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[The Library of Congress](#) > [Exhibitions](#) > [Creating the United States](#) > Formation of Political Parties

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## Creating the United States Formation of Political Parties



[Home](#) | [Exhibition Overview](#) | [Exhibition Items](#) | [Public Programs](#) | [Learn More](#) | [Interactive Presentations](#) | [Acknowledgments](#)

**Sections:** [Creating the Declaration of Independence](#) | [Creating the United States Constitution](#) | [Creating the Bill of Rights](#)

[Return to Creating the Bill of Rights List](#) [Previous Section: Demand for a Bill of Rights](#) | [Next Section: Election of 1800](#)

Political factions or parties began to form during the struggle over ratification of the federal Constitution of 1787. Friction between them increased as attention shifted from the creation of a new federal government to the question of how powerful that federal government would be. The Federalists, led by Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton, wanted a strong central government, while the Anti-Federalists, led by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, advocated states' rights instead of centralized power. Federalists coalesced around the commercial sector of the country while their opponents drew their strength from those favoring an agrarian society. The ensuing partisan battles led George Washington to warn of "the baneful effects of the spirit of party" in his Farewell Address as president of United States.

"Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally."

*George Washington, Farewell Address, September 19, 1796*



### James Madison, Father of the Constitution

James Madison (1751–1838), an Orange County, Virginia, planter shown in this portrait by Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), was a strong proponent of a strong central government to replace the Articles of Confederation. Often credited with being the Father of the Constitution of 1787, Madison established the Jeffersonian-Republican Party with Thomas Jefferson and in 1809 succeeded him as president of the United States.



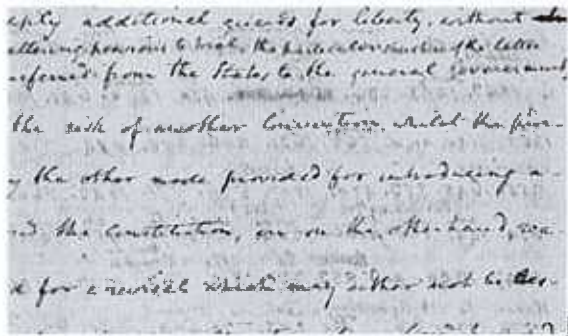
[Enlarge](#)

Charles Willson Peale. *James Madison*, 1783. Miniature portrait on ivory. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (107.00.00) [Digital ID# us0107]

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### Development of Political Factions and Parties

Opponents (Anti-Federalists) and supporters (Federalists) of the new constitution began to coalesce into political factions. In Virginia, Anti-Federalists led by Patrick Henry (1736–1799) defeated James Madison's election to the Senate and forced him into a campaign for the House of Representatives against a strong Anti-Federalist, James Monroe (1758–1831), later the fifth president. The rapid evolution of political parties from factions was an inventive American response to political conflict.



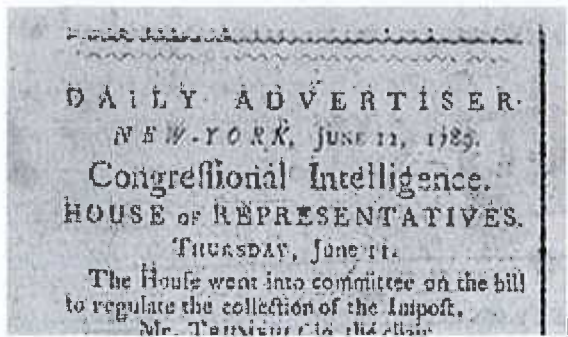
[Enlarge](#)

Letter from James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, December 8, 1788. Manuscript. Thomas Jefferson Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (88.00.00) [Digital ID# us0088]

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### Madison Calls for Amending the Constitution

Although James Madison had opposed early amendments to the Federal Constitution, he hoped to derail the growing political demand for major constitutional changes by offering a bill of rights as a diversion of a tub for a whale, a reference to a story by Jonathan Swift in which a tub is tossed to a whale to keep it from wrecking a boat. In his June 8, 1789, speech Madison favored inserting amending phrases into the body of the Constitution.



[Enlarge](#)

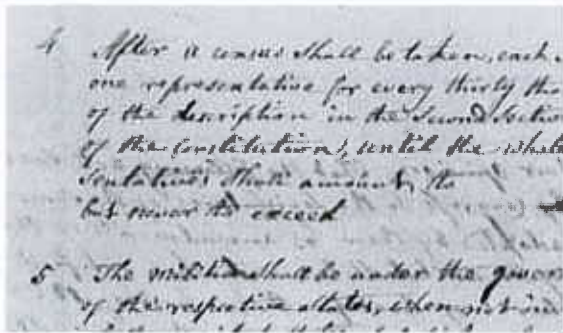
James Madison, Speech in Congress, June 8, 1789, in *New York Daily Advertiser*, June 12, 1789. [Serial and Government Publications Division](#) Library of Congress (83.01.00) [Digital ID# us\_int0001]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj7>

### Amending the Constitution

Roger Sherman (1721–1793), a congressman from Connecticut, argued in a special congressional committee appointed on July 21, 1789, that any amendments should be appended to the Constitution. On August 19, 1789, the House of Representatives finally adopted Sherman's argument that to insert them into the text would be too confusing and voted instead to add the amendments by way of a supplement.

This list of proposed amendments in Sherman's writing is probably a draft of a report by a committee on which he served. It differs markedly from the amendments finally proposed and sent to the states. As such, it provides valuable insights into the creation of the Bill of Rights.



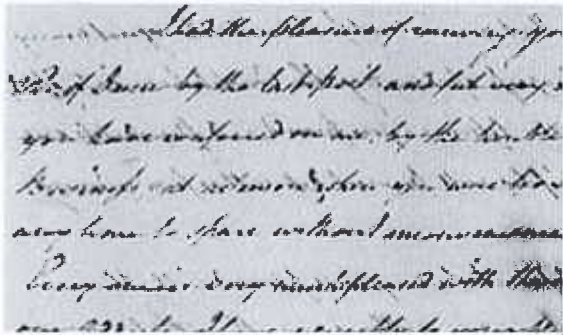
[Enlarge](#)

Roger Sherman. Draft Report of a Special Committee of Congress, ca. July 21, 1789. Manuscript. James Madison Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (81.00.01) [Digital ID#s [us0081\\_1](#), [us0081](#)]

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## Support for Amendments as Political Diversion

Despite North Carolina's refusal to ratify the Constitution without the addition of amendments, the state's governor, Samuel Johnston (1733–1816), opposed any material alterations to the Constitution but advocated for a Flourish & Dressing . . . such as a pompous Declaration of Rights. Johnston was one of the many Federalists who supported amendments for personal liberties only as a political tactic to fend off more substantive changes in federal powers.



[Enlarge](#)

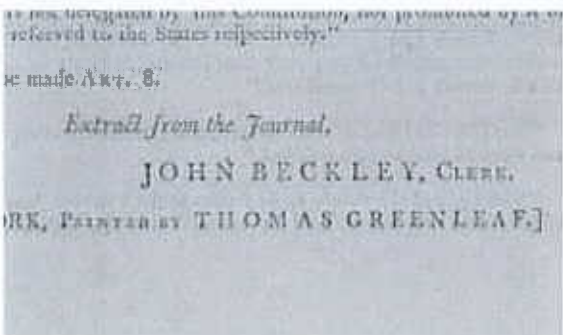
Letter from Samuel Johnston to James Madison, July 8, 1789. Manuscript. James Madison Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (81.01.00) [Digital ID# [us0081\\_01p1](#)]

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[Back to Top](#)

## Amending the Body of the Constitution

A committee of the House of Representatives appointed by James Madison originally envisioned that amendments on individual rights would be incorporated into the body of the Constitution, not appended as a supplement. This July 28, 1789, committee report presented by John Vining (1758–1802) of Delaware clearly shows the incorporation plan with the rights scattered throughout the Constitution.



[Enlarge](#)

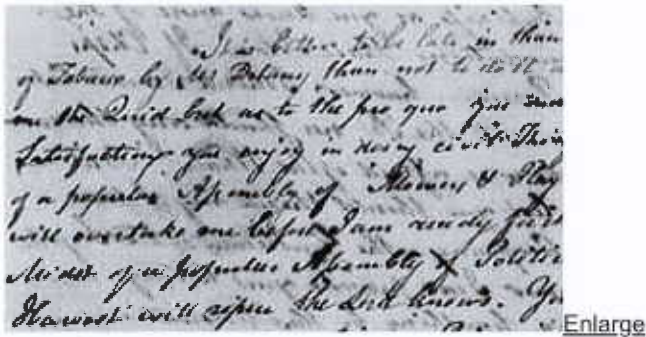
Congress of the United States, in the House of Representatives, . . . [Report] from the Committee of Eleven. New York: Thomas Greenleaf, 1789. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (82.00.01) [Digital ID#s [us0082\\_1](#), [us0082](#)]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj4>



## Warning of Prematurely Amending Constitution

Richard Peters (1743–1828), a Pennsylvania assemblyman and former delegate to the Continental Congress, warned James Madison about offering Amendments to the Machine before it is known whether it wants any. Peters, like many supporters of the Constitution, continued to oppose the adoption of a federal bill of rights.

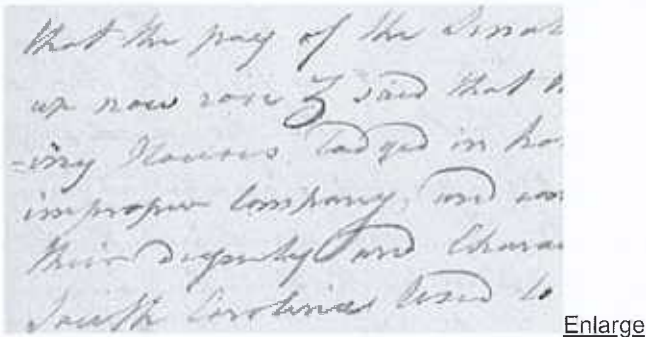


Letter from Richard Peters to James Madison, July 5, 1789. Manuscript. James Madison Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (82.01.00) [Digital ID# us0082\_01p1]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj5>

## Senate Treats Amendments Contemptuously

Many strong supporters of the federal Constitution saw no need to add a bill of rights, arguing that individual rights were already protected by the Constitution, common law, and state constitutions. William Maclay (1737–1804), a senator from Pennsylvania reported that the proposed amendments were treated contemptuously by senators, but nevertheless the Senate agreed to consider them.

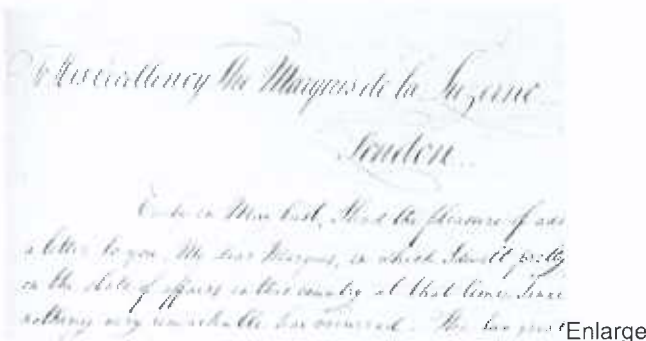


William Maclay. Journal, August 25, 1789. Manuscript. [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (83.00.00) [Digital ID# us0083\_1, us0083\_2, us0083\_3, us0083\_4, us0083\_5]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj6>

## Locating the National Capital

In this letter to the former French minister to the United States, Marquis de la Luzerne (1741–1791), George Washington reported that despite the “good deal of warmth” that marked the Congressional debates over funding the Revolutionary War debt and the location of the national capital, a compromise had been reached. The federal government would assume all state and federal debts and, after a ten-year stay in Philadelphia, the capital would be located on the Potomac River near Washington’s home at Mount Vernon.



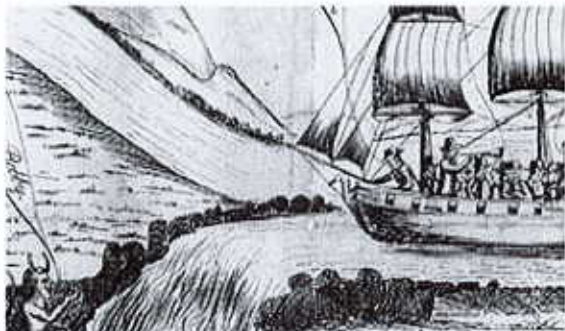
Letter from George Washington to Marquis de La Luzerne, August 10, 1790. Letter book. George Washington Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (088.04.00) [Digital ID # us0088\_04]

[Read the transcript](#)

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj35>

## Location of Capital Spurs Partisan Bickering

In July 1790, Congress decided to move the capital of the federal government from New York to a new city to be built in the District of Columbia (created from parts of Maryland and Virginia) on the Potomac River, with a ten-year interim in Philadelphia. The location of the capital was part of a critical compromise over funding of national and state debts. The Compromise of 1790 became a focal point for the emerging Federalist and Republican parties. This print satires the profit opportunities presented by the traveling capital.



[Enlarge](#)

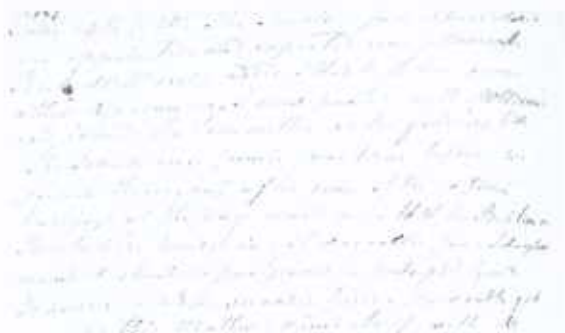
*Con-g-ss Embark'd on board the Ship Constitution of America Bound to Conogochegue by way of Philadelphia.* [New York, 1790] Etching. [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (90.01.00) [Digital ID# ppsca-19165]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj14>

[Back to top](#)

## Capital Location Negotiated

Pennsylvania Senator William Maclay (1737–1804) reported that Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton (1755–1804) offered to place the permanent national capital in Philadelphia in exchange for Pennsylvania's vote to approve the federal assumption of state debts from the Revolutionary War. According to Maclay, the Pennsylvania delegation turned down this offer. As a result Hamilton consummated a deal with Virginia that led to the national capital being located on the Potomac River.



[Enlarge](#)

William Maclay. Diary, 1789–1790. Manuscript. William Maclay Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (081.02.00) [Digital ID # us0081\_02]

[Read the transcript](#)

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj29>

## Survey of the Site for the Federal City of Washington

"An Act for establishing the temporary and permanent seat of the Government of the United States," was signed into law on July 16, 1790. After giving cursory consideration to other locations, George Washington selected a site for the seat of government with which he was very familiar—the banks of the Potomac River at the confluence of its Eastern Branch, just above his home at Mount Vernon.

Andrew Ellicott (1754–1820), federal surveyor of the District of Columbia, prepared this plan in 1792 of what would become the District of Columbia. The outline of the city's grid system and the location of the Capitol, the President's House, and the mall are clearly visible.



[Enlarge](#)

Andrew Ellicott. *Plan of the City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia: Ceded by the States of Virginia and Maryland to the United States of America, and by Them Established as the seat of their Government, after the Year MDCC.* Boston: Sam'l Hill, [1792]. Engraved map. [Geography and Map Division](#), Library of Congress (134.00.00) [Digital ID # ct002488]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj38>

### Georgetown: Suburb of the New Federal City

Within a decade of deciding to move the new federal capital to the banks of the Potomac River, what became known as "Washington, District of Columbia" began to emerge out of partisan politics and a tidal marsh. The federal city had just begun to take shape when the government moved here in 1800. This engraving provides a view of the waterfront at Georgetown, then a suburb of Washington.



[Enlarge](#)

George Isham Parkyns. (ca.1750–ca.1820) *View of the Suburbs of the City of Washington*, [ca. 1795]. Aquatint. [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (098.03.00) [Digital ID # ppmsca-23666]

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### First Bank of the United States

Created by a twenty-year federal charter on February 25, 1791, the Bank of the United States was a private corporation funded by stock sold to the federal government and individuals. The same bank bill also established a mint for issuing uniform currency. The Bank of the United States remained a contentious constitutional and political issue for decades, because opponents feared the centralized power of a national bank and opposed federal corporations.

1 of 2



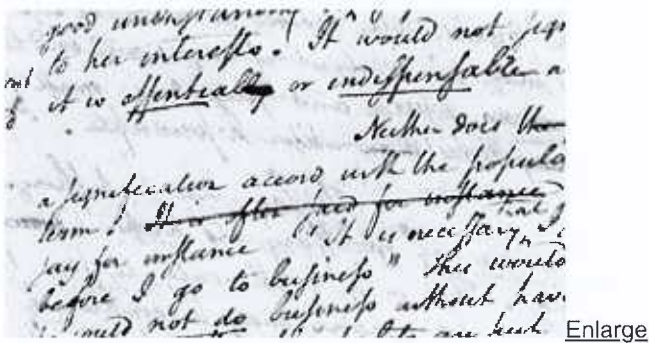




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## Partisan Clash over Creating National Bank

One of the early critical differences between Federalists and Republicans was a disagreement on the implied powers of the Constitution to allow for creation of a national bank. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson advocated a narrow construction of the Constitution that would have prohibited a national bank. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton supported the bank with a broad interpretation of the Constitution's implied powers under the general welfare clause. President Washington sided with Hamilton.



Alexander Hamilton. "Draft Report on the Constitutionality of a National Bank," February 23, 1791. Manuscript. Alexander Hamilton Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (089.01.02) [Digital ID # [us0089\\_01p4](#), [us0089\\_01p1](#), [us0089\\_01p2](#), [us0089\\_01p3](#)]

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[Back to Top](#)

## Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton played major roles in the creation of the United States. He was an aide-de-camp to George Washington during the Revolution, a member of the Continental Congress in 1782, 1783, and 1788 and the Constitutional Convention in 1787, and the first secretary of the treasury. In 1804 Aaron Burr killed Hamilton in a duel arising from ill-will after Federalist leader Hamilton supported Thomas Jefferson instead of Burr in the disputed election of 1801.

1 of 3



William G. Jackman, Alexander Hamilton, Engraving

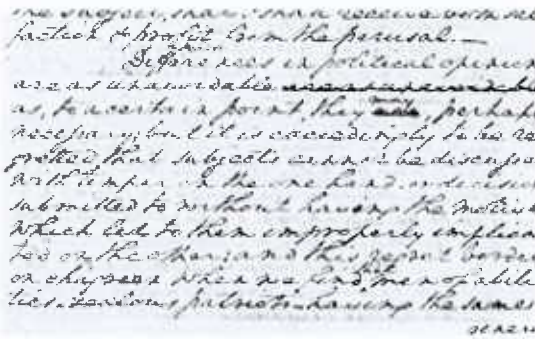


Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj25>

## Washington Tries to Pacify the Parties

As party lines were drawn in the new federal government, President George Washington tried to pacify the parties by addressing the chief protagonists—Alexander Hamilton, his secretary of the treasury, and Thomas Jefferson, his secretary of state. Although both Hamilton and Jefferson promised to work together, the struggle between the Federalist and Republican parties continued unabated.

1 of 2



Letter from George Washington to Alexander Hamilton

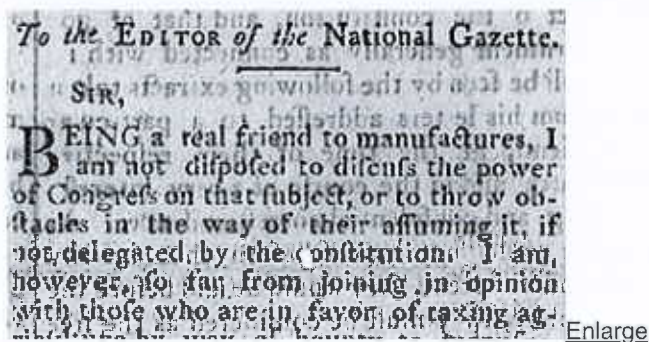
[Read the transcript](#)

*prejudiced has has ye  
fallibility, I believe it  
impracticable to me.*

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## Republican Party Christened by James Madison

In September 1792, James Madison coined the term Republican Party in an essay, A Candid State of Parties, published in the *National Gazette* of Philadelphia. Although the Jeffersonian-Republican Party drew strength from the Anti-Federalists, no one had more claim to the authorship of the federal Constitution than did Madison, one of the founders of the Jeffersonian-Republican Party.



[James Madison]. A Candid State of Politics. *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), September 22, 1792. [Serial and Government Publications Division](#) Library of Congress (90.00.00) [Digital ID# us0090]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj13>

## Jay's Treaty

Faced with British refusal to vacate western frontier forts as well as honor neutral shipping rights, President George Washington sent Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay (1745–1829) to London in 1794. The resulting treaty, which failed to resolve the issues but prevented a war with Great Britain, was extremely unpopular with the Jeffersonian Republicans. The Treaty of Amity, Commerce and



Navigation was quickly labeled "Jay's Treaty" and became a lightning rod for the political parties and a point of contention between the president and Congress over funds for its implementation.

The friends, purchasing  
Insurance with intention  
Dear Sir  
Yr. Most Obedt. Servt.  
General  
N. L. Butler

[Enlarge](#)

Letter from Pierce Butler to James Madison, June 26, 1795. Manuscript. James Madison Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (091.06.00) [Digital ID # us0091\_06]

[Read the transcript](#)

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## John Jay

John Jay (1745–1829), a prominent New York nationalist and former president of the Continental Congress, was among the first to call for a National Convention to replace or revise the Articles of Confederation. Jay was an outspoken advocate for the new Constitution and authored several of the *Federalist* essays. He served as first chief justice of the United States, 1789–1795. President Washington sent Jay to England in 1794 to negotiate a treaty, which became known as "Jay's Treaty."



[Enlarge](#)

"His Excellency John Jay, President of Congress & Minister Plenipotentiary from Congress at Madrid" in *Portraits of Generals, Ministers, Magistrates, Members of Congress and Others, Who Have Rendered Themselves Illustrious in the Revolution of the United States of North America*. London: R. Wilkinson and J. Debret, May 1783. Engraving after drawing by Pierre E. DuSimitière. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (092.02.00) [Digital ID # us0092\_02]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj33>

[Back to Top](#)

## A Champion to Challenge Alexander Hamilton

In this letter, Thomas Jefferson challenged James Madison to enter the pamphlet wars against his political rival Federalist Alexander Hamilton whom he asserted is really a colossus to the anti-republican party. There is nobody but yourself who can meet him, urged Jefferson.

*I do not send because  
it is said to be written  
by Beckley. ~~It is~~  
for the prison of Curle  
come from Beckley I do*

[Enlarge](#)

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, September 21, 1795. Manuscript. James Madison Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (88.01.00) [Digital ID#s [us0088\\_01p1](#), [us0088\\_01p2](#)]

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## Factional Fighting after Washington's Farewell

Despite George Washington's warning about the dangers of political factions or parties in his Farewell Address to the nation in 1796, the lack of a consensus candidate to assume the presidency only intensified party struggles. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson led partisan political factions or parties into the national elections of 1796. Washington even sought advice from two opposing partisan leaders, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison. Displayed here is a draft of Washington's Farewell Address, which Hamilton helped write.

*The principles of an excellent and virtuous  
government. Without looking forward to future  
as an ultimate (which however ought not to be out of  
sight) the ordinary and constant objects of public  
of the first of party, towards the maintenance of moderate  
make it the interest and the duty of a wise people  
to defend themselves and their rights.  
I mean to defend the Council as  
infected the administration of the Government. It is better  
to compromise with factionalism than to found a jealous  
and fully alarmed - the open salute for foreign  
influence and influence - which find an easy access  
to the channels of party passions - and so forth*

[Enlarge](#)

Alexander Hamilton. Draft of George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796. Manuscript. Alexander Hamilton Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (087.00.04) [Digital ID # [us0087p4](#), [us0087](#), [us0087\\_1](#), [us0087p2](#), [us0087p3](#)]

[Read the transcript](#)

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## Congress at Odds

This print captures the heated partisan debates in Congress between Vermont's Jeffersonian Republican representative, Matthew Lyon (1749–1822), and Connecticut's Federalist representative, Roger Griswold (1762–1812). They attacked each other with a cane and fireplace tongs on the floor of the House of Representatives on February 15, 1798. Griswold had accused Lyon of cowardice during the American Revolution and Lyon responded by spitting tobacco juice in Griswold's face.



[Enlarge](#)

Congressional Pugilists. Congress Hall, in Philadelphia, February 15, 1798. [Philadelphia], 1798. Etching. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (098.04.00) [Digital ID # ppmsca.19356]

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## George Washington, Commander in Chief

George Washington (1732–1799), a Virginia planter and veteran of America's frontier wars, was revolutionary America's only commander of all military forces throughout the eight-year war for independence. His leadership during the Revolution led to his election as the first president of the United States (1789–1797).



[Enlarge](#)

Charles Balthazar Julien Fevret de Saint-Mémin. George Washington. Charcoal on tinted paper, ca. 1800. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (021.01.00) [Digital ID# LC-DIG-ppmsca-11597]

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## Seeking Women's Rights

American women, such as Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren, hoped the American Revolution would lead to more legal and political rights for women. During the post- Revolutionary period, periodicals aimed directly at women emerged. The best known was *The Lady's Magazine and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge*, founded in Philadelphia in 1792. In this engraving, a copy of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), the cornerstone feminist document, by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) is presented to Lady Liberty.



[Enlarge](#)

James Thackera and John Vallance. Liberty. Frontispiece in *The Lady's Magazine, and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge*. Philadelphia: W. Gibbons, 1792–1793. Marian S. Carson Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (92.01.00) [Digital ID# us0092\_01]

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[Back to top](#)

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## Political Rights of Women Asserted

In a letter to her sister, Elizabeth Smith Shaw Peabody (1750–1815) of Atkinson, New Hampshire, Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, asserted the rights of women to judge the conduct of government, even if a woman does not hold the Reigns of government.



the for his Health his cough  
 he is better, I would have you  
 know, they have been used with  
 the has still some remaining  
 in Sept. be do not defer your  
 in the same manner that and

[Enlarge](#)

Letter from Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Smith Shaw Peabody, July 19, 1799. Manuscript. Shaw Family Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (95.01.00) [Digital ID#s us0095\_01p1, [us0095\\_01p2](#)]

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## Abigail Adams

Abigail Smith Adams (1744–1818) was an outspoken supporter of women's political, educational, and marital rights and a sage and savvy political advisor to her husband, John Adams, revolutionary leader and second president of the United States. She was the mother of six children and managed the family farm and investments while serving as her husband's chief supporter and advisor.

1 of 2



A. Adams. Engraving, after a painting by Gilbert St



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## Abigail Adams Sees Adams-Jefferson Administration as Sign of Unity

The usually politically astute Abigail Adams mistakenly believed that the election of Thomas Jefferson as John Adams's vice-president would serve as a bond of union between the States and Mr. Jefferson. I have no doubt will support the president. However, their rival political parties continued to clash throughout Adams's administration. The rivalry of Adams and Jefferson fully emerged in the bitterly partisan campaign of 1800.

which will encourage  
 ing the Supreme being  
 Still has my life new wonders  
 repeated every year  
 Behold my days which yet remain  
 I must them to thy care  
 Or mostly to  
 'served to the Vice President, very justly  
 it best enable men to devote their time

[Enlarge](#)

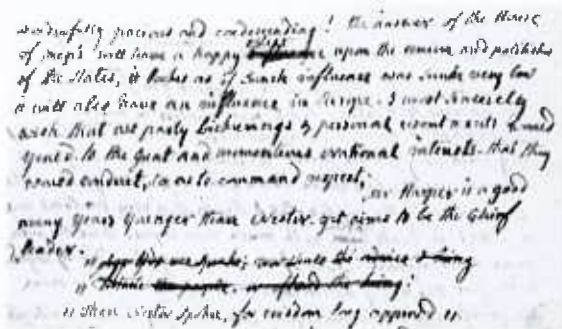
Letter from Abigail Adams to Elizabeth Smith Shaw Peabody, February 10, 1797. Manuscript. Shaw Family Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (95.02.01) [Digital ID#s [us0095\\_02p1](#), [us0095\\_02p2](#)]

[Read the transcript](#)

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj24>

## Political Infighting and a War with France

Abigail Adams (1744–1818), wife of President John Adams, feared that political infighting was endangering the United States, which was engaged in an undeclared naval war with France. Jeffersonian Republicans strongly opposed this “quasi-war” with France, arguing that it strengthened commercial interests in Federalist strongholds. In this letter to her nephew William Shaw (1778–1826), Adams saw hope in the response of the House of Representatives to the president’s address to Congress.



[Enlarge](#)

Letter from Abigail Adams to William Shaw, December 23, 1798. Manuscript. Shaw Family Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (092.03.00) [Digital ID# [us0092\\_03p1](#)]

[Read the transcript](#)

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## Ongoing, Undeclared Naval War

During the administration of President John Adams, the United States was engaged in an ongoing, undeclared naval war with France over neutral shipping rights. French naval vessels and privateers seized hundreds of American vessels, like the frigate *Philadelphia* pictured here, while the United States struggled to build a navy capable of defending its commerce.



[Enlarge](#)

William Birch & Son. "Preparation of War to Defend Commerce" from *The City of Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania, North America, As it Appeared in the Year 1800*. . . Hand-colored engraving. Springland, Pennsylvania: William Birch and Son, 1800. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (54.00.05) [Digital ID# [us0054p5](#)]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj36>

[Back to top](#)

## Linking Jeffersonian Republicans to the French Revolution

In 1792, political pamphleteer William Cobbett settled in Philadelphia and began writing pro-English and anti-Republican articles under the pseudonym “Peter Porcupine.” Cobbett once described Thomas Jefferson as a deist, “a Frenchman in politics and morality” and “a man as much qualified to be president as I am to be an Archbishop!”



[Enlarge](#)

"Stop the Wheels of Government," illustration in [William Cobbett] Peter Porcupine's *Political Censor or Monthly Review of the Most Interesting Political Occurrences Relative to the United States of America*. Philadelphia: William Cobbett, April 1796. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (090.05.00) [Digital ID# us0090\_05]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj34>

## William Cobbett Satirized

William Cobbett (1763–1835), English soldier turned political pamphleteer, fled London for the United States in 1792. Always a lightning rod for political passion, Cobbett returned to England in 1800 after being successfully sued for journalistic slander and libel in the states. In this later British cartoon series chronicling the colorful life of Cobbett, artist James Gillray depicts the pamphleteer surrounded by hand-written pages, engulfed in flames, and beset by ghosts.



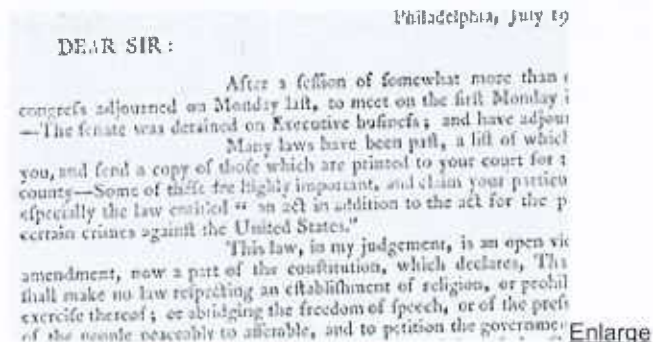
[Enlarge](#)

James Gillray. *The Life of William Cobbett, Written by Himself. No. 8*. London: Published by Hannah Humphrey, 27 ST. James's Street, September 29, 1809. Hand-colored engraved print. [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (094.04.00) [Digital ID# ppsmsca.24337]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj42>

## Congressman Declares Acts Unconstitutional

Virginia Congressman John Dawson (1762–1814) declared the Alien and Sedition Act an open violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Passed by the Federalist-controlled Congress as America prepared for possible war with France, the Alien and Sedition Acts limited free speech by declaring public criticism of government officials to be seditious libel, punishable by imprisonment and fines. Dawson urged citizens to rely first on the Courts to declare it unconstitutional, as well as to prepare to seek its repeal.



[Enlarge](#)

Letter from John Dawson to his Constituents, Philadelphia, July 19, 1798. Printed broadside. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (94.01.00) [Digital ID# us0094\_01]



The Alien and Sedition Acts restricted immigration and made strong criticism of public officials illegal. Several newspaper publishers and writers were imprisoned for "seditious" writings. Many Americans opposed a federal sedition law arguing that it violated the Constitution and infringed on the right of states to regulate free speech through slander laws. This petition to the United States Congress was part of a Republican Party effort to repeal the Alien and Sedition Acts.

# TO THE SENATE OF REPRESENTATIVES of the United States

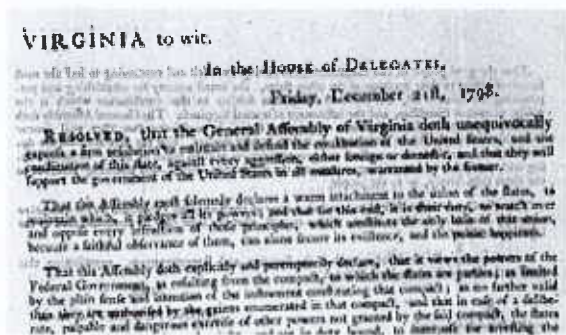
[Enlarge](#)

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States. We whose names are hereunto subscribed being citizens of the county of Albemarle in the state of Virginia. Albemarle County, Virginia: 1798. Broadside. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (090.04.00) [Digital ID # us0090\_04]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj16>

## Virginia Resolutions Oppose Alien and Sedition Laws

The Alien and Sedition Acts restricted immigration and made strong criticism of public officials illegal. Several newspaper publishers and writers were imprisoned for "seditious" writings. Many Americans opposed a federal sedition law arguing that it violated the Constitution and infringed on the rights of states to regulate free speech through slander laws. The Virginia House of Delegates adopted these resolutions drafted by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson to protest the constitutionality of the Alien and Sedition Acts.



[Enlarge](#)

Virginia to Wit. In the House of Delegates Friday, December 21st, 1798. Resolved that the General Assembly of Virginia doth unequivocally express a firm resolution . . . Richmond, 1798. Leaflet. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (091.07.00) [Digital ID# us0091\_07]

[Read the transcript](#)

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj39>

## Vindication of the Constitutionality of Alien and Sedition Laws

A large minority in the Virginia legislature opposed the passage of the Virginia Resolutions asserting a states right to declare a federal law unconstitutional and specifically declaring the Alien and Sedition Laws unconstitutional. That group of state legislators published this statement as a vindication of the constitutionality of the Alien and Sedition Laws.



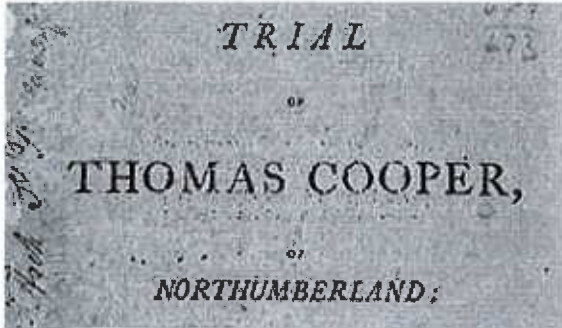
[Enlarge](#)

The Awful Crisis which has arrived Must be felt by us all. . . . [Richmond]: T. Nicholson, 1799. Pamphlet. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (94.02.00) [Digital ID# us0094\_02]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj21>

## Libel Trial of Thomas Cooper

After attacking the administration of Federalist President John Adams in print, Thomas Cooper (1759–1839), political writer and ardent Republican, was tried for seditious libel against Adams before Federalist Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase (1741–1811) in April 1800. Cooper was found guilty, fined, and imprisoned. Republican political leaders strongly criticized Justice Chase, and he was eventually impeached (though not convicted) in 1804, after the Republicans won control of the government.



[Enlarge](#)

Thomas Cooper. *An Account of the Trial of Thomas Cooper of Northumberland: on a Charge of Libel against the President of the United States.* . . . Philadelphia: John Bios, April 1800. [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#). Library of Congress (94.00.00) [Digital ID# us0094]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj19>

## Virginia Slave Rebellion Increases Election-Year Turmoil

In the midst of the high tensions surrounding a climactic presidential election, Virginia slaves led by Gabriel Prosser (1775–1800) marched on Richmond, Virginia. Governor James Monroe notified Vice President and presidential candidate Thomas Jefferson that the most serious and formidable conspiracy of slaves had been clearly proved. Gabriel's insurrection led to harsh reprisals, including executions, deportations, and sales of slaves accused of rebellion.

[Enlarge](#)

Letter from James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, September 15, 1800. Manuscript. Thomas Jefferson Papers, [Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (101.00.00) [Digital ID# us0101]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj26>

[Back to Top](#)

## Honoring George Washington at his death

Political harmony suffered a serious blow with the death of the nation's father figure, George Washington, on December 14, 1799. Residents of Ulster County, New York, were provided a detailed account of Washington's death and the many events eulogizing America's fallen leader in this January 4, 1800, edition, one of only two copies in existence. This newspaper includes John Marshall's eulogy delivered before the House of Representatives. Marshall concluded his remarks with the now famous phrase, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."





[Enlarge](#)

Ulster County Gazette, January 4, 1800. Kingston, New York: Samuel S. Freer & Son. Newspaper. [Serial and Government Publications Division](#) Library of Congress (83.02.00) [Digital ID# us0083\_02p1]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj8>

## Celebrating The First Great Western Empire

This patriotic broadside celebrates the accomplishments of the United States from the adoption of the Federal Constitution through the presidencies of George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. The Temple of Freedom or the Federal Edifice is supported by pillars of agriculture and commerce, while it boasts of the population of the seventeen states in the union.



[Enlarge](#)

R. Packard. *The First Great Western Empire; or, the United States of America*. Albany, New York, 1812. Wood engraving. [Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (95.00.00) [Digital ID# us0095]

Bookmark this item: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/formation-of-political-parties.html#obj22>

[Back to top](#)

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