



President Jefferson Seeks Unity and Reconciliation

As he approached his inauguration as the third president of the United States in March 1801, Thomas Jefferson knew one of his tasks was to heal a divided nation.

Jefferson had predicted prior to the election of 1800 that “our campaign will be as hot as that of Europe, but happily we deal in ink only; they in blood.” He said the nation’s newspapers were “teeming with every falsehood they can invent for defamation.” President John Adams, seeking re-election on the Federalist ticket, was labeled a monarchist; Vice President Jefferson was called an atheist; both candidates were declared enemies of the Constitution.

When the states’ electoral votes were cast Dec. 3, 1800,

Adams was defeated but Jefferson did not win the presidency. Instead, he tied with Aaron Burr, his Republican running mate. The Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1804, would change the process for electing the president and vice president by directing the states to vote separately for each; in 1800, however, the fact that nearly all Republicans recognized Jefferson’s place at the top of the ticket counted for little. The election would be decided in the House of Representatives, where members of the Federalist majority worked to block Jefferson’s election by backing Burr.
















The House convened in Washington on Feb. 9, 1801, but after several days of balloting there was still no decision. Finally, on Feb. 17,



White House Historical Association

Portrait of Thomas Jefferson by Rembrandt Peale, 1800.

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MONTICELLO



Thomas Jefferson's First Inauguration

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on the 36th ballot, Jefferson attained a majority and the presidency.

The bitterly contested campaign and the drawn-out election process, plus the predictions of resistance to the new administration and whispers about the possibility of civil war, inspired Jefferson to use his inaugural address to unify the nation. He knew that his audience would be far larger than the crowd that would assemble for the first inauguration to be held in the new federal city of Washington. That morning, in fact, he gave an advance copy of his address to a printer so it could be distributed later in the day.



Library of Congress

View of the unfinished Capitol c. 1800 by William R. Birch.



On the morning of Wednesday, March 4, Jefferson emerged from the Conrad and McMunn boarding house at New Jersey Avenue and C Street, where he had been residing for several months. Demonstrating his desire for “republican simplicity,” Jefferson broke the precedent set by his predecessors Adams and George Washington, who had worn elegant suits and swords for their inaugurations and been driven to the ceremonies in liveried coaches. The tall, 57-year-old Virginian wore, the *Alexandria Times* reported, the clothes “of a plain citizen without any distinctive badge of office,” and walked the short distance to the unfinished Capitol, accompanied by Virginia militia officers, District of Columbia marshals, and a group of congressmen.

Jefferson arrived to find the Senate Chamber “so crowded,” an observer noted, that “not another creature could enter ... there was near a thousand persons within the walls.” Noticeably absent was Adams, who had left town in the middle of the night.

Jefferson was sworn in by Chief Justice John Marshall, his distant cousin and a staunch political foe. The crowd then fell silent as Jefferson began his address.

“Friends and Fellow-Citizens,” he began, almost in a whisper. “Called upon to undertake the duties of the first executive office of our country, I avail myself of the presence of that portion of my fellow-citizens which is here assembled to declare a sincere consciousness that

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the task is above my talents." Jefferson declared, however, that he would find "resources of wisdom, of virtue, and of zeal on which to rely under all difficulties" in those "authorities provided by our Constitution."

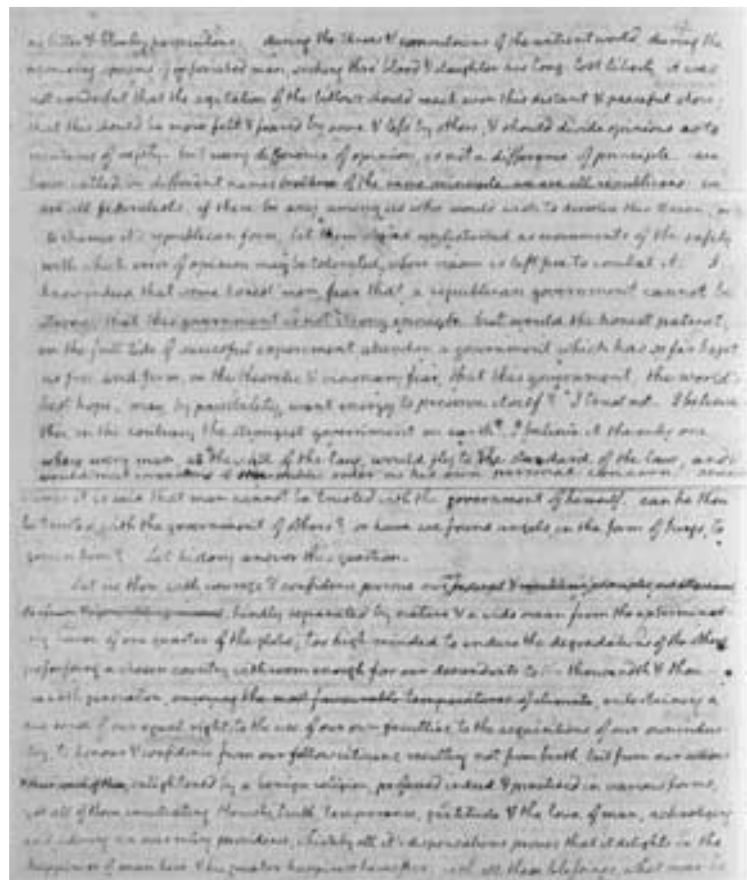
He said that the nation had "room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation" and that his administration would pursue "honest friendship with all nations and entangling alliances with none." He affirmed that America's future depended upon "the preservation of the Central Government in its whole constitutional vigor, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home and safety abroad." He called on the nation to be "united with one heart and one mind."

"Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle," Jefferson maintained, and said Americans were, in truth, "brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists."

Though few people actually heard Jefferson's address, which one observer said was "delivered in so low a tone" as to be barely audible, the sentiments were not lost.

"I have this morning witnessed one of the most interesting scenes, a free people can ever witness," Margaret Bayard Smith commented. "The change of administrations, which in every government and in every age have most generally been epochs of confusion, villainy and bloodshed, in this our

Jefferson's draft of his first inaugural address, which he delivered March 4, 1801.



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Thomas Jefferson's First Inauguration

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happy country take place without any species of distraction, or disorder. This day one of the most amiable and worthy men [has] taken that seat to which he was called by the voice of his country.”

After the inauguration, Jefferson returned to Conrad and McMunn's for dinner with his fellow boarders. The new leader of the nation he had helped create continued to live there until March 19, when he moved into the President's House.



The Thomas Jefferson Foundation marked the 200th anniversary of Jefferson's election with activities at Monticello, Kenwood, and the Library of Congress.

At Monticello, the annual Winter Tour, “The Revolution of 1800: Jefferson, Politics, and the Presidency,” looked at how the volatile political climate of 1800-01 affected Jefferson, his family, and the Monticello community.

At Kenwood in December, the International Center for Jefferson Studies conducted a three-day conference, “Thomas Jefferson and the Revolution of 1800,” at which more than two dozen distinguished historians considered a wide range of issues revolving around Jefferson's election.

At the Library of Congress on March 6, the ICJS and the library's Manuscript Division co-sponsored a discussion of Noble E. Cunningham's new book, *The Inaugural Addresses of Thomas Jefferson, 1801 and 1805*, which was published by the University of Missouri Press with the support of the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. The panel featured the author and James Horn, Saunders Director of the ICJS.

Jefferson also received some due at the Jan. 20 inauguration of President George W. Bush. In addition to referring to Jefferson in his address, Bush distributed as gifts 3,000 engraved Jefferson Cups made by the Gorham Co., of Smithfield, R.I., supplier to the Monticello Museum Shops and Monticello Catalog.

— CHRISTINE COALWELL

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