared. But it will not be better for the English. They will be the Dupes, if they lay a foundation for it. “Yes,” said the Duke, “I think you will have another war with the English.” And in this wish he expressed the vows of every Frenchman upon the face of the earth.¹⁸⁹

On September 5, 1783, Adams wrote to President Elias Boudinot:

To form immediate commercial connections with that half of Europe which ever has been, and with little variations ever will be, opposite to the House of Bourbon, is a fundamental maxim of that system of American politics which I have pursued invariably from the beginning of this war. It is the only means of preserving the respect of the House of Bourbon itself; it is the only means in conjunction with our connections with the House of Bourbon, already formed, to secure us the respect of England for any length of time, and to keep us out of another war with that kingdom. It is, in short, the only possible means of securing to our country that peace, neutrality, impartiality, and indifference in European wars, which, in my opinion, we shall be unwise in the last degree, if we do not maintain. It is, besides, the only way in which we can improve and extend

¹⁸⁹ Adams, *Works*, 8:91. Translation by Kenna Giffin.

our commercial connections to the best advantage.¹⁹⁰

Adams again wrote Boudinot February 10, 1784, from The Hague, commenting on the peace treaties between Russia and Turkey, and between England and Holland:

May the world continue at peace! But if it should not, I hope we shall have wisdom enough to keep ourselves out of any broil As I am quite in sentiment with the Baron de Nolken, the Swedish ambassador at St. James's, who did me the honor to visit me, although I had not visited him. "Sire," said he, "I take it for granted, that you will have sense enough to see us in Europe cut each other's throats with a philosophical tranquility."¹⁹¹

Adams wrote Secretary Jay on April 13, 1785, from Auteuil, that "Surely it would not be difficult for an American minister to convince a British one that . . . the only thing they ought to expect from America is neutrality."¹⁹² Finally, as Adams prepared to leave his post in London, he wrote to Secretary Jay on November 15, 1787, that the United States should

. . . act with dignity in all events, that she may not be obliged to join in any

¹⁹⁰ Adams, *Works*, 8:146.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8:178.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 8:235.

war without the clearest conviction of the justice of the cause, *and her own honor and real interest* [emphasis added], it is indispensably necessary that she should act the part, in Holland, of perfect independence and honest impartiality between the different Courts and nations who are now struggling for her friendship, and who are all, at present, our friends. This has ever appeared to me so clear and obvious . . . ¹⁹³

Even if Adams had stayed in the United States during the end of the Revolution and the years immediately following it, he might well have realized the potential traps for the young country if she allied herself too strongly with any one European country. By spending those years in Paris and London, however, Adams was able to see even more details to convince him that the United States would do well to avoid entanglement in European feuds at all costs, because the country that got caught in between the two fighting powers stood to gain nothing but trouble. As he told Jefferson in their retirement correspondence,

Britain will never be our Friend, till We are her Master. This will happen in less time than you and I have been struggling with her Power – provided We remain United. Aye! there’s the rub! I fear there will be greater difficulties to preserve our Union, than You and I, our Fathers

¹⁹³ Ibid., 8:461.

Brothers Friends Disciples and Sons have had to form it. Towards G. B. I would adopt their own Maxim. An English Jocky says “If I have a wild horse to brake I begin by convincing him that I am his Master. And then I will convince him that I am his Friend.” I am well assured that nothing will restrain G. B. from injuring Us, but fear.¹⁹⁴

Not everyone agreed with Adams on that point, of course, and years later he wrote that, as a result of Gênet’s visit, as many as 10,000 people roamed the streets and threatened to drag President Washington out of his house to compel the government to declare war on Britain at that point.¹⁹⁵ The development did draw Jefferson and Adams back to the same side on the fence, however, as both agreed there appeared to be an increasing threat of war. One of the main reasons for this sentiment was that Britain was stopping American ships at sea to capture and impress sailors by claiming that they were British citizens. When Britain subsequently captured American trading vessels in the West Indies, many in the United States went wild for war. War fever motivated one Senator to file a bill that would suspend all trade with Britain. The floor vote was a tie; Adams, as Senate president, broke the tie by voting “no,” thus defeating the bill.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 502. Adams to Jefferson, 16 December 1816.

¹⁹⁵ McCullough, *John Adams*, 445.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 449.

He wrote to Abigail,

This day the senators were equally divided upon a question which seemed to me to involve nothing less than peace and war [the bill to prevent violations of neutrality]; and I was obliged to decide it, to the no small chagrin of a number. If this country is involved in war, it shall not be my fault. But if it comes either from the malice of our enemies or the imprudence of our own people, it may perhaps be found that I shall not shrink from its difficulties sooner than some who now seek it in disguise.¹⁹⁷

Another example of how Adams was influenced by his experiences in Great Britain (and France) was exhibited in a letter he wrote to Abigail Adams, dated February 4, 1794, wherein the vice president denounced a lie that the Duke of York had been caged in Paris and the English fleet was in the hands of the republic (the French). The lie was created to “gull the gudgeons,” he said, and it succeeded in exciting the masses, but the attempt to get the vice president to read the lie in the Senate failed. “I was too old to be taken in, at least by so gross an artifice, the falsehood of which was to me palpable.”¹⁹⁸ He seemed to be saying that the years of exposure to the primary actors in European politics gave him an

¹⁹⁷ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 169. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 12 March 1794.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 162-163. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 4 February 1794.

intimate understanding of the people and their methods of operation that was especially helpful in discerning truth from lies regarding British and French activities.

He again mentioned his concern about trusting or relying on Great Britain in a letter to Abigail dated April 15, 1794. It would have been wise to avoid antagonizing Britain, especially when the British were in the midst of a quarrel with France:

. . . Britain, however, has done much amiss, and deserves all that will fall thereon. Her insolence, which you and I have known and felt more than any other Americans, will lead her to ruin, and us half-way. We indeed are, in point of insolence, her very image and superscription; as true a gamecock as she, and I warrant you, shall become as great a scourge to mankind.¹⁹⁹

On April 19, 1794, he explained why there was so much opposition to sending John Jay to Great Britain to try to negotiate a treaty to end some of the harassment from Great Britain, and ended by reminding Abigail again how well the two of them knew British attitudes because of the years they spent in London:

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 174. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 15 April 1794.

We are ill-treated by Britain, and you and I know it is owing to a national insolence against us. If they force us into a war, it is my firm faith they will be chastised for it a second time worse than the first.²⁰⁰

The next truly important issue for Adams as vice president came to the fore in the spring of 1795 when the text of the Jay Treaty reached the president. The Senate went into special session on June 8 to consider the treaty, which was greeted with much dissatisfaction from Senators (and others) who had not been with John Jay in Britain to negotiate the treaty. In examining the terms of the treaty, the Senators noted that Jay gave up almost every point of negotiation to the British, and obtained little in return. There was no guaranteed protection of American seamen from British seizure, one of the most crucial issues. Britain refused to open ports to American trade except in the West Indies and for ships weighing less than 70 tons.²⁰¹

The only concession Britain made was to remove the last of the troops from the Northwest Territory by the end of year, which they were obligated to do by the Treaty of Paris anyway, although the troops weren't removed until after 1814. But, Jay had managed to get a peace agreement with Britain. After thirteen

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 176. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 19 April 1794.

²⁰¹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 456.

days of debate in the Senate, with Adams watching and listening, exactly two-thirds of the Senate confirmed ratification of the treaty.²⁰²

Although many citizens considered Jay a traitor, and even burned him in effigy, Adams knew what he had been up against during the negotiations in London. He opined that a flawed treaty was far preferable to war with Britain, which could easily have been disastrous for the young country, so Adams stood by President Washington in support of the treaty.²⁰³ Once again, Adams's loyalties were called into question and he was called an Anglophile. He disagreed with his detractors, saying that while he admired British constitution and governmental structure, he considered the British as "insolent as ever" and the unfortunate and mad George III (who, history suggests, was a victim of porphyria by this time) a "hopeless blunderer."²⁰⁴ Of course, the fact that Adams could admire anything about the British government probably irked a number of the more Jeffersonian statesmen of the moment, given as they were to admiration for the French Revolution.

The U.S. House of Representatives began consideration of the Jay Treaty in March 1796. The event gave Adams and Washington a chance to rediscover

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid., 457.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

their similar opinions regarding England and France while discussing the treaty, although there are no specific indications that Adams directly influenced Washington on this point. The treaty passed both houses during the first week of May:²⁰⁵

Yesterday I dined at the President's, with ministers of state and their ladies, foreign and domestic. After dinner the gentlemen drew off after the ladies, and left me alone with the President in close conversation. He detained me there till nine o'clock, and was never more frank and open upon politics. I find his opinions and sentiments are more exactly like mine than I ever knew before, respecting England, France, and our American parties.²⁰⁶

The Adams Presidency

Adams and Jefferson were the leading candidates during the election of 1796. The Republican press called Adams a “gross and shameless monarchist,” “His Rotundity,” and “champion of kings, ranks, and titles,”²⁰⁷ blatant reminders of the decade Adams spent in Europe, except for the rotundness. However, the *Washington Federalist* reminded readers of Adams's strengths:

²⁰⁵ McCullough, *John Adams*, 460.

²⁰⁶ Peabody, *John Adams*, 347. John Adams to Abigail Adams, 25 March 1796.

²⁰⁷ McCullough, *John Adams*, 462.

Deeply versed in legal lore, profoundly skilled in political science; joined to the advantage of forty years' unceasing engagement in the turbulent and triumphant scenes, both at home and in Europe, which have marked our history; learned in the language and arts of diplomacy; more conversant with the views, jealousies, resources, and intrigues of Great Britain, France and Holland than any other American; alike aloof to flattery and vulgar ambition, as above all undue control [he has as] . . . his sole object . . . the present freedom and independence of his country and its future glory. On this solid basis he has attempted to raise a monument of his honest fame.²⁰⁸

Adams still was not a monarchist, of course. He did manage to win the election, and was sworn in as President of the United States of America at noon Saturday, March 4, 1797. Adams said later that he felt as he had when appearing before George III, as though he were onstage,²⁰⁹ evidence that his London experience was always fresh in his mind.

The so-called monarchist kept his inauguration understated, appearing in a carriage with only two horses and with few trappings that might be considered representative of court. He even had Abigail remove the Quincy coat-of-arms that

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 546. *Washington Federalist*, 7 October 1800.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 467.

she had had painted on the carriage at home.²¹⁰ His inaugural speech was calculated to dispel rumors that he wanted to change the form of government to something close to a monarchy, so he included a statement indicating his entire satisfaction with the constitution:

. . . I first saw the Constitution of the United States in a foreign country. Irritated by no literary altercation, animated by no public debate, heated by no party animosity, I read it with great satisfaction, as a result of good heads, prompted by good hearts; as an experiment better adapted to the genius, character, situation, and relations of this nation and country than any which had ever been proposed or suggested. In its general principles and great outlines, it was conformable to such a system of government as I had ever most esteemed, and in . . . my own native State . . . had contributed to establish. . . . I did not hesitate to express my approbation of it on all occasions, in public and in private. It was not then nor has been since any objection to it, in my mind, that the Executive and Senate were not more permanent. . . . I have repeatedly laid myself under the most serious obligations to support the Constitution. The operation of it has equaled the most sanguine expectations of its friends; and, from an

²¹⁰ Ibid., 468.

habitual attention to it, satisfaction in its administration, and delight in its effect upon the peace, order, prosperity, and happiness of the nation, I have acquired an habitual attachment to it, and veneration for it.

What other form of government, indeed, can so well deserve our esteem and love?²¹¹

He then added that he wanted no alterations unless the people themselves found it necessary to alter the Constitution. He reiterated his support for the policies begun by Washington in a policy statement famous for setting forth Adams's principles and policies all in one sentence.²¹²

The occasion, I hope, will be admitted as an apology, if I venture to say, that, if a preference upon principle of a free republican government, formed upon long and serious reflection, after a diligent and impartial inquiry after truth ; if an attachment to the constitution of the United States, and a conscientious determination to support it, until it shall be altered by the judgments and wishes of the people, expressed in the mode prescribed in it ; if a respectful attention to the constitutions of the individual States, and a constant caution and delicacy towards the State governments ; if an equal and impartial regard to the rights, interest,

²¹¹ Peabody, *John Adams*, 354-355. Adams's Inaugural Speech, 1797.

²¹² Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 219.

honor, and happiness of all the States in the Union, without preference or regard to a northern or southern, eastern or western position, their various political opinions on essential points, or their personal attachments ; if a love of virtuous men of all parties and denominations ; if a love of science and letters, and a wish to patronize every rational effort to encourage schools, colleges, universities, academies, and every institution for propagating knowledge, virtue, and religion among all classes of the people, not only for their benign influence on the happiness of life in all its stages and classes, and of society in all its forms, but as the only means of preserving our constitution from its natural enemies, the spirit of sophistry, then spirit of party, the spirit of intrigue, profligacy, and corruption, and the pestilence of foreign influence, which is the angel of destruction to elective governments ; if a love of equal laws, of justice and humanity in the interior administration ; if an inclination to improve agriculture, commerce, and manufactures for necessity, convenience, and defence ; if a spirit of equity and humanity towards the aboriginal nations of America, and a disposition to meliorate their condition, by inclining them to be more friendly to us, and our citizens more friendly to them ; *if an inflexible determination to maintain peace and inviolable faith with all nations, and that system of neutrality and impartiality among the belligerent powers of Europe, which has been adopted by the government,*

and so solemnly sanctioned by both houses of congress, and applauded by the legislatures of the states and the public opinion, until it shall be otherwise ordained by congress ; if a personal esteem for the French nation, formed in a residence of seven years, chiefly among them, and a sincere desire to preserve the friendship which has been so much for the honor and interest of both nations [emphasis added] ; if, while the conscious honor and integrity of the people of America and the internal sentiment of their own power and energies must be preserved, an earnest endeavor to investigate every just cause, and remove every colorable pretence, of complaint ; if an intention to pursue, by amicable negotiation, a reparation for the injuries that have been committed on the commerce of our fellow – citizens, by whatever nation, and (if success cannot be obtained) to lay the facts before the legislature, that they may consider what further measures the honor and interest of the government and its constituents demand ; if a resolution to do justice, as far as may depend upon me, at all times, and to all nations, and maintain peace, friendship, and benevolence with all the world [emphasis added] ; if an unshaken confidence in the honor, spirit, and resources of the American people, on which I have so often hazarded my all, and never been deceived ; if elevated ideas of the high destinies of this country, and of my own duties towards it, founded on a knowledge of the moral principles and

intellectual improvement of the people, deeply engraven on my mind in early life, and not obscured, but exalted by experience and age ; and with humble reverence I feel it my duty to add, if a veneration for the religion of a people who profess and call themselves Christians, and a fixed resolution to consider a decent respect for Christianity among the best recommendations for the public service—can enable me, in any degree, to comply with your wishes, it shall be my strenuous endeavor that this sagacious injunction of the two Houses shall not be without effect.²¹³

Echoing his predecessor, and his own declarations made to Oswald during the peace treaty negotiations, Adams announced his determination to maintain American neutrality and to maintain peace with all nations.²¹⁴ It was not going to be easy. His own party – of which he was hardly the strongest supporter, considering that he disliked factions as much as did Washington – was splitting into at least two if not three camps. The High Federalists, those who comprised the ardently anti-French, pro-British wing of the party and looked to Hamilton as leader, looked down on Adams, despite his greater experience dealing with the British.²¹⁵ They also might have thought Adams inferior because they had served

²¹³ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 220-222.

²¹⁴ McCullough, *John Adams*, 469.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 472.

in the cabinet of George Washington, according to Adams biographer David McCullough.²¹⁶

But Adams was determined to continue to try to reconcile with France as he attempted to avoid a war.²¹⁷ He had been concerned about Napoleon's campaigns in Italy throughout 1796 and 1797, because he believed that French victories posed potential danger for America. If all of Europe, including Great Britain, effected peace with the French, Paris would be free to turn its full attention to harming the United States, Adams believed. France might still try to find a way to make the United States dependent upon her to a far greater extent than would be good for U.S. interests.²¹⁸

Thus, Adams entered his presidential term facing a major misunderstanding with France, which he desperately hoped to reconcile.²¹⁹ Unfortunately, the French Directory (governing council), chose to interpret the Jay Treaty as an Anglo-American alliance and to take offense because of it.²²⁰ French privateers seized and plundered U.S. ships on the Atlantic and Caribbean,

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 473-474.

²¹⁸ Ferling, *John Adams*, 351.

²¹⁹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 476.

²²⁰ Ibid., 474.

then beat and tortured American sailors.²²¹ Adams, resenting the assaults, feared they would stop American trade entirely. He also knew the United States was not prepared to fight Britain or France, no matter how much the Federalist papers were trying to stir up sentiment against France among the American public. He feared that, with the rise of anti-French feeling, the limited American army would have to be enlarged to the point that it might eventually tyrannize the people and draw the country into unnecessary wars.²²²

The French Directory next refused to receive American ambassador Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Then, Adams learned on March 13, 1797, that French privateers had seized more American ships in the Caribbean. This amounted to an undeclared war on American shipping taking place on the high seas and near ports vital to American trade, and threatened to escalate to all-out war.²²³ Still, Adams believed that the only way to avoid a war with France was for

²²¹ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 35.

²²² Ibid., 36. Had Adams been more prescient, he might have realized that a future president might achieve those goals even with a more modest, “volunteer” army. Indeed, Adams’s friend Elbridge Gerry described a large, standing army as being like a swollen penis that provided “an excellent assurance of domestic tranquility, but a dangerous temptation to foreign adventure.” Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 552.

²²³ McCullough, *John Adams*, 477.

the United States to unite for that purpose in spirit, and to prepare a strong national defense. As Adams presidential historian Ralph Adams Brown concluded:

While America's relations with France during these years were precarious, so were her dealings with Britain. If the United States were to remain truly independent and neutral, she must refrain from accepting a partnership with either country. Among the political leaders of both parties, only John Adams seems to have understood both the necessity and the demands of neutrality.²²⁴

Part of the reason Adams so thoroughly understood the necessity and demands of neutrality toward both France and Great Britain was because he spent a decade in both countries, learning first-hand how they operated and why it would be more beneficial to the young United States to avoid aligning itself very closely with either country. Adams knew that the French ministers could find it in France's best interests if Great Britain and the United States engaged in another war that would weaken both opponents. He also knew that Great Britain's ministers would consider the British best interests to be well served if France and the United States spent some time battling each other, using up each other's

²²⁴ Ralph Adams Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975), 31.

resources and weakening each other so that Britain might be well positioned to grab a few spoils – such as islands, other areas of land, ships, weapons, or other goods, for example – when the combatants finished slugging it out and were not in a position to resist very strongly. Better, Adams realized, to avoid weakening the United States by taking on any other opponent, at least until the country had time to mature and develop, especially economically. Let France and Great Britain expend their aggression on each other, perhaps even decimating each other's economy, while the United States watched, and waited, and built up its own economy.

Adams called Congress into special session on May 15, 1797, as war became the cause célèbre of the day. According to the Federalist view, France had insulted the United States – had thrown down the gauntlet, so to speak. The Republicans, however, wanted to remain friends with France and encouraged the new president to seek peace. Publisher William Cobbett most unhelpfully announced in the paper *Porcupine's gazette* that war with France was all but certain, possibly because he favored an alliance with Britain, which he thought would result from war with France. He was not alone in this view.²²⁵ Adams, however, had information from his son, John Quincy Adams, who was in Berlin,

²²⁵ McCullough, *John Adams*, 478.

and from William Vans Murray, minister at The Hague, that led him to believe that:

France did not really want war with the United States but merely wanted to make the young republic subservient to French policy and interest . . . That country [France] would . . . benefit more from simulating anger and despoiling American commerce than from actual war.²²⁶

Congress responded to Adams's request to strengthen American defense by voting to build twelve new frigates and to fortify the Eastern coast. However, only a few merchant vessels were permitted to arm themselves against French deprivations, nor would Congress impose an embargo against hostile ships.

"Abigail Adams told her husband that Congress was full of timid imbeciles."²²⁷

About this time, a letter that Jefferson had written to Philip Mazzei during the Jay treaty debate was published in a New York Federalist paper. Jefferson had suggested that America was being taken over by leaders who were assimilating "the rotten as well as the sound points of the British model."²²⁸ The letter was taken to be an attack on Washington, but it could have referred to other officials as well, not the least of which could have been Adams, who openly admitted his

²²⁶ Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 46.

²²⁷ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 35-37.

²²⁸ McCullough, *John Adams*, 483.

admiration for parts of the British system of government, as Jefferson knew well.²²⁹

Adams, an international realist for many years, knew that neutrality would be difficult to establish and maintain in a world in which nearly every European country seemed to be at war. He knew how much could happen in France or Britain, on the high seas, and even in his own country that he could not control.²³⁰ The United States had no military strength on land or sea. French privateers were preying on the American merchant fleet at will, from operations based in the West Indies or even New Orleans.²³¹ And even though France had wounded America by privateering and rejecting envoys, Adams wanted to heal the wound, preserve peace and friendship. It was in the interest of the United States to work toward those goals, according to Adams, who continued making attempts to negotiate with France. At the same time, however, he also realized how important it was to build American defensive, especially naval, strength.²³²

Adams thought that building up the navy was the most important and most effective step the United States could take. Even though some people accused

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., 484.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² McCullough, *John Adams*, 484.

Adams of endangering the peace because of the military build-up, he was convinced that it was a necessary step.²³³ Besides needing a strong navy to protect American commerce from France and Great Britain, and to allow the United States to continue her growing sea commerce without depending on the British navy for assistance, naval strength was needed to help keep marine insurance rates reasonable. Soon after Adams became president:

. . . the cost of insuring a ship from New York or New England bound for Jamaica skyrocketed to 40 percent of the value of both ship and cargo . . . the nation's expanding and protected commerce paid the cost of building and maintaining the navy. It has been suggested that American citizens saved more than eight million dollars in insurance rates after the navy was enlarged, a sum more than twice the total naval expenditures between 1794 and 1798.²³⁴

It is difficult to estimate how much Adams's experiences negotiating with the French and the British a decade or so earlier influenced his thinking, but it stands to reason that knowing the specific people involved, in some instances, and knowing the usual viewpoints of the Europeans probably helped Adams take the path that would be best, or least damaging, for the United States. Jefferson was

²³³ Ibid., 488.

²³⁴ Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 72-76.

convinced that the best hope for peace was for France to defeat Britain, and he thought that outcome was imminent enough that negotiations should drag out to allow it to happen. Adams, however, so mistrusted the French, because of his earliest experiences working with them in France and the Netherlands, that it might seem amazing that he tried so hard to reconcile with France. Yet, he was so ignored by the British that it might just as easily seem to be no wonder he was willing to go the extra mile to reconcile with France in order to keep the United States balanced on the tightrope of neutrality. Adams, like any good lawyer or diplomat, could also set aside his personal feelings to some extent when an issue concerned what was best for the United States.

Ultimately, Adams's insistence on maintaining U.S. neutrality in the face of one major European power's argument with another European power – which meant trying to keep a reasonably positive relationship with France at this point – harkened back to the explanation he gave to British peace negotiator Richard Oswald while the two were discussing European politics in general once the peace negotiations were going well:

For my own Part I thought America had been long enough involved in the Wars of Europe. She had been a Football between contending Nations from the Beginning, and it was easy to foresee that France and England both would endeavor to involve Us in their future Wars. I thought [it] our Interest and Duty to avoid [them] as much as

possible and to be compleatly independent and have nothing to do but in Commerce with either of them.²³⁵

The result of the May 15, 1797, special session of Congress was one more attempt to negotiate with France. Elbridge Gerry, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and John Marshall were appointed as commissioners to try to settle matters. They accomplished nothing, in the face of French lack of interest in treating when there was no payment to be gained from it. However, Congress did not learn of the failure until after its regular session began in November 1797. Adams was already preparing for this news by asking his cabinet members for their views of the proper course: war? Embargo? Change in relations with other European powers, especially Great Britain? Most of the cabinet response came through Secretary of War James McHenry's reply, which was a rather blatant statement of Alexander Hamilton's recommendations to forge an alliance with Great Britain and share the spoils of war when Britain won the Floridas, Louisiana, Spanish South America; the United States would get the territory east of the Mississippi and the port of New Orleans.²³⁶

²³⁵ Lyman H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 3, *Diary 1782-1804* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 52.

²³⁶ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 228-237

Once the news of the commission's failure arrived, however, Adams then asked his cabinet whether or not to let Congress know all the details of the venture, and whether or not to recommend a declaration of war. While Adams seemed to have no suspicion at the time that McHenry's responses were actually those of Hamilton, it was obvious that Adams was not interested in tightening connections with Great Britain. "It was at war with the whole theory of his life, and all the lessons of his experience,"²³⁷ according to John Quincy Adams and Charles Francis Adams, the president's son and grandson. That is, such policies promoted neither the neutrality required in balancing the powers of the European nations, nor did they bode well for the United States in obtaining Adams's ultimate goal by negotiating the thin line she needed to walk between Great Britain and France so as not to fall prey to either.

By 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte was in command of sufficient land and sea forces to cross the Channel and attack Britain. As Austria dropped out of the war, Adams's fear of a more or less united Europe appeared to be developing. Even worse, intelligence reports suggested that a French invasion of England was imminent, which, if it succeeded, would create a colossus of France.²³⁸ However, Napoleon shifted his sights to Egypt, taking the pressure off the British-French

²³⁷ Ibid., 238.

²³⁸ Ferling, *John Adams*, 351.

feud. The exception was the February 1798 attack of a French privateer on a British merchant ship inside Charleston Harbor.²³⁹

The French government again refused to see the three American envoys, and the Directory decreed that all French ports were closed to neutral shipping. In addition, any ship carrying anything produced in England was subject to French capture. This did nothing to lessen the pressure on the United States, of course. Adams, still wanting peace, also prodded his country to prepare to defend itself if necessary, primarily by establishing a competent navy. He hoped to strengthen the navy by building and buying ships of the line from Great Britain,²⁴⁰ as he was not a fan of standing armies.²⁴¹ He thought a long period of Franco-American enmity was likely, so that there was nothing to be gained by declaring war with France, but urged that the 1778 treaties with France be suspended although thought that it would be wise to leave at least one envoy in Europe.²⁴² He even mentioned to the British ambassador, in the spring of 1798, that he expected war with France.²⁴³ Adams's goals, however, were peace and neutrality to give the United States time

²³⁹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 494.

²⁴⁰ Ferling, *John Adams*, 352.

²⁴¹ McCullough, *John Adams*, 495-497.

²⁴² Ferling, *John Adams*, 352.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 355.

to develop its strength and stability, according to historian Ralph Adams Brown.

Because of his experience negotiating treaties in, and with, France and Great

Britain:

Adams wished to avoid European entanglements. This was no new idea with the president. As far back as 1777 Adams had been fearful of an alliance with France, and in 1782, while negotiating for peace, he had demonstrated his distrust of bilateral diplomacy. . . . even an informal alliance, even the acceptance of temporary military or naval assistance . . . would limit America's independence and might inadvertently draw her into some European imbroglio . . . He felt that Britain's interest in alliance with the United States, or even in naval cooperation, was predicated on self-interest. . . . He . . . was alert to the danger of European involvement. [W]ar for conquest and gain might precipitate civil war and the splitting of the nation.²⁴⁴

Adams also knew that Congress would not vote for war unless he told it the outrageous bribery demands the French made through Foreign Minister Charles Talleyrand's letter: a formal apology, a large U.S. loan to France, and fifty thousand pounds sterling. There was also a possibility that declaring war on

²⁴⁴ Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 148.

France might provoke the French to kill Pinckney, Marshall and Gerry, who were still in Paris. Adams told Congress only that the diplomatic mission had failed, and that all U.S. merchant vessels needed to be fully armed. When House Republicans demanded to see the secret correspondence, Adams provided it. The Republicans voted to keep it quiet, but the Federalist Senate published fifty thousand copies.²⁴⁵

Adams then focused attention on perceived enemies at home by pushing through Congress the Alien and Sedition Acts as war measures. Francophobia was rampant, even though war between France and America had not been declared.²⁴⁶ While Adams never did invoke the Alien Acts,²⁴⁷ he did urge prosecution of (mostly Republican) editors under the terms of the Sedition Act, which he later more or less repudiated as being unconstitutional. Whether or not Adams's time in Europe influenced his support for these acts is not clear. He certainly had dealt with rather unflattering portrayals in the English press, as noted in Chapter II describing Adams's term in London as minister plenipotentiary, but he had also suffered much worse from the American press, especially during elections. The fact that the country was almost at, if not in the middle of, war probably

²⁴⁵ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 40-41. This was, of course, the "XYZ Affair."

²⁴⁶ Ferling, *John Adams*, 504.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 505.

contributed to the general frustration with vicious articles, drawings, and some outright lies in the press. It might have been the first time a president tried to muzzle the American press during wartime, and even insinuate that criticism of the administration was the same as lack of patriotism, but it would be far from the last time.

When American envoy Elbridge Gerry finally returned from France in the autumn of 1798, he reported that France wanted peace. As good as that news might have been, it did not necessarily suit all the American officials. Hamilton had wanted to “liberate” Spanish Florida and Louisiana with a combination of a British fleet and American troops, but Adams reminded him that the United States was friends with Spain at the moment.²⁴⁸ Only America’s growing naval strength made peace possible, according to Adams, as he and Hamilton discussed the European situation. Hamilton was confident of the British empire, saying that Britain had the upper hand in the war, and would help restore the Bourbons to power in France, so America must join the British, not deal with the French government.²⁴⁹

Adams still maintained that neutrality was the best course for America, and continued to work toward negotiating with France. To that end, he agreed, in

²⁴⁸ Ferling, *John Adams*, 518.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 531.

February 1799, to send three new envoys to France: William Vans Murray, already serving as minister to the Netherlands; Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth, and North Carolina Governor William Davie. After receiving a letter in July 1799 from Talleyrand, in which the foreign affairs minister sent direct assurance that the American envoys would be welcomed properly, “with the respect due the representative of a free, independent and powerful country,”²⁵⁰ Adams wrote to Secretary of State Charles Pickering:

. . . I dread no longer their [French] diplomatic skill. I have seen it & felt it & been the victim of it, these twenty one years. . . .²⁵¹

In October 1799, Adams cabinet tried to talk him out of sending the envoys. When that tactic failed, Alexander Hamilton met with Adams²⁵² and argued that the peace mission should wait until the French political situation stabilized, because the French might bring the exiled king, Louis XVIII, to the throne. According to Abigail Adams, Adams’s reply, probably based upon his decade of close association with French politicians, was: “I should as soon expect . . . that the sun, moon & stars will fall from their orbits, as events of that kind

²⁵⁰ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 49; Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: the Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Scribners, 1966), 174.

²⁵¹ Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams*, 104.

²⁵² Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 54.

take place in any such period, but suppose such an event possible, can it be any injury to our Country to have envoys there?”²⁵³ When Hamilton suggested that the peace mission might provoke England, as Jay’s Treaty had inflamed the French, Adams dismissed the concern. The British would know that more conflict with the United States would mean more cooperation between the Americans and the French.²⁵⁴ Ellsworth and Davie sailed to Europe in November 1799 on Adams’s orders.

Adams’s position emphasizing continued attempts to work out some sort of peaceful agreement with France prevailed. Murray, Ellsworth and Davie were welcomed with open arms by French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, and peace with France became a welcome reality by means of an agreement negotiated at the Convention of Môtrefontaine, signed October 3, 1800, north of Paris.²⁵⁵ The full text of the latest Franco-American treaty made its American debut in a Baltimore paper on November 7, 1800; the official copy arrived a month later and

²⁵³ Ibid., 55; Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, her elder sister, from Philadelphia, 30 December 1799, as published in Stewart Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1947), 224; Chernow, *Hamilton*, 597-600.

²⁵⁴ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 55.

²⁵⁵ DeConde, *The Quasi-War*, 255-256; Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 59-60. William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams, 27 September and 22 December 1800.

was submitted to the Senate in December,²⁵⁶ which approved it February 3, 1801.²⁵⁷

The treaty came too late to help Adams in the election of 1800, in which he was frequently excoriated as a monarchist and more British than American,²⁵⁸ neither of which were true. The Republicans alleged, anyway, that the Federalist Party was pro-British in orientation as it denounced the provisional army, the naval expansion to prepare for possible war, decried Federalist taxes, and promised the quick repeal of the Alien and Sedition Acts.²⁵⁹ The charge prompted the tribute to Adams in the *Washington Federalist*, previously mentioned, which said that Adams was “. . . more conversant with the views, jealousies, resources, and intrigues of Great Britain, France and Holland than any other American”²⁶⁰ because of the years Adams spent in those countries.

Knowing those “views, jealousies, resources, and intrigues” of Britain and France probably was what kept Adams nibbling away at the roadblocks to peace that both countries threw up periodically. Adams might have seen that European

²⁵⁶ Ferling, *John Adams*, 552.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 560.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 544.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 399.

²⁶⁰ McCullough, *John Adams*, 546. *Washington Federalist*, 7 October 1800.

diplomacy did not usually move rapidly nor make sudden twists or turns, except because of outside forces.

Many Federalists believed that war with France was inevitable and welcomed the opportunity to avenge “wounded national honor,” to assist in destroying the French revolutionary government, and to help keep Great Britain from falling to France.²⁶¹ Adams, however, believed that the only direct threat to American soil might be sudden incursions against coastal cities, and that was remote threat at best. He feared a large, standing army, such as those often maintained by European monarchs, because it could be “a vehicle for tyranny and corruption” and – amazingly enough – might result in the sudden imposition of monarchy in the United States.²⁶²

While Adams’s diplomatic skills bought the United States peace with France, they frustrated other American statesmen who might have had much more parochial and short-term views of the situation, in addition to seeing the international game as something more personal than it really was.

Shortly before moving from the White House, Adams reflected on his term as president and concluded that by preventing war with France, he had kept

²⁶¹ Ferling, *John Adams*, 355.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

Great Britain “in awe” of the United States.²⁶³ That position would not have been possible to continue if America had jumped into active hostilities with France, considering how isolated and vulnerable the United States was at the time.²⁶⁴ Adams insisted that his peace mission was “the most splendid diamond in my crown; or, if anyone thinks this expression too monarchical, I will say, the most brilliant feather in my cap.” Americans must realize that “great is the guilt of an unnecessary war.”²⁶⁵ The treaty with France meant that the fledgling United States avoided a confrontation that might have endangered the country’s independence. In addition, Adams began a cordial relationship with Napoleon that set the stage for President Jefferson to make the Louisiana Purchase, making America truly continental.²⁶⁶

Even after leaving the presidency, Adams watched President Jefferson struggle to keep the United States out of the clutches of either Great Britain or

²⁶³ Ibid., 409.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 62; Charles Francis Adams, *The Life and Works of John Adams*, vol. 10, (Boston: Little & Brown, 1854), 113, John Adams to James Lloyd, 16 February 1813; McCullough, *John Adams*, 474.

²⁶⁶ Beschloss, *Presidential Courage*, 62; Adams, *Works*, 10:113, John Adams to James Lloyd, 16 February 1813; McCullough, *John Adams*, 474.

France. When Great Britain attacked The Chesapeake in 1802, impressing American sailors into service on British ships, both Adams and John Quincy Adams were indignant and called for measures of redress:

[They] were not so far carried away by their feelings as to overlook the superciliousness of Great Britain. They had known it by personal experience in its most offensive shapes, and they felt that submission to it in any form was not the most likely way to put an end to it for the future.²⁶⁷

Jefferson continued to make weak responses when strong responses might have worked better, as well as failing to build the U.S. naval force to the point where it could defend the seaboard and protect the national commerce. Rather, the commercial ships were left to fend for themselves at sea or rot at port, damaging commerce and the economy further by making the rates for insuring commercial ships soar to new highs, nearly to the point of making shipping itself not worth the risk. The alternative of submitting to Great Britain still drew vehement opposition from Adams *père et fils*:

Their joint experience had produced no clearer lesson than this, that Great Britain seldom respected the rights of any nation on the sea,

²⁶⁷ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 366.

whose power did not make itself feared. . . . So they declared themselves on the side of the government in maintaining, at all events, the rights of America.”²⁶⁸

Once again, it was Adams’s ability to look at the situation from the European perspective, gleaned from his long and often frustrating years in Paris and London, that allowed him to gauge what responses to make to British and French events and how to interpret their actions and reactions to each other as well as to what the United States said or did. Whether or not Adams would have had the same patience and wisdom had he not had the experience of being the first U.S. ambassador to London is anyone’s guess. Indeed, it is also possible that he would not have been tagged to be the first vice president and second president of the United States without that diplomatic experience, for even the Secretary of State that he inherited from President Washington and finally dismissed, Timothy Pickering, acknowledged that Adams was “a statesman, a diplomatist, of great experience.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 371.

²⁶⁹ Timothy Pickering, *Review of the Correspondence Between the Hon. John Adams and the Late Wm. Cunningham, Esq.* (Salem: Cushing & Appleton, 1824), 11.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

So how did the experiences John Adams had while serving as America's first minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain, and his experiences negotiating the Treaty of Paris, affect his foreign policy during his vice presidency and presidency?

While there is no way to determine an exact correlation between a discrete experience and a particular action, circumstantial evidence suggests that Adams's time in Great Britain and France honed his negotiating skills for the international forum, and above all, allowed him the chance to observe the players "on stage," so to speak, as well as "back stage." More specifically, he appeared to learn from observations, discussions, and negotiations the value of patience; the importance of understanding how other parties viewed their own interests; and the delicacy of the network of relationships that characterized European politics at the time.

Adams seemed to have realized just how important it had become that even America, so far away from the Continent, needed to conduct her relationships with other countries carefully. After all, what had started as a localized colonial war within the British Empire in 1775 became a global conflict by 1780, as Great Britain warred with France, Spain and the Netherlands as well

as the United States.²⁷⁰ The reason for war was the American colonial empires – two continents of unfathomable resources.

Whereas the Americans were fighting a revolutionary, ideological war, the European powers were fighting for essentially limited political and commercial advantages in accordance with their ancient and consecrated system of the balance of power.²⁷¹

Adams was determined that America would not become prey for any European power, but would avoid the European political intrigue at least until such time as America became more capable of fending off power plays.

To that end, Adams put his hard-won experience to good use as he evaluated rapidly developing events within America and on the Continent, and how those events related to each other. He tried to steer his country through the rapids and whirlpools of European power politics, refusing to allow her to be driven onto the rocks of detrimental alliances, promoted by Hamiltonian power- and glory-seeking, in the treacherous company of Great Britain. Adams also realized the necessity of keeping America from falling for the Jeffersonian illusion of safety in the equally treacherous clutches of the French, as Adams had

²⁷⁰ James Bishop Peabody, *The Founding Fathers: John Adams: A Biography in His Own Words*, vol. 2 (New York: Newsweek, 1973), 266.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

explained in great detail to U.S. Secretary of Foreign Affairs Robert Livingston as early as July 1783.²⁷²

Would Adams have followed the same course had he never had the opportunity to spend nearly a decade in Europe, negotiating and conversing with diplomats and even royalty from nearly every European country? He certainly had some basis for the same or similar understanding because of his extensive study of government, history, and philosophy, as shown by the confidence his Continental Congress colleagues had in him. But would he have developed the breadth and depth of understanding of what made Great Britain and France tick had he not lived there? While a definitive answer is, of course, impossible, the tendency is to say probably not, considering that, at the time, European politics were more intricate than colonial politics because sovereign countries, not colonies, were involved; countries with sometimes very different cultures were involved; and the time delay in communication made it even more difficult to know whether or not to respond quickly or to wait to find out what the other player(s) had done. In short, diplomacy with Europe was an extremely slow chess

²⁷² Charles Francis Adams, ed. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With A Life of the Author*, vol. 8 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1853), 21. Adams's conversation with the Duc de la Vauguyon regarding West India trade, wherein the Duc expressed pleasure at the idea of another war between the United States and the British. See footnote 185, p. 66, *supra*.

game. The advantage was that because of the time delay, Adams and others also had much more time to think about the situations and the possible repercussions of actions.

Adams referred several times to his experiences in Great Britain while discussing the events of his vice presidency and presidency, usually in letters to Abigail Adams or other family members. The references suggest that Adams himself considered his years in Europe as valuable training for handling the issues that came before him:

Britain, however, has done much amiss, and deserves all that will fall thereon. Her insolence, which you and I have known and felt more than any other Americans, will lead her to ruin, and us half-way. We indeed are, in point of insolence, her very image and superscription . . .²⁷³

Yet again, in another of the rather philosophical letters he wrote to Jefferson in 1816, Adams reiterated his position on how the United States needed to manage the relationship with Great Britain so that America would not become a colony once again:

Towards G. B. I would adopt their own Maxim. An English Jocky says "If I have a wild horse to brake I begin by convincing him that I am

²⁷³ John Quincy Adams & Charles Francis Adams, *Life of John Adams* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005, originally published by Lippincott, 1871), 174.

his Master. And then I will convince him that I am his Friend.” I am well assured that nothing will restrain G. B. from injuring Us, but fear.²⁷⁴

Whether his part involved casting a tie-breaking vote in the U.S. Senate,²⁷⁵ appointing yet another peace commission to approach France (that of Murray, Ellsworth and Davie), or rejecting the Hamiltonian ploys (the Miranda plot to ally with Great Britain in search of territorial plunder, personal glory, and possible disaster), Adams consistently held to the course he had embraced as minister to Great Britain as well as inherited from President Washington: maintain absolute neutrality as to Great Britain and France (and other European powers).

It probably would have been much easier on Adams to go along with the Hamiltonian plots. Adams would have had considerably more support and fewer impediments by choosing sides. However, because of his experiences in France,

²⁷⁴ Cappon, *Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 502.

²⁷⁵ Adams & Adams, *Life of John Adams*, 152-155. Such as the veto Adams cast to defeat a bill, passed by the House, to prohibit all of Great Britain’s commodities from being imported into the United States until Great Britain completely redressed grievances caused by Orders in Council issued by Great Britain to harass the trade of neutrals, that is, the United States, after Great Britain declared war against France in 1794. The bill would have violated President Washington’s policy of absolute neutrality; would have aborted the mission of John Jay to attempt to settle the issues with a treaty; and would have involved the United States as a party in the dispute between the two great European powers.

the Netherlands, and Great Britain, Adams could be reasonably certain that by choosing sides in the Anglo-French disputes, he was quite possibly choosing the demise of America. He had once described the Anglo-American relationship, during peace treaty negotiations, as resembling that of the Eagle and Cat:

An Eagle scaling over a Farmers Yard espied a Creature, that he thought an Hair. He pounced upon him and took him up. In the Air the Cat seized him by the Neck with her Teeth and round the Body with her fore and hind Claws. The Eagle finding Herself scratched and pressed, bids the Cat let go and fall down. --No says the Cat: I wont let go and fall, you shall stoop and set me down.²⁷⁶

Adams had seen the British and French ministers operate; he had been the victim of those operations in the Netherlands. He understood how Britain and France determined where their interests lay because he had discussed those interests with their ministers and had tried to convince them to act against those interests at times, as shown by his initially unsuccessful attempt to gain recognition of the United States by the United Provinces in 1780-1783. Perhaps equally as important, he had been in the same room, across the table, or standing next to the ministers during these negotiations, able to observe their facial

²⁷⁶ Lyman H. Butterfield, *The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 45. Diary entry 3 November 1782.

expressions and body postures, both of which can often convey more, and more accurate, information than the words being used. Adams had been a keen observer of people since his youth; several diary entries noted numerous observations about how people looked and acted, as well as his dedication to improving that particular skill. With this power of observation, Adams probably absorbed much more information about his European adversaries than he realized at the time. Owing to his deep devotion to his country, as he told King George III in their first meeting, he would not have hesitated to use any scintilla of information available in his drive to protect the interests of the United States and give her the time she needed to develop the strength to repel any subsequent assaults by any European power, and to grow into the great country he dreamed and believed she could be.

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APPENDIX

Timeline for John Adams

Timeline for John Adams

1735 – Adams born Oct. 30 (Oct. 19, O.S.) in the North Precinct of Braintree (later named Quincy), Massachusetts.

1756 – Signs contract with James Putnam to read law for two years.

1764 – Marries Abigail Smith Oct. 25.

1765 – Composes the Braintree Instructions, which denounce the Stamp Act.

1769 – In May, writes instructions for Boston representatives to the General Court on protesting the presence of British troops and the growing power of admiralty courts.

1773 – In January and February, publishes articles in the *Boston Gazette* opposing crown salaries to Superior Court judges. In May, is elected by the House a member of the Council but is vetoed by Governor Hutchinson.

1774 – In March, furnishes legal authorities for impeachment proceedings against Chief Justice Peter Oliver. In May, elected by the House a member of the Council but vetoed by Governor Gage. In June, elected a Massachusetts delegate to the Continental Congress, which he attends September through October. Reelected in December.

1775 – In January through April, publishes essays signed “Novanglus” in the *Boston Gazette*. In May through July, attends second Continental Congress; proposes George Washington as commander in chief. In August, is reelected to Continental Congress, which he attends September through December. In

October, is appointed Chief Justice of Massachusetts; resigns February 1777 without ever serving. Is reelected to the Continental Congress in December.

1776 – February through October, attends Continental Congress. March through April, writes *Thoughts on Government*, which is published and used in many states for making constitutions. Appointed to a committee to draft a declaration of independence in June and July, and makes the principal speech in favor of the resolution for independence. Drafts a “Plan of Treaties” in June through September. Reelected to Continental Congress in November.

1777 – January through September, attends Continental Congress sitting in Baltimore, then Philadelphia. Elected by Congress a joint commissioner, with Franklin and Arthur Lee, to France, replacing Silas Deane in November; commission dissolved September 1778, Franklin named sole minister.

1778 – February through March, sails to Bordeaux, France. First audience by Louis XVI of France in May.

1779 – June through August, sails from Lorient, France, to Boston. Elected to represent Braintree in new state constitution convention August through November, elected minister, by Congress, to negotiate treaties of peace and commerce with Great Britain in September, but commissions revoked June-July 1781. Sails from Boston to Ferrol, Spain, in November and December.

1780 – February, arrives in Paris after crossing northern Spain and part of France on land. In June, commissioned by Congress to negotiate a Dutch loan. In

December, elected minister by Congress to negotiate a treat of amity and commerce with the Netherlands. Remains in Netherland until July 1781.

1781 – In June, elected by Congress first among five join commissioners to treat for peace with Great Britain. In July, returns to Paris to discuss peace mediation, rejects the proposals, returns to Amsterdam until October 1782.

1782 – In April, recognized by the Dutch States General as minister plenipotentiary to the Netherlands. Purchases first American legation building in Europe at The Hague, the Hôtel des Etats-Unis. Contracts for first Dutch loan to the United states in June. Signs treaty of amity and commerce with the Netherlands in October. October through November, assists negotiations, with fellow commissioners, of preliminary treaty between United states and Great Britain, signed at Versailles November 30. Remains in Paris.

1783 – Begins conferences on terms of definitive treaty with British negotiator in April. Signs definitive treat in September. Visits London in October, November, December.

1784 – Executes contract for a second Dutch loan in January. Elected joint commissioner, with Franklin and Jefferson, to negotiate treaties of amity and commerce with twenty-three European and African powers, May through June. In August, joins his family in London, after which they travel to Paris until May 1785.

1785 – In February, elected by Congress first American minister to the Court of St. James's. Has audience with George III in London in June. Leases first U.S. legation in London, now No. 9 Grosvenor Square, in June. Signs treaty of amity and commerce with Prussia in London in August.

1786 – Negotiated commercial treaties with Tripoli, Portugal, and Great Britain in London march through April.

1787 – In London, January, publishes first volume of *A Defence of the Constitutions of the Government of the United States of America*. Volume two follows in September, volume three in 1788. May through June, executes contract for third Dutch loan for the United States in Amsterdam. Excursion to the west of England with his family, July through August. In October, recalled at his request by Congress from London, the Netherlands mission, and joint mission with Jefferson to the Barbary Powers. Recall effect following February.

1788 – In February, has final audience with George III, then takes leave of the Stadholder and the States General at The Hague. Drafts contracts for a fourth Dutch loan to the United States. Leaves England for Boston, April through June, with family. In June, elected member of Massachusetts delegation to First Congress, but did not serve. Remains in Braintree for the moment.

1789 – March and April, elected vice president by 34 of 69 votes. In April, goes to New York City, seat of government, and presides over first Senate session of First Congress.

1790 – January through August, presides over second Senate session of First Congress. Moves to Philadelphia, new government seat, in November. Presides over third Senate session of First Congress December through following March.

1791 – October through April, presides over the Senate for first session of Second Congress.

1792 – December through following March, presides over second Senate session at Second Congress.

1793 – Reelected Vice President by 77 of 132 votes. Returns to Philadelphia. December through May, presides over the first Senate session of the Third Congress.

1794 – November through following February, presides over the second Senate session of the Third Congress.

1795 – In June, presides over a special session of the Senate called to ratify Jay's Treat. Returns to Philadelphia November to December, and presides over the Senate in the first session of Fourth Congress December through following May.

1796 – In December, elected president of the United States, 71 of 139 votes; Thomas Jefferson becomes vice president. Returns to Philadelphia.

1797 – Takes office as president March 4. In May through July, calls a special session of Congress to deal with the French crisis, and appoints first peace mission to France. In November, delivers first annual message to Congress.

1798 – In March, tells Congress about the dispatches from the American envoys to France, and declares state of quasi-war. May through June, recommends and oversees the adoption of measures for establishing the Navy Department and creating a provisional army. Appoints George Washington commander in chief. In July, signs Alien and Sedition Acts into law. In December, delivers second annual message to Congress, suggesting appointment of a new mission to France.

1799 – Appoints second peace mission to France in February. Delivers third annual message to Congress in December.

1800 – In May, dismisses cabinet members James McHenry and Timothy Pickering. Is chosen presidential candidate for the Federalists in May. Inspects new seat of government in Washington in May and June. End of quasi-war concluded in September and October, after which Adams travels to Washington to be the first occupant of the unfinished President's House. Abigail follows. In December, Adams loses the election with 65 votes to 73 by both Jefferson and Burr.

1801 – Appoints many new judges to extend influence of federal judiciary in January. Appoints John Marshall as chief justice of the Supreme Court. In March, leaves Washington the morning of Jefferson's inauguration.

1802 – Begins writing the first part of his autobiography, which he completes in June 1805.

1805 – Publishes *Discourses on Davila*.

1806 – Begins second part of autobiography; completed early in 1807.

1807 – Writes third part of autobiography, but does not finish it.

1809 – Letters of reminiscence published in the *Boston Patriot* in April and May.

1812 – Resumes correspondence with Thomas Jefferson in January.

1818 – Abigail dies October 28.

1820 – Attends sessions of the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention as Quincy delegate in November and December; proposes Bill of Rights to remove all religious restrictions.

1825 – In February, son John Quincy Adams elected president of the United States by the U.S. House.

1826 – Adams dies on July 4 at the Old House in Quincy a few hours after Thomas Jefferson dies at Monticello in Virginia.

From: L. H. Butterfield (Ed.), *The Adams Papers: Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 4 (New York: Atheneum, 1964; Originally published by Harvard University Press), 257-271.