


# CHAPTER 12

## Jeffersonian Revolution (1800–1820)

### IN THIS CHAPTER

**Summary:** The election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800 was a critical election in American history; Jefferson's view of America differed greatly from that of the Federalists. Alexander Hamilton and other Federalists envisioned America as a future industrial power. For Jefferson, the independence and pride of the yeoman farmer would guide America into the future. During the time when John Marshall was chief justice of the Supreme Court, the power of the federal courts increased. The overall size of America also increased in this era as a result of the Louisiana Purchase. The War of 1812 was fought over continued tensions between the Americans and the British. Many Americans in this era envisioned massive economic growth in the United States; this was the focus of Henry Clay's "American System."

### Keywords



**Marbury v. Madison (1803):** critical Supreme Court decision that established the principle of judicial review, stating that the Supreme Court has the right to review all federal laws and decisions and declare whether or not they are constitutional.

**Louisiana Purchase (1803):** massive land purchase from Emperor Napoleon of France that virtually doubled the size of the United States.

**Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804):** expedition that discovered much about the western part of the North American continent and the economic possibilities there.

**War of 1812:** war between the British and the Americans over British seizure of American ships, connections between the British and Native American tribes, and other tensions. The British sacked Washington, DC, in 1814. The treaty ending the war merely restored diplomatic relations between the two countries.

**American System:** plan proposed by Senator Henry Clay and others to make America economically independent by increasing industrial production in the United States and by the creation of a Second National Bank.

**Missouri Compromise (1820):** political solution devised to keep the number of slave states and free states equal; Missouri entered the Union as a slave state and Maine entered as a free state. Potential states in the northern part of the Louisiana territory would also come in as free states in the future.

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## Election of 1800

John Adams decided to run for a second term as president in 1800. Charles Pinckney of South Carolina ran as the Federalist candidate for vice-president. Thomas Jefferson was again the Republican candidate for president. Aaron Burr of New York was the Republican running for the vice-presidency. Jefferson edged out Adams in the Electoral College with 73 votes to Adams's 65. However, because the Constitution made no distinction in the Electoral College between presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Aaron Burr also received 73 votes, throwing the election to the House of Representatives for a decision. Burr was an ambitious and unscrupulous politician and did not concede to Jefferson. Instead, he garnered substantial votes from Federalists who detested Jefferson. The election in the House of Representatives, where each state cast one vote, was a cliffhanger, with the voting going through 35 ballots without a victor. Ironically, Jefferson owed his victory on the thirty-sixth ballot to Alexander Hamilton, who told supporters that Burr was "the most unfit man in the United States for the office of president." This political crisis led to the adoption of the **Twelfth Amendment** in 1804, which allowed members of the Electoral College to cast separate ballots for the president and vice-president.

The election of 1800 was the first time that control of the presidency passed from one party to another. Because of this, it has sometimes been called the "Revolution of 1800." Thomas Jefferson brought remarkable abilities and a wealth of experience to the presidency. He was an Enlightenment man, fascinated by the latest scientific and political ideas, and a gifted writer. He was an able political leader who had built a successful party, yet as a former diplomat and secretary of state, he also had extensive experience in foreign affairs.

As a strict constitutional constructionist, Jefferson was determined to reverse the policies of the Federalists and scale back the reach of the federal government. Once in office, he and his secretary of the treasury, Albert Gallatin, cut taxes like that on whiskey. He allowed the hated Alien and Sedition Acts to lapse. Jefferson did not wipe out all the legislative achievements of the Washington and Adams administrations, however. At his inaugural, he had reached out to the political opposition by declaring, "We are all Republicans; we are all Federalists." Jefferson had opposed the creation of Hamilton's national bank; once in office, he accepted its economic usefulness and left it alone.

## An Assertive Supreme Court

Until the 1930s, there was a long interval between presidential elections and the new president's inauguration in March of the following year. In 1801, the outgoing Federalists took advantage of this period to pass the **Judiciary Act**, creating many new federal circuit and district courts. Outgoing president Adams appointed Federalist judges to these courts. These were known as “**midnight appointments**,” because President Adams was erroneously believed to be signing these many commissions on his last night in office.

Jefferson and his partisans were outraged by this effort to pack the federal bench with Federalists. The new Republican Congress promptly repealed the Judiciary Act and launched the impeachment of a pair of Federalist judges. One of John Adams's last-minute judicial appointees was John Marshall, whom Adams nominated to be chief justice of the Supreme Court. Marshall was an able lawyer and Federalist politician who served as secretary of state in the last year of Adams's presidency. Marshall would become the longest-serving chief justice, heading the Court from 1801 to 1835. He would also be the most influential. His judicial rulings profoundly shaped American law. Federalist in principle, he asserted the supremacy of federal over state law. Marshall also elevated the stature and political significance of the Supreme Court.

One of Marshall's most important rulings came early, in the 1803 *Marbury v. Madison* decision. William Marbury was a Federalist whom John Adams appointed to be a justice of the peace in the District of Columbia. Marbury's letter of appointment was not delivered to him, and James Madison, secretary of state in the new Jefferson administration, refused to deliver it to him. Marbury sued for his letter. Marshall disliked Madison's action but ruled against Marbury anyway, arguing that the provision of the Judiciary Act of 1789 that enabled Marbury to sue was itself unconstitutional. This established the principle of **judicial review**, which gives the courts the ability to rule on the constitutionality of legislation. Marshall's assertion of judicial prerogative laid the foundation for the Supreme Court's later political influence.

## A New Frontier

Thomas Jefferson envisioned a republic of independent farmers. He believed that only self-sufficient, property-owning citizens would be able to resist corruption and tyranny. To ensure such a future for the United States, Jefferson needed land. He became fascinated with the west. Settlers were already streaming into the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. By 1800, one million Americans lived there. The Jefferson administration encouraged western settlement by easing the terms to purchase land; a down payment of \$80 gave a purchaser rights to 160 acres of land. The movement west accelerated.

This massive influx of settlers inevitably led to conflict with the Native Americans who lived and hunted on these western lands. Jefferson believed that the Native American way of life must inevitably give way to the march of American civilization. He hoped that the Native Americans would eventually assimilate into American society and become farmers themselves, but he doubted that this would happen any time soon. As a result, Jefferson believed that the best thing for the Native Americans would be to remove them to a more distant territory, where, over time, they could adapt to American ways. Jefferson thus laid the foundation of the policy of Indian removal that would come to a head in the later presidencies of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren. Unsurprisingly, many Native Americans resisted American expansionism, including the brilliant Shawnee diplomat and

soldier Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa, a religious visionary called the “Prophet” by the Americans.

## The Louisiana Purchase

The French dictator Napoleon Bonaparte forced the Spanish government to secretly cede Louisiana to France in 1800. Napoleon was hoping to recreate a French empire in the Americas. The American government learned that the French intended to return to Louisiana in 1801. The prospect of a militarily powerful and aggressive neighbor bordering the United States worried President Jefferson. He decided to attempt a diplomatic resolution to the problem and sent William Livingstone to France with an offer to purchase New Orleans. Livingston was later joined by James Monroe. In the meantime, Napoleon’s dreams of a North American empire faded as an army dispatched to recapture the Caribbean island of Haiti perished of disease. War also loomed between France and Great Britain, and Napoleon knew that any French possessions in North America would be cut off by the British Navy. In 1803, Napoleon startled Livingston and Monroe by offering to sell the entire Louisiana territory for \$15 million. The **Louisiana Purchase** was a financial bargain for the United States. The Americans had been willing to offer \$10 million for New Orleans alone; the purchase price for the entire territory worked out to roughly 3 cents an acre. The acquisition of the Louisiana Territory doubled the size of the United States.

Jefferson had some legal scruples about the federal government’s ability to purchase such an expanse of territory since no such power is explicitly mentioned in the Constitution; he set these concerns aside because the Louisiana Purchase was so obviously in the interest of the United States and because the accession of so much new land in the west greatly strengthened his dream of an agrarian republic. Although some Federalists opposed the Louisiana Purchase because it reinforced Jefferson’s political base in the west, the Senate ratified the treaty with France, and the House of Representatives quickly approved the expenditure of the purchase price.

Jefferson was anxious to know more about the interior of the North American continent, its flora and fauna, the peoples living there, and its economic potentialities. Even before the Louisiana Purchase, he had been contemplating sending mapping expeditions west. Once Louisiana was acquired, Jefferson sponsored the **Lewis and Clark Expedition** to explore the new lands that had been added to the United States. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark left St. Louis with a party of nearly 50 men in 1804. Over the course of a two-year journey, they made their way to the Pacific Ocean and back. The voluminous records of Lewis and Clark’s trip provided Americans with a wealth of information about the lands that the pair had traversed and whetted the appetite for further western exploration and settlement.

## Burr’s Conspiracy

Political strife did not abate during Jefferson’s presidency. The Federalists were declining but continued to oppose Jefferson’s policies. The **Essex Junto**, a group of extreme Federalists based in New England, denounced what they saw as a “decline in public virtue” with Jefferson in office. Massachusetts senator Thomas Pickering believed that the president was a “Parisian revolutionary monster.” In 1804, the Federalists nominated Charles

C. Pinckney to run against Jefferson, but the Federalist candidate was overwhelmed in the election, winning only 14 electoral votes.

More problematic for Jefferson than the Federalist opposition was the challenge posed by his vice-president. After demonstrating his disloyalty during the electoral crisis of 1800, Aaron Burr recognized that he had lost any hope of playing an influential role in the Jefferson administration. A wily schemer, Burr was accused of negotiating with secessionist Federalists. Alexander Hamilton believed the charge and criticized Burr in a letter. Learning of this, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. Hamilton agreed to the encounter, and on July 11, 1804, he was shot and killed by Burr.

Under indictment for murder in New York and New Jersey, Burr completed his term as vice-president and then traveled to the West. Here he launched a conspiracy with the equally unscrupulous general James Wilkinson and others to foment a rebellion against Spanish rule in Mexico. Burr hoped to restore his fortunes by conquering lands for himself in the southwest. Wilkinson betrayed Burr's scheme to both the Spanish and American governments. President Jefferson ordered Burr's arrest on a charge of treason. Jefferson hoped to see the conviction of his old rival, but Chief Justice John Marshall, who presided over the trial, was unsympathetic to the arguments of the prosecution, and Burr was acquitted.

## Renewal of War in Europe

The resumption of war between France and Great Britain in 1803 had far-reaching effects on the United States. Once again, the United States attempted to maintain its neutrality while finding itself caught between the competing ambitions of two great powers. American merchants hoped to trade freely with all countries, but Great Britain imposed a blockade on all French-controlled Europe, seizing ships that did not have expensive British licenses. Napoleon created his Continental System, which placed an embargo on trade with Great Britain. As a result, the French Navy captured American ships doing business with the British. In addition to interfering with American commerce, the British Navy, short on manpower, instituted the practice of **impressment**. After stopping American ships on the high seas, British naval officers kidnapped American sailors and forced them to serve on their ships. The British claimed that the men they seized were British subjects; some probably were, but many were naturalized or American-born citizens. British warships ranged up and down the American seacoast, interfering with American shipping and impressing American sailors. The most notorious incident occurred in 1807, when a British warship fired on the unsuspecting U.S.S. *Chesapeake*, forcing it to strike its colors before taking off four members of its crew.

Most Americans were outraged by the *Chesapeake* incident. President Jefferson could have led a largely united nation to war. Instead, he decided to try a peaceful means of resolving the crisis. Jefferson believed that the United States could change British and French policy through an economic boycott. He persuaded the Republican-dominated Congress to pass the **Embargo Act of 1807**, which prohibited American exports. Unfortunately, the Embargo Act at first seemed to have a greater effect on the American economy than on the British and French. Seaborne trade largely dried up, hurting merchants and putting sailors out of work. Planters and farmers were hurt because they could not get their products to foreign markets. Economically disastrous, the Embargo Act became deeply unpopular, especially in the Federalist bastion of New England, where ocean-going

commerce was especially important. Jefferson's economic policy failed to have its intended effect and divided the American people.

The Democratic-Republican Party was still strong enough to elect James Madison as president in 1808. Madison recognized that the Embargo Act had to be abandoned in order to restore American prosperity. As a replacement, he supported the **Non-Intercourse Act**, which allowed Americans to trade with all countries except Great Britain and France. Congress continued to pass bills through 1810, attempting to put enough economic pressure on Great Britain and France to compel them to stop interfering with American trade.

## The War of 1812

Years of humiliation at the hands of the British led a group of young Republicans in Congress to call for war. Henry Clay of Kentucky was one of the leaders of these "War Hawks." He believed that if the United States did not resist British policies, it could not honorably call itself an independent nation. The War Hawks were also concerned about the situation in the west. Tecumseh and the Prophet were rallying the Native Americans of the trans-Appalachian region against further American settlement. Tecumseh hoped to organize a confederacy of tribes powerful enough to resist the American military. The Americans believed that Tecumseh was allied with the British in Canada. In 1811, the governor of Indiana, William Henry Harrison, led a force of 1,000 men against Prophetstown, which had been built by Tecumseh and his brother. Tecumseh was away, and the Prophet unwisely attacked the Americans and was defeated at the Battle of Tippecanoe. Harrison's army burned Prophetstown and dispersed its inhabitants, dealing Tecumseh's cause a severe blow. The War Hawks believed that a war with Britain would enable the United States to break what was left of Tecumseh's power. They also hoped to conquer new lands in Canada.

President Madison asked for war in June 1812. The enthusiasm of the War Hawks was not matched by everyone in the country. Many Federalists loathed Napoleonic France and believed that it would be economically advantageous to reach a diplomatic accommodation with Great Britain. Federalist New England would show little support for the war, and many New Englanders traded with the British in Canada.

Despite their bellicosity, the War Hawks had done little to ready the United States for a war against Great Britain. The army was tiny and untried, and the navy possessed just 17 ships. The weaknesses in the American army were exposed as attempts to invade Canada ended in ignominious failure. The navy did better, winning a number of ship-to-ship combats, but the British soon bottled up most American warships in their harbors. In 1813, an American naval victory on Lake Erie paved the way for William Henry Harrison to defeat a force of British and Indians at the Battle of the Thames near Detroit. The most significant result of the battle was the death of Tecumseh. In the south, members of the Creek tribe, allied with the British, attacked American settlers. Andrew Jackson at the head of a force of Tennessee militiamen crushed the Creeks in a series of bloody battles.

## The End of the War

Napoleon's enemies forced him to abdicate in 1814. This freed up large numbers of British troops who were then deployed to America. The United States had to withstand major British attacks. A British invasion from Canada was turned back by an American naval

victory on Lake Champlain. Another British army landed in Chesapeake Bay and captured the city of Washington, burning the Presidential Mansion and the Capitol. A follow-up attack on Baltimore was repulsed, inspiring Francis Scott Key to write “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Andrew Jackson became a national hero in January 1815, when he handily defeated a British army attempting to seize the city of New Orleans. Jackson’s victory actually took place *after* a peace treaty had been signed between the United States and Great Britain, but that news hadn’t yet reached New Orleans.

In late 1814, negotiators gathered in Ghent, in what is now Belgium. Both sides were tired of the war, and the defeat of Napoleon put an end to the British blockade and impressment. The **Treaty of Ghent** ended the war on the basis of the status quo ante, the situation before the war. Aside from breaking the power of the Native Americans living east of the Mississippi, the United States gained nothing tangible from the war. Militarily, the war had been at best a draw with the British. But the culminating victory at New Orleans and the fact that the United States held its own against Great Britain enabled Americans to see the war as a success, a veritable second war of American independence.

## A Federalist Debacle and the Era of Good Feelings

During the war, many Federalists remained outspoken in their opposition to the conflict. While American diplomats were negotiating at Ghent, a number of New England Federalists gathered at the **Hartford Convention**. Here they denounced the war and debated topics including the **nullification** of laws, such as the embargo that they regarded as unconstitutional. Some delegates advocated the **secession** of New England from the union, although the convention as a whole never endorsed this.

The timing of these Federalists was bad. The end of the war and Jackson’s victory at New Orleans left them looking both unwise and unpatriotic. The Federalist party never recovered from this embarrassment and faded away over the next few years. For a time, the triumphant Democratic-Republicans led a unified country in which they faced no significant political opposition. James Monroe was easily elected president in 1816 and served for two terms. The period from 1816 to 1823 became known as the **Era of Good Feelings**.

## Henry Clay and the American System

Taking advantage of the confident post-war mood, Henry Clay publicized an economic program that he termed the **American System**. Clay expressed the reinvigorated nationalist spirit of the time by aiming to make the United States economically independent of Europe by encouraging American industry. President Madison and then President Monroe supported the plan. The failures of the War of 1812 had convinced many Republicans that the government should play a more vigorous role in the economy; in effect, they adopted important elements of Alexander Hamilton’s economic vision.

In 1816, Congress created the **Second National Bank** to facilitate credit and financial transactions across the United States. The **Tariff of 1816** increased the tariff rate on foreign goods to 22 percent in order to encourage domestic manufacturers. The revenue from the tariff was earmarked for roads and other internal improvements to help American farmers, industrialists, and merchants get their products to markets. These policies helped spur a post-war economic boom that lasted until the onset of an economic depression in 1819.

## Missouri Compromise

Slavery became a major political issue for the first time in 1819, when Missouri asked to enter the Union as a slave state. At this time, the number of free and slave states was equal at 11 each. In earlier years, slavery had seemed to be a declining institution. The Northwest Ordinance barred slavery from the Northwest Territory. In 1808, the importation of slaves from overseas was outlawed. But Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin had made cotton a lucrative cash crop. The demand for slave labor increased, making slaves much more valuable to their masters.

The expansion of slavery into the western territories suddenly became a heated issue. The balance of slave and free states gained new political urgency. The possibility of Missouri tipping this balance in favor of the slave states outraged many in the north. Acrimonious political debate ensued. Henry Clay, the speaker of the house, resolved the issue in 1820 with the **Missouri Compromise**. Clay paired the admission of Missouri to the Union with the admission of Maine as a free state. To prevent further disputes, he drew a line through the Louisiana Territory at 36 degrees, 30 minutes; states admitted south of that line would be slave states, whereas states admitted north of the line would be free states. Clay and many contemporaries hoped that the Missouri Compromise had put an end to the contentious issue of slavery.

## Chapter Review



### Rapid Review

To achieve the perfect 5, you should be able to explain the following:

- The election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800 is called the “Revolution of 1800,” as the new president had a completely different vision of America from the Federalists whom he replaced.
- Thomas Jefferson was one of the most brilliant men ever to serve as president, and he instituted many “Republican” policies during his eight years in office.
- The role of the federal courts was greatly strengthened during the tenure of John Marshall as chief justice of the Supreme Court.
- The Louisiana Purchase more than doubled the size of the United States and allowed the “empire of liberty” to continue to expand.
- The case of Aaron Burr showed the deep political divisions that existed in the United States during this period.
- The Napoleonic Wars greatly impacted the relationship between the United States, England, and France.
- America entered the War of 1812 because President Madison convinced the nation that America’s rights as a neutral power had been violated and because many in Congress felt that the British were encouraging the resistance by Native American tribes.
- The American System of Henry Clay and others was proposed after the War of 1812 and outlined a plan for broad economic growth for the United States.
- The Missouri Compromise temporarily solved the issue of the number of slave states versus the number of free states.



**Time Line**

- 1800: Thomas Jefferson elected president in “Revolution of 1800”
- 1801: John Marshall named chief justice of the Supreme Court  
Alien and Sedition Acts not renewed
- 1803: Louisiana Purchase  
*Marbury v. Madison* established federal judicial review
- 1804: Alexander Hamilton killed in duel with Aaron Burr  
Thomas Jefferson reelected  
Twelfth Amendment ratified (separate voting for president, vice president)  
Beginning of Lewis and Clark expedition
- 1807: Embargo Act greatly harms foreign trade
- 1808: James Madison elected president  
Further importation of slaves into the United States made illegal
- 1812: Beginning of the War of 1812
- 1814: British army sacks Washington  
Treaty of Ghent formally ends the War of 1812  
Indian removal from Southern territories begins in earnest
- 1814–1815: Hartford Convention (meeting of Federalists)
- 1815: Victory of Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans (after the War of 1812 was officially over)  
Henry Clay proposes the American System
- 1816: James Monroe elected president
- 1816–1823: Era of Good Feelings
- 1820: Missouri Compromise