



# In a Landslide, Jefferson Wins a Second Term

Before the election of 1804, President Thomas Jefferson projected that his party would carry all but four of the 17 states in the fall balloting. It did even better. The Jeffersonian Republicans defeated the Federalists everywhere except Connecticut and Delaware, thus giving Jefferson the presidency for another four years.

Jefferson accounted for the overwhelming support at the polls in his second inaugural address by reviewing his administration's first-term achievements. Early in his remarks he stated: "On taking this station ... I declared the principles on which I believed it my duty to administer the affairs of our commonwealth. My conscience tells me that I have, on every occasion, acted up to that declaration."

He went on to note that foreign relations were improved and internal taxes discontinued. He said that import taxes, "paid cheerfully by those who can afford to add foreign luxuries to domestic comforts," supported a smaller national government, allowed for the expansion of the nation through the purchase of Louisiana and Indian territories, and reduced the national debt.

Jefferson elaborated upon the topic of Louisiana, as the purchase treaty was regarded as an outstanding achievement of his administration. "Is it not better," he asked, "that the opposite bank of the Mississippi should be settled by our own brethren and children, than by strangers of another family? With which shall we be most likely to live in harmony and friendly intercourse?"

Jefferson did not, however, forgo the partisan opportunity to remind



**President Jefferson in an 1804 engraving by Charles Fevret de Saint-Mémin.**

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the public that “the acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some.” Most Federalists had openly opposed the purchase. Based primarily in New England and determined to protect that region’s trade and shipping interests, the Federalists were uneasy with the country’s westward movement and the growing importance of the port of New Orleans. But to Jefferson, the 1804 election victory sounded the approval of his western vision by the majority of Americans.

The achievements of Jefferson’s first term had assured that he would be re-nominated by his party. But the Republican caucus, which met in February 1804, had dropped the Vice President Aaron Burr in favor of New York’s governor, George Clinton, as Jefferson’s running mate.

Burr had lost the confidence of many Republicans during the drawn-out election of 1800. In that contest, Jefferson, then vice president, defeated the Federalist incumbent, John Adams. But because the Republicans had failed to make sure at least one electoral vote for vice presidential candidate Burr was withheld, Jefferson and Burr tied for the presidency. The contest went to the House of Representatives, where Federalists seized the opportunity to block Jefferson’s election by giving their votes to Burr. The deadlock was not broken until mid-February 1801, when the House elected Jefferson on its 36th ballot.

Because Burr did not withdraw his name from contention for the presidency, Jefferson and other Republicans came to doubt his loyalty and were uneasy with his holding a position of national prominence. As Jefferson began organizing his administration, he ignored Burr’s patronage recommendations and did not consult him on policy decisions.

In 1804, aware that he would not be a part of the national ticket, Burr challenged the Republicans in his home state of New York by



**An 1804 campaign poster urging support for the Jefferson-Clinton ticket.**

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running for governor. The Federalists considered supporting Burr to create greater division among the Republicans, but Federalist leader Alexander Hamilton spoke out strongly against Burr, and others asked, “Is he to be used by the Federalists, or is he a two-edged sword, that must not be drawn?”

Burr lost the New York election in the spring of 1804, and cast much of the blame on Hamilton – one factor that led to their famous duel in July of that year. Hamilton’s death was considered the

death of Burr’s political career as well, yet he returned to Washington to complete his term as vice president. President Jefferson completely divorced himself from Burr, saying, “There never had been an intimacy between us, and but little association.”

The Jeffersonian Republicans could rid themselves of Burr, but that did not address the problem inherent in the electoral process that had produced the tie vote of 1800. The Constitution allowed each elector two votes but did not require that they be designated for president and vice president. Thus, the candidate with the most votes would become president, the runner-up vice president. In light of the development of partisan political parties, this was recognized as problematic, and in the first session of Congress following the election Jeffersonians led the move to amend the Constitution.

Support crossed party lines but was far from unanimous. The legislation was not passed by both houses until December 1803. The proposal sent to the states for ratification specified that as electors met in their respective states, “they shall name in their ballots the person voted for as President, and in distinct ballots the person voted for as Vice-President.”

As any change to the Constitution required ratification by three-fourths of the states, Jefferson and Secretary of State James Madison left Washington for the summer recess with the electoral process still undecided. Madison assured Jefferson that all was ready “for giving



“A Philosophic Cock,” by James Min, hand-colored aquatint, Newburyport, Mass., c. 1804. American Antiquarian Society

**Jefferson’s Federalist opponents sought to undermine his candidacy with unflattering portrayals, such as this cartoon.**

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effect to the proposed amendment.” But it was not until Sept. 25, 1804, that Madison was able to declare that the 12th Amendment to the Constitution had been ratified.

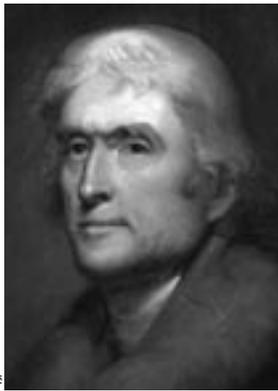
In keeping with the practice of the time, Jefferson and his Federalist rival, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina (who had been Adams’ running mate in 1800), abstained from any overt campaigning. Both relied instead upon their party machinery working at the grassroots level and through the press.

The strongest opposition to Jefferson was based in New England. Federalist William Plumer of New Hampshire lamented that Jefferson and his supporters were even allowed to call themselves “republican,” believing “Democrats and Jacobins” far more appropriate. Plumer authored six newspaper articles under the pseudonym Cato in which he went through Jefferson’s political career from secretary of state to the presidency and even referenced Jefferson’s one published book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, to outline what he saw as Jefferson’s inconsistencies.

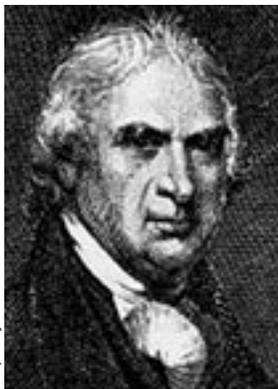
Despite these efforts, Plumer had to record in his personal journal entry for Feb. 13, 1805, his party’s overwhelming loss. When the electoral ballots were counted that day before a joint session of Congress, Jefferson and Clinton received 162 votes apiece while Pinckney and his running mate, Rufus King of New York, had 14 apiece. It was none other than Aaron

Burr, sitting as presiding officer of the Senate, who declared that Thomas Jefferson had been elected president and George Clinton vice president.

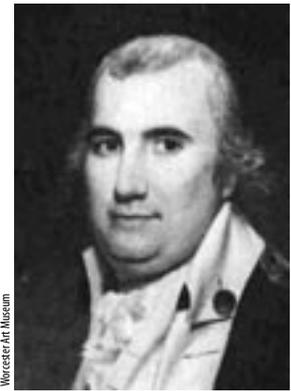
Jefferson had run for re-election to affirm the nation’s approval. He wrote in January 1804: “The abominable slanders of my political enemies have obliged me to call for that verdict from my country in the only way it can be obtained.” He concluded that a favorable vote would be “my sufficient voucher to the rest of the world and to posterity, and leave me free to seek, at a definite



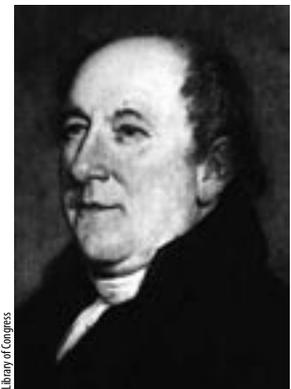
Jefferson



Clinton



Pinckney



King

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time, the repose I sincerely wished to have retired to now.”

Certainly the election of 1804 gave validation to Jefferson and the direction set by his administration. It would prove to be the apex of his political career, as the accomplishments of his first term would not be matched in his second. Escalating wars in Europe would threaten American neutrality and damage the prosperity experienced by the nation during Jefferson's first term. He would come to experience an observation on the presidency he had offered many years before, “that no man will ever bring out of that office the reputation which carries him into it.

- GAYE WILSON

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### *Election of 1804*

**Thomas Jefferson**  
(Virginia)  
**George Clinton**  
(New York)  
*Republican Party*  
162 Electoral Votes

**Charles C. Pinckney**  
(South Carolina)  
**Rufus King**  
(New York)  
*Federalist Party*  
14 Electoral Votes

Georgia (6)  
Kentucky (8)  
Maryland (9)  
Massachusetts (19)  
New Hampshire (7)  
New Jersey (8)  
New York (19)  
North Carolina (14)  
Ohio (3)  
Pennsylvania (20)  
Rhode Island (4)  
South Carolina (10)  
Tennessee (5)  
Vermont (6)  
Virginia (24)

Connecticut (9)  
Delaware (3)  
Maryland (2)

Note: Popular vote totals were not officially recorded until the election of 1824.



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