

Chapter 31 - James Madison's First Term

Time: Fall of 1808

Run-up To The Election Of 1808

As the 1808 presidential election approaches, the path to the nomination is open for James Madison despite the negative economic effects of the Embargo Act.

At 57 years old, Madison is eight years younger than Jefferson, who has named him Secretary of State and groomed him for the top job. He has been at the center of American politics since the 1787 Constitutional Convention, and is widely credited with being the principle author of the final agreement.

Along with Jefferson, he has guided the Democratic-Republicans to national dominance.

Within the party, only the hardest line Anti-Federalists retain any reservations about his credentials. This faction is led by John Randolph of Roanoke, George Clinton, Patrick Henry and James Monroe, states-rights conservatives who feel that Jefferson and Madison have allowed too much power to rest in federal hands.

Clinton is Jefferson's sitting Vice-President, and a dominant force in New York politics, having served as Governor for 21 years before joining Jefferson's cabinet. He has run twice before for the presidency, in 1788 and in 1792, where he records 50 electoral votes against Washington. But he is now 69 years old and his time has passed.

Monroe has also criticized Madison for initially arguing against including a Bill of Rights in the Constitution, rejecting term limits, and supporting a standing army. But he has already lost two races against him for a seat in the U.S. House from Virginia.

When the various state caucuses convene and vote, Madison is nominated 83-3, with Clinton selected once again for Vice-President.

Meanwhile, the Federalist Party continues in near total disarray. After Washington's death in 1799, Adams's defeat in 1800, and Hamilton's fatal wounding in 1804, no one has been able to step in and mount a national campaign. The result is a party now largely confined to its original roots in New England.

The hub lies in Boston, led by George Cabot, Harrison Otis and Timothy Pickering, Adams's intensely pro-British Secretary of State. Pickering describes the extent of the Federalist disorder as follows:

The Federalists here are in point of numbers so utterly impotent, and the (Republicans) govern in nearly all the states with such an overwhelming majority; nothing would be

more remote from their contemplation than to set up candidates of their own for President and Vice-President.

In search of an election plan, Federalists from eight states gather in New York in August 1808 for what is often considered the first attempt at a national political convention. Attendance is sparse and the meetings are held in secret. Consideration is given to actually backing the Democratic-Republican, George Clinton, the majority feel this would further erode “party identity.”

Instead they fall back to the same ticket so soundly defeated by Jefferson in 1804 – former Revolutionary War General Charles C. Pinckney of South Carolina, and Rufus King of New York.

Time: November-December 1808

Madison Wins The Presidency

Voting takes place between November 4 and December 7, 1808, with the Federalists hoping public sentiment against the year-old Embargo Act will swing the outcome their way.

But Madison beats them 2:1 in the popular vote and by a comfortable margin in the Electoral College. Six electors from New York honor their “favorite son,” Clinton, by writing him in on their presidential ballots, despite his lack of public support.

Results Of The 1808 Presidential Election

Candidates	State	Party	Pop Vote	Tot EV	South	Border	North	West
James Madison	Va	Democratic-Rep	124,732	122	56	16	47	3
Charles C. Pinckney	SC	Federalist	62,431	47	3	5	39	
George Clinton	NY	Democratic-Rep	---	6			6	
James Monroe	Va	Democratic-Rep	4,848	0				
Unpledged			680	0				
Total			192,691	175	59	21	92	3
Needed to win				88				

Note: South (Virginia, NC, SC, Georgia), Border (Delaware, Maryland, Ky), North (NH, Mass, NY, NJ, Penn, RI, Conn,Vt), West (Ohio)

Still the Federalist do make some inroads. Madison’s electoral count is 40 votes shy of Jefferson’s total in 1804.

Change In Electoral Votes: 1808 vs. 1804

Year	Candidates	Party	Electoral Votes
1804	Thomas Jefferson	Democratic-Republican	162
1808	James Madison	Democratic-Republican	122

And three New England states – Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Rhode Island – are carried by General Pinckney.

Party Power By State

South	1804	1808	Pick Ups
Virginia	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
North Carolina	Dem-Republican	Split	
South Carolina	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
Georgia	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
Tennessee	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
Border			
Delaware	Federalist	Federalist	
Maryland	Dem-Republican	Split	
Kentucky	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
North			
New Hampshire	Dem-Republican	Federalist	Federalist
Vermont	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
Massachusetts	Dem-Republican	Federalist	Federalist
Rhode Island	Dem-Republican	Federalist	Federalist
Connecticut	Federalist	Federalist	
New York	Dem-Republican	Split	
New Jersey	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
Pennsylvania	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	
West			
Ohio	Dem-Republican	Dem-Republican	

In the Vice-Presidential race, George Clinton beats King handily, and will now serve under Madison as he has under Jefferson.

1808 Electoral College Vote For VP

Candidate	Party	Votes
George Clinton	Dem-Rep	113
Rufus King	Federalist	47
John Langdon	Dem-Rep	9
James Madison	Dem-Rep	3
James Monroe	Dem-Rep	3
Total		175

Time: 1808

The Federalists Make Some Gains In Congress

In the House, the Federalists pick up 23 seats, while still trailing well behind the Republicans.

Election Trends – House Of Representatives

Party	1801	1803	1805	1807	1809	Change
Democratic-Republicans	68	102	114	116	93	(23)
Federalist	38	40	28	26	49	+23
Congress #	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	
President	TJ	TJ	TJ	TJ	JM	

Most of the Federalist gains are in the North, again reflecting anger over the effects of the Embargo on the shipping industry.

House Trends By Region

Democratic-Republican	Total	South	Border	North	West
1801	68	30	7	31	
1803	102	42	13	46	1
1805	114	48	13	52	1
1807	116	47	12	56	1
1809	93	41	12	39	1
Change Vs. '07	(23)	(6)	NC	(17)	NC
Federalists					
1801	38	8	4	26	
1803	40	7	3	30	
1805	28	1	3	24	
1807	26	2	4	20	
1809	49	8	4	37	
Change Vs. '07	+23	+6	NC	+17	

The make-up of the Senate is largely unchanged from the prior three session.

Election Trends – Senate

Party	1801	1803	1805	1807	1809	Change
Democratic-Republicans	17	25	27	28	27	(1)
Federalist	15	9	7	6	7	+1
Congress #	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	
President	TJ	TJ	TJ	TJ	JM	

Senate Trends By Region

Democratic-Republican	Total	South	Border	North	West
1801	17	10	3	4	
1803	25	10	4	9	2
1805	27	10	4	11	2
1807	28	10	4	12	2
1809	27	10	4	11	2
Change Vs. '07	(1)	NC	NC	(1)	NC
Federalists					
1801	15	0	3	12	
1803	9	0	2	7	
1805	7	0	2	5	
1807	6	0	2	4	
1809	7	0	2	5	
Change Vs. '07	1	NC	NC	1	

Time: 1751 to 1836

President James Madison: Personal Profile



James Madison (1751-1836)

None other than Thomas Jefferson will refer to James Madison as “the greatest man in the world.” The two will know each other over a fifty year span, and will combine their remarkable intellects and prose writing skills to capture the spirit and structures of America’s new government.

James Madison, Jr., is born on March 16, 1751, the first of his parent’s twelve children.

Like Jefferson, he grows up amidst privilege, on the 4,500 acre Mount Pleasant plantation, some 30 miles to the northeast of Monticello. The land is located in the Piedmont (or “foothills”) region of Virginia, just east of the Appalachians. Madison will later rename the plantation Montpelier, “mount of the pilgrims,” after a famous French resort.

“Young Jemmy” is slight of stature and drawn early on to the life of the mind. His curiosity is fed by a series of outstanding academic tutors who emphasize a combination of classical studies and the Scottish Presbyterian values of Calvinism.

Between the ages of eleven and sixteen he resides at the Robertson School, an institution set up to provide the children of elite families a European-style education. The headmaster of the school is Donald Robertson, a University of Edinburgh graduate, who recognizes and nurtures Madison's intellectual capacities. Many years later, Madison will say of him:

All that I have been in life I owe largely to that man.

After returning home in 1767 he studies under Reverend Thomas Martin, who encourages him to attend his alma mater, the College of New Jersey, also a Calvinist dominated institution. Madison completes a four year curriculum there in two years, overseen throughout by Reverend Thomas Witherspoon, president of the college. Witherspoon's track record for turning out government leaders is remarkable, and includes some ten Cabinet officers, three Supreme Court Justices, 28 U.S. Senators and 49 House members, in addition to Madison and Aaron Burr.

Upon graduation in 1771, Madison is able to read six languages, including Greek, Latin and Hebrew, has engaged in political debate as a member of the Whig Society, and is left pondering a career either in law or the clergy. Despite his obvious talents, Madison tends to be shy and bookish by nature, and it is his friends who push him forward at this early stage of life. .

He is back home in Virginia when conflict heats up between the colonists and the Crown. At 5'4" tall and weighing under 100 pounds, he is too physically frail to join the military, so he signs on to the Orange County Committee For Safety and begins to draft a constitution for the state. He is also too young and unknown to attend the Declaration of Independence congress of 1776, but engages heavily in Virginia state politics.

His lifelong linkage to Thomas Jefferson develops at this time, when he helps draft the landmark *Virginia Statute For Religious Freedom* in 1777:

Be it enacted by General Assembly that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief, but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of Religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge or affect their civil capacities.

In 1780, with the outcome of the Revolutionary War still in doubt, he becomes visible at the national level as the youngest-ever delegate to the Second Continental Congress. He is 36 years old in the summer of 1787 as the Constitutional Convention assembles in Philadelphia. His role here proves pivotal to founding the Union.

As unofficial Secretary he sits at the front of the hall and is accountable for listening to and capturing the key issues, and working behind the scenes to iron them out. The "Virginia Plan" he has drafted for Governor Randolph introduces the basic "three branches of government" structure that will prevail in the end. He engages in many of the floor debates, and pushes the delegation to closure, despite strong anti-Federalist sentiments, often centered in his own Virginia delegation. Then he overcomes his personal opposition to including a Bill of Right,

drafts the initial twelve Amendments, along with 26 of The Federalist Papers, that lead on to ratification.

The Constitution captures Madison's most lasting and profound insights about the minds and behaviors of men in relation to civil power.

It reflects his roots as a Presbyterian Calvinist – left to their natural instincts (or “passions”), the capacity for self-interest or even evil-doing among men is great. Thus a “pure democracy” is doomed to failure. The best alternative is a republic, comprising men most capable of placing the common interest above their own. But even this will prove insufficient, according to Madison. For “government of the people” to work, power given any one man or body must be kept in check by off-setting power in the hands of others. Only by insuring that there is consensus between the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary branches will the people be well served.

Madison's tireless achievements at the 1787 Convention are obvious to all attendees, across Federalists like Washington, Adams, and Hamilton, and the state-centric opposition. From this time on he is widely seen as having the right stuff to someday be president. The College of New Jersey recognizes his work with a Doctor of Laws honoris causa, and with Witherspoon citing him to all alumnae as:

One of their own sons who had done them so much honor by his public service.

In 1794, Madison is 43 years old and in the third of his four terms in the U.S House, when he marries Dolley Todd, a 26 year old widow, introduced to him by Aaron Burr. Her outgoing nature complements his reserve, and she will manage social affairs in Washington for both the bachelor Jefferson and her husband.

Philosophically Madison exhibits a host of Federalist-leaning tendencies early on. He favors a republic over a pure democracy; federal laws trumping state laws; a strong Executive with veto powers and no term limits; creation of a standing army; initial opposition to a bill of rights; a national government with sufficient power to unify all factions as needed.

But his center of gravity shifts as he observes the Federalists in action. He concludes that Alexander Hamilton, his colleague in writing *The Federalist Papers*, has co-opted Washington's government and is running it akin to a British monarchy. He becomes so obsessed by Hamilton's activity that he secretly drafts a resolution which he encourages Virginia's William Giles to introduce in the House:

Resolved: That the Secretary of the Treasury has been guilty of maladministration in the duties of his Office, and should, in the opinion of Congress, be removed from his office by the President.

Madison continues to see Hamilton's evil hand manipulating John Adams's term in measures like the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 – at which point he throws himself into building the opposition Democratic-Republican Party. His goal remains a “national government,” but one

refusing to run roughshod over those standing in opposition to the will of the Executive branch. Jefferson later comments on his dedication to this cause:

I do not know in the world a man of purer integrity, more dispassionate, disinterested, and devoted to genuine Republicanism; nor could I in the whole scope of America and Europe point out an abler head.'

After Jefferson's victory in 1800, he becomes Secretary of State for eight years, despite the fact that he never travels abroad in his lifetime. His time is spent in the middle of the conflict between Napoleon and the British, as both nations interfere with American shipping and commerce on the high seas.

Like Jefferson, Madison tilts toward the French. When offered "honorary citizenship" in France after its revolution, he accepts, unlike Washington and Hamilton. He participates in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase and convinces Jefferson that the 1807 Embargo Act will utilize American commerce to help end Europe's war.

In 1808 he is seen by all as the logical choice to succeed Jefferson, who endorses him enthusiastically.

By nature, however, Madison is more the exceptional legislator than the decisive executive.

Aside from Albert Gallatin, his cabinet is weak. At times he is easily deceived diplomatically both by Britain and by Napoleon, and he fails to prepare the nation militarily for what his critics call "Mr. Madison's War of 1812." But while being forced to watch the British occupy the capital of Washington, he finally rallies the resistance and emerges with a victory in 1815.

One year later he departs the capital, never to visit again. He still has two decades to live, and focuses this time on Montpelier and on a series of final causes.

Financial difficulties plague this period, mainly related to members of Dolley's family who pile up crippling debts, then look to her to bail them out. The main villain in this group is her son, Payne Todd, whom Madison has adopted. The ex-President hopes to turn operations of his tobacco plantation over to Todd, but the young man proves to be a lifelong ne'er do well, drinking, gambling, fighting, and being sentenced to debtor's prison.

Madison hopes that the sale of his notes from the 1787 Convention will provide a windfall profit, and he and Dolley work together to organize them. She will eventually sell them to Congress in 1837 for \$30,000, and they will be published in 1840.

Aside from the work on his papers, the aging Madison helps Jefferson found the University of Virginia, and serves as its second president from 1826 to 1836. He also helps rewrite Virginia's state constitution in 1829.

Like Jefferson, he is troubled by the concept of slavery, while still regarding blacks as inferior to white men, denying their freedom, utilizing their labor to run his tobacco plantation, and, as he

says, “selling off another Negro” as need be. He wishes that slavery would end in America, but cannot conceive of social assimilation. As he tells Lafayette in 1826:

The two races cannot co-exist, both being free & equal. The great sine qua non therefore is some external asylum for the colored race.

The only answer lies in buying their freedom and returning them to Africa. With this outcome in mind, he lends his support to the American Colonization Society in 1817.

Over the years, Madison owns some 300 slaves, most typically around 100 at any time. In 1834 and 1835 he sells roughly a quarter of them to cover mounting debts. He ponders freeing the rest at his death, but decides that Dolley’s financial well-being prohibits manumission.

The “father of the U.S. Constitution” dies at age 85 years on June 28, 1836; just six days shy of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Dolley Madison is forced to sell Montpelier in 1844 to relieve family debts, and moves back to Washington. In 1844 she is honored with a permanent visitor’s seat on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, before her death in 1849.