

FOUNDING BROTHERS: EPISODE III

Act I - First Party System: Adams vs. Jefferson

1. In what ways were John Adams and Thomas Jefferson similar? In what ways were they different? Why did different political parties form around their leadership?
2. Did the addition of new states and western growth foreshadow a swing of power from the Federalists to the Republicans? Explain.
3. What does the Twelfth Amendment say, and when was it passed? Why did it need to get passed? Do students think the amendment was a good idea?
4. Characterize the two parties -- Federalists and Republicans -- by explaining the views of each on the following topics: 1) social philosophy; 2) constitutional philosophy; 3) domestic policy; 4) economic beliefs and policies; and, 5) foreign policy.

Act 2 - Character and Scandal

5. In the video Abigail Adams, while very impressed with Jefferson for much of her life, did say, "Oh, I have read his heart in his wicked eyes. The very devil is in them. They are lasciviousness itself." She also said that, "His mind is now poisoned with passion, prejudice, and faction." (Ellis, Founding Brothers, p. 171) Why did she feel this way? How do you judge Jefferson's character? (See Ellis, Founding Brothers, p. 210)
6. After his relationship with Maria Reynolds and the blackmail scheme of James Reynolds became public, Hamilton confessed, "My real crime is an amorous connection...I must have been a clumsy knave to risk my character in such bad hands and in so huckstering way...I have paid pretty severely for the folly and can never recollect it without disgust and self-condemnation." Hamilton argued that this "indelicate amour" should not ruin his political career. Do you think private life and "personal indiscretions" should affect our judgments of public officials.

Act 3 - Accusations of Tyranny: Alien and Sedition Acts

7. In the conflict between France and Britain in the late 1790s, why did different political factions in the United States support different sides? Why were the Federalists pro-British? Why were the Republicans pro-French?
8. What did the Alien and Sedition Acts say and why were Republicans so opposed to them?
9. Given the "quasi-war" with France and rumors about spies, Hamilton requested a 50,000-man army for the revolutionary era's version of homeland defense. Adams, wary of creating tyranny, authorized only a 15,000-man army. Was there a real danger in the creation of a standing army?

Act 4 - Elections and the Electoral College

10. James T. Callender's criticism of John Adams was extreme: "This federal gem...is not only a repulsive pendant, a gross hypocrite, and an unprincipled oppressor, but...in private life, one of the most egregious fools upon the continent." Why did Callender write this?
11. Why do you think Hamilton wrote the following about fellow Federalist John Adams, a leader of his own party: "He is a man of an imagination sublimated and eccentric; propitious steady perseverance neither to the regular display of sound judgment, nor in a systematic plan of conduct...?"
12. Aaron Burr, a mysterious figure in American history, is portrayed in the video as different from most of the other founding brothers. Hamilton, who hated Burr and called him "bankrupt beyond redemption," was driven to support the Republican Jefferson in the election of 1800. Why did Hamilton dislike Burr? What made Burr different from the other founders?