

John Adams

Handy Dour Yankee

Second, 1797-1801



Nicknames: "His Rotundity", "The Duke of Braintree", "His Superfluous Excellency", "Bonny Johnny Adams", "The Atlas of Independence", "The Colossus of Independence", "The Colossus of Debate", "Old Sink or Swim"

Birth: October 30th, 1735, Braintree (now Quincy), Massachusetts

Death: July 4th, 1826, Braintree, Massachusetts (on the fifty-year anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and the same day that his on-again/off-again friend Thomas Jefferson died)

Significant Events During Adam's Term: U.S. Navy Fights Barbary Pirates off the Coast of Tripoli ... Alien and Sedition Acts ... "Quasi-War" with France ... George Washington Dies ... Number of States remain at sixteen

Quotes: *"If national pride is ever justifiable or excusable it is when it springs, not from power or riches, grandeur or glory, but from conviction of national innocence, information, and benevolence."*
-- John Adams

"Moral reflections, wise maxims, religious terrors have little effect upon nations when they contradict a present passion, prejudice, imagination, enthusiasm or caprice." -- John Adams

"Mr. Adams and his Federalists wish to sap the Republic by fraud, destroy it by force, and elect an English monarchy in its place." -- Thomas Jefferson

"A motley rabble of saucy boys, negroes, and mulattoes, Irish teagues and outlandish jack tarrs." -- John Adams, seeming to foreshadow James Watt*, describing the Americans present at the "Boston Massacre" (Adams, though a staunch revolutionary, was defending the British soldiers in court)

* James Watt would be Ronald Reagan's (#40) Secretary of the Interior. Watt once described members of an advisory panel he was dealing with as "a black, a woman, two Jews, and a cripple." Appointing such a man Secretary of the Interior was tantamount to employing a coyote as night watchman in a chicken coop. There is a little more about Watt and his deranged ideas in the George W. Bush (#43) chapter.

"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, speaking of John Adams in 1783

How his term ended: Adams lost his reelection bid to Thomas Jefferson

Other Professions: Surveyor, Lawyer

Worst Mistake: The so-called "Alien and Sedition Acts" of 1798 which curtailed immigration and (unconstitutionally) freedom of the press. The Sedition act criminalized either saying or writing anything about the government, Congress, or the President considered *by* the government to be "false, scandalous, and malicious." Ten Americans were imprisoned for speaking out against the government as a result of this law.

Saving Grace: Adams supported Haiti in their quest for independence from France. The Presidents who immediately preceded and followed Adams, namely the slaveholders Washington (#1) and Jefferson (#3), supported France. Jefferson was being consistent (although still wrong) in supporting France, as he was an infamous francophile. Washington was a different story: He was not a friend of France, and it seems odd that he would support her, as he was a supporter of Britain (who during this period were constantly fighting with France somewhere over something). Perhaps Washington was just that much of a racist that he counted white Americans as being worthy of independence from Britain but could not stomach the thought of black Haitians being independent from the lily-white French.

Notes: John Adams twice selected George Washington as leader of the military. In the

Revolutionary War, Massachusettensian Adams nominated Virginian Washington for the post in a (successful) attempt to get the southern colonies behind the war. At the time, only Massachusetts was really enthusiastic about going to war with Britain; the other colonies were lukewarm at best about the idea. With “their” man Washington leading the troops, though, the southerners also supported the war. In a Haman/Mordecai-like scenario, John Hancock thought that he himself was the right man for the job, and expected to be nominated Commander of the revolutionary forces. As Adams introduced his nominee with words of praise, Hancock did at first think that it was he who was being spoken of. He was taken aback when Washington's name was given instead.

During the Revolutionary War, Adams helped convinced France to directly help America in their fight against Britain, and Holland to lend money to the United States.

For the first two years of Adams' presidency, the U.S. And France fought a “Quasi-War” on the high seas. Although the Revolution had been fought against Britain, and won with France's assistance, Washington had been pro-Britain (and thus anti-France) during his administration, and Adams, also a Federalist, held similar views. The next President, though, the francophile Jefferson (#3), preferred France in that match-up.

Some believe Adams, with his wild mood swings (his son John Quincy, the sixth President, seems to have had them, too), was manic-depressive.

Adams was given the denigrating nicknames listed above because of his suggestion that the President be addressed as “His Highness, the President of the United States, Protector of their Liberties,” which to his peers smacked of British-style monarchical hifalutinisms.

Adams and Jefferson were the only Presidents to sign the Declaration of Independence.