

# TOLEDO MAGAZINE

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Thomas Jefferson

As this election year progresses, do you find yourself already tired of the mudslinging and name-calling, of 'mis-leader' and 'flip-flopper'? Do you wish to go back to a simpler time when everybody got along and political discourse was thoughtful and high-minded? Well, keep wishing, because it never was that way.

## Feuding founders



Benjamin Franklin

“If ignorance is bliss, why aren't more people happy?”

Thomas Jefferson

“I never thought him an honest, frank-dealing man, but considered him as a crooked gun or other perverted machine, whose aim or shot you could never be sure of.”

Thomas Jefferson on Aaron Burr

“He is distrustful, obstinate, excessively vain, and takes no counsel from anyone.”

Thomas Jefferson on John Adams

“All tongue, without either head or heart.”

Thomas Jefferson on Patrick Henry

“A slur upon the moral government of the world.”

John Quincy Adams on Thomas Jefferson

“The Declaration of Independence I always considered as a theatrical show. Jefferson ran away with all the stage effect of that ... and the glory of it.”

John Adams on Thomas Jefferson

John Adams hated Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Jefferson thought his vice president, Aaron Burr, was a traitor. Alexander Hamilton considered both Jefferson and Adams top political enemies, but held a special grudge against Burr. Before our founders finished the war for independence, they were well on their way toward fighting a war of words and slander with each other.

The mud really began to fly with the first real presidential race, where Adams and Jefferson sought to replace George Washington. Fledgling political parties' portrayals of the opposition's man proved to be as dirty and nasty as any

modern campaign. Jefferson, Democratic-Republicans claimed Adams was “an avowed friend of the monarchy,” — the equivalent of calling someone a Communist during the McCarthy period — and the Federalists, backing Adams, countered that Jefferson was an “atheist, demagogue, coward, mountebank, trickster, and Franco-maniac.”

The rematch of 1800 proved even sleazier. Jefferson's people spread the rumor that Adams was going to have

one of his sons marry a daughter of King George and reunite the country with Britain. They also accused Adams of sending Gen. Charles Pinckney to England to procure four young mistresses, two for Adams and two for Pinckney. When Adams heard the story his response was, “If this be true, General Pinckney has kept them all for himself and cheated me out of my two.”

The Federalists attacked Jefferson with just as much fury. Federalist

newspapers proclaimed that if Jefferson were elected, “murder, robbery, rape, adultery, and incest will be openly taught and proclaimed. The air will be rent with the cries of the distressed, the soil will be soaked with blood, and the nation black with crimes.” Federalists also spread word of Jefferson having been a coward during the Revolutionary War, that he had stolen from widows, and that he had fathered children by his slave, Sally Hemings.

When you think about it, “flip-flopper” and “mis-leader” rate as tepid compared to our founding fathers' rough-and-tumble standards.

“He means well for his country, is always an honest man, often a wise one, but sometimes and in some things, absolutely out of his senses.”

Benjamin Franklin on John Adams

“A crafty and lecherous old hypocrite whose very statue seems to gloat on the benches as they walk the State House Yard.”

William Corbett on Benjamin Franklin

“Oh I have read [Hamilton's] heart in his wicked eyes many a time. The very devil is in them.”

Abigail Adams on Alexander Hamilton

“That Washington was not a scholar is certain. That he is too illiterate, unlearned, unread for his station is equally beyond dispute.”

John Adams on George Washington

“It has been the political career of this man to begin with hypocrisy, proceed with arrogance, and finish with contempt.”

Thomas Paine on John Adams



Aaron Burr

Alexander Hamilton

ARTICLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY WES BOOHER

## John Adams didn't like anybody

John Adams, called the crankiest founding father by some historians, seems to have had a feud going with just about everyone.

In 1778, Adams joined Benjamin Franklin in Paris as part of a three-man team to seek French support in the war of independence with Britain. While it started out agreeably enough (Adams had referred to Franklin as a “great and good man”), Franklin and Adams grew to loathe each other. It soon became Adams' opinion that Franklin was too deferential to the French, too much of a ladies' man, and just too lazy. Franklin thought Adams too strident and self-important.

While Adams did not dislike George Washington, he grew distrustful of the public's growing admiration for the first president. Part of the problem was that, as Washington's vice president, Adams was kept out of the loop of influence. “I am vice president; in this I am nothing,” Adams is reported to have said.

The truth is, he felt that as the history of this new country was being written, his role in the revolution

was being diminished as the reputations of men like Washington and Thomas Jefferson grew. Adams, a short, spunky New Englander — whose favorite form of conversation was an argument — knew that the tall, soft-spoken, aristocratic Virginians would go down better in the history books than he would.



John Adams

And it frustrated him.

As for Jefferson — his former good friend — their relationship was destroyed with all the intrigue that occurred in the election of 1796. Adams' perceived disloyalty of Jefferson as Adams' vice president, and the wild election of 1800. Adams did not even attend his former friend's inauguration.

But after more than a decade of no communication, at a time when both of them were retired from public life, something extraordinary happened. They began a series of letters that rebuilt their friendship.

As President Adams struggled to get re-elected in 1800, fellow Federalist party leader Hamilton wrote a tome criticizing him, calling Adams unfit to lead the country. Hamilton's actions effectively split the party, contributed to Adams losing the election for a second term, and doomed the Federalist party to eventual extinction.

This led Adams to describe Hamilton as “a man devoid of every moral principle.”

## Hamilton, Burr, and the duel

The politics of the day could go from sniping to something far more deadly. In the case of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, it resulted in the death of the former and the political destruction of the latter.

Hamilton, as George Washington's secretary of the treasury, was one of early America's premier statesmen and had brilliantly put the young nation's fiscal house in order. But he was often controversial, and was an unapologetic adulterer — he once had to make a public account of an affair in order to explain payments he made to the woman's husband.

Burr was an opportunist, willing to do whatever it took to gain power, often switching parties and locales for a better deal. For years, Hamilton had been openly critical of Burr, sometimes referring to him as an “embryo-Caesar.”

During the election of 1800, an electoral tie between Jefferson and his running mate, Burr, left the choice of chief executive to the House of Representatives. Hamilton's influence made Jefferson president and Burr vice president — an outcome that was in accordance with the popular will, but left Burr disgruntled.

In 1804, Hamilton threw all his political

weight against then-vice president Burr, keeping him from the governorship of New York. Burr, having enough of Hamilton's insults, accused Hamilton of having called him a “dangerous” man in public. Hamilton replied to the charge, letters were exchanged, and eventually Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. The two men met on July 11, 1804, at Weehawken Heights, N.J. Hamilton was mortally wounded and died the next day.

While there can be no doubt that Hamilton lost in combat, Hamilton's supporters won the duel of words after his death. Burr was vilified and eventually brought up on murder charges in New York and New Jersey.

Burr's political career died with Hamilton. While he was never convicted of murder, he never again held elected office. Later, after several misadventures, Burr was accused of treason by President Jefferson. He was tried and acquitted because the state did not have the required number of witnesses. Burr's name became second only to Benedict Arnold's in infamy in relation to his country.

Hamilton, on the other hand, is with us yet today, his face staring at us whenever we open our wallets, a fixture on the \$10 bill.

“A man of irregular and insatiable ambition ... who ought not be trusted with the reins of government.”

Alexander Hamilton on Aaron Burr

Sources: *Founding Brothers* by Joseph J. Ellis, *Great American Scandals* by Michael Farquhar, John Adams by David McCullough, washingtonpost.com, digitalhistory.uh.edu, wikipedia.org, and insultmonger.com