Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation Study Guide

Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation by Joseph Ellis

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

In the mid-1770s, leaders of thirteen British colonies stretching most of the length of the Atlantic coast of North America improbably succeeded in breaking loose from imperial control. In the 1780's-90's, they struggled to turn their nation-states into a viable union, capable of survival in a still-hostile world. They looked across the Atlantic to France, seeing that revolution more probably leads to further bloodshed and the imposition of a new form of totalitarianism. Some patriots saw the Constitutional Convention of 1787 as compromising, or even abandoning, the Spirit of '76. Others saw it as a natural and necessary evolution. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, close personal friends in the band of brothers, personify the two positions, and sacrifice their friendship to promote their vision. *Founding Brothers* looks closely at a series of incidents that bring the post-revolutionary era alive, examining the major events and controversies that were taken up or covered up in the early republic's struggle for survival. The final chapter takes up the substance of the debate as the chief adversaries mellow with advanced age and seek to establish their views for posterity.

Preface

Preface Summary

Modern Americans broadly share a sense that members of the revolutionary generation of the 1770s-90s brought about something pre-ordained by the gods: a nation marked by popular government and a market economy. Some of those leaders, indeed, spoke prophetically, but the fact was that they also knew their movement could have failed and they would surely have hanged together as traitors. Had the British army commanders prosecuted the war more vigorously, they could have nipped the uprising in the bud, and evolution rather than revolution would have kept the colonies within the Empire.

That the U.S. became an enduring republic with institutions capable of standing the test of time was largely a matter of luck, inspiration, and makeshift construction. It was unlikely and unprecedented. Republicanism had succeeded only once: in Cicero's Rome. The American colonies had no history of enduring cooperation, no sense of national cohesion. Historians must view the revolution nearsightedly and farsightedly at the same time. On the farsighted side, several of the founders clearly saw the continent's limitless potential and had a sense of providence in their actions to create a nation of absolute freedom and independence. On the nearsighted side, the arguments they raised for seceding from the British Empire also militated against the creation of any other centralized power to replace the crown. This was a paradox and apparently intractable dilemma, forcing John Adams periodically to throw up his hands in frustration.

The problem was solved in 1787, when a tiny minority of the prominent political leaders, gathered to tighten the loose Articles of Confederation, boldly went beyond their mandate and wrote a new Constitution. The "miracle at Philadelphia" has come to be seen as a gathering of inspired demi-gods, but was in fact a second battle to secure nationhood for the newly won independence. Uncertainty was the dominant mood, and compromise was the tool, allowing both sides of the debate to believe it had gotten the best of the bargain. The battle between states' rights and federalism was intractable; the solution was to posit power in "the people." The epithet "Americans" was originally used by the English as an insult towards an inferior and subordinate people. The revolution was sparked by protest that their rights as British citizens had been violated, as had their natural rights as human beings.

When the new government gathered in New York City for the first time in 1789, they began testing the proposition that Abraham Lincoln would later cite in the Gettysburg Address, that the "nation so conceived and so dedicated [could] long endure" — whether the nation's vast assets could overcome its four major liabilities: 1) no republican government on this scale had ever succeeded; 2) the Declaration of Independence itself stigmatized all concentrated political power; 3) the people had no common history as a nation; and 4) fully 17.5% of the population were slaves, and 90% of them were concentrated in the South. The 1790s were the most crucial and

consequential decade in U.S. history, exceeding the years 1855-65 and the 1940s, because without the establishment of stable national institutions at this point would have doomed the experiment.

Modern scholarship prefers to concentrate on the common folk of the era rather than the mythologized "Founding Fathers," but this overlooks the clear fact that politics was the central achievement of the time. The political elite, mostly male and all white, were unlike any group in Europe. Most were born poor and would have been simply overlooked in the Old World. Instead, they became the greatest generation of political talent in U.S. history. They created a republic and then held it together. There are two established ways of telling the story: 1) the "pure republicanism" or "Jeffersonian" interpretation, whereby the successful liberation movement, which broke cleanly with European monarchy and aristocracy, fell victim to a "hostile takeover" by the Federalists in the election of 1800 (with Hamilton as the chief culprit); and 2) the collectivist, conservative, protosocialist view that the Federalists — Adams, Hamilton, and Washington — were true heirs of the revolutionary legacy, creating a higher authority that was "us" rather than "them" (the chief culprit here is Jefferson). Every generation of historians has taken up this debate, endlessly and futilely chasing their own tails, because we live with the legacy of the revolutionary generation. Rather than "split the difference," one should seek to understand the deepest impulses of the Revolution and see how, in the aftermath of victory, the partisans of common cause could not agree on how to proceed. Remarkably, they succeeded (unlike the French soon afterwards) in not "devouring [their] own children" and transforming the explosive energies of the debate into political parties. The Civil War tested what Jefferson's proposition meant.

The 1790s were an "Age of Passion," a decade-long shouting match among a group of well-dressed personalities striking classical poses, much as they are portrayed in art. This book recreates the sense of urgency and improvisation that moved eight prominent political leaders. Four common features are revealed: 1) in the collective enterprise they checked one another, achieving balance and equilibrium; 2) they knew each other personally; 3) slavery was viewed as too risky a topic to deal with immediately; and 4) they realized full well that later generations would be looking at them and posed accordingly.

Preface Analysis

The Preface, entitled "The Generation," establishes how Ellis envisions this book. It is a series of self-contained episodes, selected to recover the sense of urgency and improvisation that marked the revolutionary generation. He dedicates himself to bringing to the task all the storytelling skill he possesses — which is considerable. He briefly lays out the scholarly debate about whether the triumph of Federalism in 1800 marked a break with the revolutionary spirit or its logical continuation, refusing to adopt the simplistic "split-the-difference" position — and the modern tendency among historians to concentrate on the common people of the era rather than the "stars." He is frank in admitting that he begins with the story of the Hamilton-Burr duel in order to catch the reader's attention quickly. It is the only instance in that generation in which violence and

death overcame political resolution. In the Preface, we are treated to a number of brief asides (e.g., Benjamin Harrison's musing in 1776 that his portliness would result in a quick death should they all be hung by the British, whereas the skinny Elbridge Gerry would suffer for hours). Such touches of color punctuate this book.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

"The Duel" at Weehawken, NJ, July 11, 1804, can be succinctly summarized — Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton face off according to the customs of the *code duello,* Hamilton dies of his wound, and Burr's reputation is ruined — but the dramatic event requires deeper analysis and more colorful depiction. Colonel Burr, the shadowy and severe grandson of the great theologian of human depravity, Jonathan Edwards, bore himself as a natural aristocrat, but had a history of spinning webs to entrap others. Peaches-and-cream, gallant, animated, and visionary General Hamilton, had an air of gentlemanly diffidence, despite his lowly birth. Hamilton came to Weehawken because he did not believe he could afford to decline Burr's "invitation," and left written indications that he intended not to fire on his opponent. Dueling was illegal, and the *code duello* provided for a "language of deniability" to shield participants from legal proceedings. Hamilton, as the man who had been challenged, had the right to choose weapons and placement on the narrow ledge overlooking the Hudson River. He chose powerful, ornate smoothbore pistols firing a large ball. Rarely however were such weapons lethal, because they were inaccurate. He opted to face into the sun, strengthening the argument that he intended not to fire. But then, he requested a delay to don his eyeglasses and aim at several imaginary targets. Two shots rang out and Hamilton fell, mortally wounded as the ball ricocheted off a rib and upward through his vital organs. He realized he was doomed before lapsing into unconsciousness. Burr seemed surprised and regretful and wanted to speak to his dying opponent, but was ushered away to preserve the deniability. Hamilton was rowed back to New York, and rallied long enough to make clear that he thought he had not fired his pistol. He died next day and received a magnificent funeral. Newspapers and rumors formed an overwhelming consensus that Burr had murdered the martyr Hamilton in cold blood. He fled New York in disgrace, demonized as the new Benedict Arnold.

There is little agreement among witnesses about the actual gunfire at Weehawken. A war of words was waged in the press and pamphlets. Hamilton's second, Nathaniel Pendleton, and Burr's second and protégé, William Van Ness, published a "Joint Statement" describing the principles' adherence to the *code duello,* agreeing only that both had fired a shot separated by a few seconds. Hamilton's followers held that Burr fired first and that Hamilton's shot came as the result of an involuntary jerk after being hit. If this were true, the two discharges should have been virtually simultaneous. Burr's followers held that after Hamilton fired and missed, Burr waited for the smoke to clear and fired more accurately. While this better fits the agreed scenario, it fails to address why the dying Hamilton would believe he had not fired and Pendleton's contention that he found a high branch severed from a tree behind Burr's position by Hamilton's ball. Both stories are self-serving. Most likely, Hamilton fired first, intending to miss Burr. Burr, ignorant of Hamilton's pledge, took deadly aim. Burr had nothing to gain and everything to lose by killing Hamilton, and immediately showed regret. Most likely, he intended only to wound his opponent, but misaimed and inflicted a mortal wound. Burr

took his intentions to his grave. Hamilton's probably erroneous version of the story prevailed.

What brought two prominent statesmen to the dueling field? Burr challenged Hamilton, and Hamilton did not believe he could refuse without staining his honor. They had waged a war of words for fifteen years, reflecting personal animosity and political disagreement. Hamilton had attacked Burr's qualifications in the 1804 campaign for the governorship of New York, and a newspaper applied the adjective "despicable" to Burr. He demanded an explanation or a disavowal, which could easily have been given since the author, Dr. Charles Cooper, did not make clear the context. Hamilton chose, however, to evade Burr's demand, considering it arrogant of Burr to demand again an explanation of so long a conflict. Since Hamilton had apologized two years earlier but failed to stop his backstabbing, Burr's blood was up. Hamilton conceded that he had criticized Burr's politics to Dr. Cooper, but denied attributing dishonorable conduct to him. Technically, this should have eliminated the question of a duel. The matter was handed over to seconds, who most often managed to avoid a confrontation. This time they failed. Both men set their affairs in order after the formal challenge, and sat together at a Fourth of July celebration. The night before, Hamilton hosted political foes at dinner, in hindsight suggesting he was making a point that political and personal difference ought to be kept separate — and, perhaps, regret that the situation with Burr had reached the point it had. In a "Statement on the Impending Duel," Hamilton essentially admitted to vilifying his opponent for years on the conviction that all he had said was true. He went to Weehawken in order not to lose the respect of his political colleagues.

After Weehawken, Burr went on to perhaps treasonable dealings with the British and a moral crusade was launched against dueling in the North. The duel is the only instance in which blood flowed over politics in the revolutionary generation — unlike the later blood baths in France, Russia, and China. It is understandable only if one recovers the core moral values of those years. The combatants had known each other since the war, and first clashed in 1789, when Hamilton first called Burr on a political flip-flop in New York politics. It deepened in 1791, when Burr defeated Hamilton's father-in-law to gain a seat in the U.S. Senate and began fighting Hamilton's fiscal program. In 1792, Hamilton opposed Burr's candidacy for the vice presidency, and in 1794 prevented Burr from being named envoy to France. In 1800, Hamilton backed his archenemy Thomas Jefferson over Burr in the House fight over who would win the tied electoral vote for President. Finally, in 1804, Hamilton went out of his way to oppose Burr's run for the New York governorship. Hamilton's battle with Jefferson was over principles; his opposition to the unprincipled Burr was that Burr sought only his own aggrandizement through power and wealth. He was truly the Catalan of America (an allusion to the treacherous, degenerate, and licentious politician who destroyed republican government in ancient Rome — a claim grasped instantly by their contemporaries). Burr recognized that the people intended that Jefferson be President, but allowed the drama to be drawn out in the House of Representatives until Hamilton could no longer hold his tongue. In 1804, Burr's switch to Federalism in the New York campaign forced Hamilton to utter his fatal criticism. He abhorred the plan of the Federalist leaders of New England and New York to secede from the Union. Burr was too ambitious, energetic, perceptive, and risk-

taking — to be allowed to prevail in a country still politically immature. The moral fiber of would-be leaders was still too vital a consideration. Had the question of libel gone to court, Hamilton would almost certainly have won. Instead, he went to Weehawken to defend the still-emerging world that his opponent threatened. Although both were well on the way to political oblivion, both wanted to be part of the company of leaders who were great by reason of having been present at the founding of the nation.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Chapter 1, "The Duel" deals with confrontation on the morning of July 11, 1804, when Vice President Aaron Burr and former Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton faced off at Weehawken, NJ, and Hamilton lost his life. Ellis first reviews those facts that can be established beyond dispute, then circles back to the debated minutes of who fired first and the probable motivations of each, and finally examines the history of bad blood between the two men in the context of an America so immature that personal virtue could not be divorced from politics. Recall when reading the rest of the book that Chapter 1 is out of chronological order. Hamilton is very much alive and active in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

A haggard, dejected Alexander Hamilton confided to Thomas Jefferson, together waiting outside President Washington's New York office, that he was ready to resign his post as Secretary of the Treasury because Congress was deadlocked over his financial plan. In Hamilton's view, failure to have the federal government assume the states' debt would doom the union. Preoccupied with other matters and suffering migraine headaches, Jefferson offered to help by bringing Hamilton together over dinner with the leader of the opposition to this plan, James Madison. Jefferson provides the only account of the June 20, 1790, gathering, which resulted in one of the landmark accommodations in U.S. politics. The Residence Bill and the Assumption Bill, both considered near dead before the dinner, passed within days of each other in July by nearly identical votes in Congress. The press concluded that a secret deal had been reached, and Jefferson's letter to Madison argued that Virginia would not suffer from this necessary compromise, and that without it the U.S. would dissolve either peacefully or in civil war. The dinner was but one of several secret conversations over the two seemingly unrelated questions. Why were they so threatening to the newborn nation in the founders' minds?

James Madison at age 39 had a reputation as a shrewd and politically savvy veteran of the constitutional battles of the 1780s. His arguments for compromise won him the honorary title of "Father of the Constitution." He had co-written (with Hamilton) the *Federalist Papers,* outmaneuvered Patrick Henry to gain Virginia's ratification of the Constitution, and drafted the Bill of Rights in 1790. He was regarded as the most influential political leader in the U.S., after Washington and Franklin. Diminutive, colorless, sickly, and paralyzingly shy, he used his seeming defects to win out over his flamboyant colleagues. While Jefferson served in Paris, Madison and Hamilton had teamed up to expand the national government's sovereignty over the states. But by 1790 they had drifted to opposite sides of the constitutional divide, as Madison was reconverted to the revolutionary faith of Virginia. The break came when Hamilton's *Report on the Public Credit* reached Congress. It proposed that the daunting public debt be redeemed straightforwardly by reimbursing everyone holding government securities at the full value of the original promise. The problem with this plan, in Madison's mind, was that many war veterans had sold their securities to speculators at reduced rates and would thus be defrauded. A surprised Hamilton acknowledged the argument to Congress and suggested there were three options: 1) pay both parties, 2) reject one or the other claim, or 3) compromise on some form of equity. Madison favored the third option, but was defeated when Congress voted. He rose to suggest that the matter was more complicated than Hamilton suggested — consolidate thirteen ledgers into one — and concealed a sinister plan. Virginia (and most of the Southern states) had paid off much of their wartime debt and demanded to know how much federal tax they would be assuming before voting for assumption. Rough calculations again suggested unfairness. Madison's deepest concern was not for money but for control, trust, and independence. Virginians upheld the hallowed revolutionary opposition to outside taxation. Northern

congressmen accused Madison of opposing a bill vital to the survival of the republic, while Southerners pointed to this debate as proof that Madison had been wrong in advocating the new Constitution. They had a deep ideological fear of "consolidation," of being eaten alive by another form of imperialism. Madison urged patience. He pointed out that Virginia's interests were well represented in the capital and that he controlled the votes needed to see assumption defeated.

Hitting this obstacle, Hamilton characteristically threw himself onto the offensive. His take-charge temperament (perhaps an overcompensation for his illegitimate origins) drove him to write the *Report on the Public Credit* with desperate speed, advocating a centralized solution to the problem. This alone would free America's latent commercial energies. He found Madison's proposals naïve and mischievous; no one had coerced veterans to sell their securities, and any path other than reimbursing the current holders would be an administrative nightmare. He pointed to Madison's past advocacy of federal power over the states and suggested that if the states wished to renegotiate calculations of their debts this could be done, among friends. Assumption, Hamilton argued, was not a Faustian bargain or plot to destroy the states; it was a practical plan that would benefit everyone. He saw himself as the chosen instrument to implement the collective effort. Hamilton favored the model of the British national bank and regulated economy, which were anathema south of the Potomac. Hamilton could not hear the Southern arguments, focused as he was on the certainty that money concentrated in the hands of the few became capital to fuel the whole economy. It was a national blessing rather than Madison's view that it was a "public curse." Hamilton trusted — even over-trusted — the urban elite among whom he had learned to work, while Virginians saw bankers and speculators as unproductive to society. The conflict was agrarian versus commercial sources of wealth. Wealthy Virginians, who wore debt to British and Scottish creditors as a badge of honor, had no idea what Hamilton was talking about.

The third participant in the dinner was Thomas Jefferson, six months back from service overseas, out of touch (despite correspondence with Madison), preoccupied, and ailing (as were the rest of the most prominent Virginians at the time). Jefferson deferred to Madison's judgments about the Constitutional debates of 1787-88 and avoided partisan fighting. After graduating from William and Mary and studying law, he had emerged as a staunch advocate of independence and authored the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but was disgraced during his wartime service as governor of Virginia. He accepted the post in France reluctantly, and his return to New York and the job of Secretary of State was only because no one turned down George Washington. Endlessly polite and accommodating, unable to abide personal conflict, and understanding firsthand the international implications of America's debtor status, Jefferson encouraged his fellow Virginians to "give as well as take."

The "residency question" had become a nightmare. The Constitution authorized Congress to establish a "seat of government," but regional blocks refused to relinquish their claims. Pennsylvania vied with Virginia as to geographically central sites, and "Big Knife" Madison was for once unable to cut a deal. The Potomac site (adjacent to Washington's estate at Mount Vernon) developed a mythical status as the gateway to

the West in Virginians' minds but invited only mockery elsewhere. A bargain with proponents of assumption began to look favorable. The dinner's compromise solution had already been prepared by at least three secret meetings: 1) between Hamilton's assistant and Jefferson and Madison; 2) between Hamilton and representatives of Pennsylvania; and 3) between delegates of Virginia and Pennsylvania. Jefferson's account of the dinner-table conversation glosses over the fact that Hamilton no longer needed to deliver Northern votes for a Potomac capital and Madison did not need to deliver any votes on assumption. In all probability, most of the discussion that Sunday evening dealt with recalculating Virginia's debt to the point that it and its new federal tax liability would balance out. Jefferson left this unattractive detail out.

The sudden victory of the Potomac site surprised everyone and raised criticism in the Philadelphia and New York press. When the battle refused to abate, it was decided to do what a New York newspaper had originally suggested: give George Washington a map and have him point to the future capital. Washington made the decision and supervised every aspect of the planning and building of the city that would bear his name. Jefferson and Madison agreed that work should begin immediately, in order to forestall further debate. Virginians refused to drop their revolutionary rhetoric against assumption, and Hamilton saw once again the danger of secessionism. He no longer knew whether Madison was a Virginian or an American, and consulted him no more.

The Compromise of 1790 averted a political crisis for which the U.S. was not yet ready to face. Revolutions always fragment once the common enemy disappears. Virginia contained one-fifth of the U.S. population and a third of its commerce; it saw itself as "first among equals" in the confederation of states. The choice of a remote and nearly vacant tract of land for the capital, far removed from the centers of economic power, defused concern about Hamilton's fiscal reforms. The Dinner brought Jefferson and Madison back into political partnership; neither could accept the secessionist impulses of Virginians whose apprehensions they shared. Jefferson would go on to oversee a campaign to extend the Virginian vision of the Revolution, and Madison would lead the troops.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter 2, "The Dinner," looks back nearly fourteen years before the Duel to a dinner that Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson hosted to bring together Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton and Congressman James Madison, in an attempt to iron out their ideological rivalry over two divisive issues: the assumption of states' wartime debt by the federal government and the establishment of a national capital. Our appreciation of Hamilton's abrasive temperament gained in Chapter 1 is deepened here, as we view him at the height of his power. He could see both the big picture and the myriad details with equal clarity, which confounded his opponents. We meet the idealistic Thomas Jefferson and the pragmatic James Madison, who will each serve as the subject of a later chapter.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

On February 11, 1790, a Quaker delegation petitioned the House of Representatives to end the African save trade immediately. Several Southern representatives rose to oppose them— James Jackson of Georgia apoplectically, and William Loughton Smith of South Carolina Constitutionally. No action could be taken until 1808. James Madison asked his colleagues to allow the petitions to run their course quietly. Next day, however, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society petitioned anew, declaring slavery and the slave trade incompatible with the values of the American Revolution and challenged the claim that the Constitution prohibited action. The "general welfare" clause was a way around it. Benjamin Franklin had signed this petition, and this guaranteed that the matter could not be assigned to legislative oblivion. Consideration of the assumption and residency questions was set aside for a public debate that for the first time spoke openly about slavery — heretofore considered too important and controversial a word to pronounce. Thomas Scott of Pennsylvania admitted that the slave trade could not be touched for twenty years, but the institution of slavery was not protected. Jackson responded with a sermon on God's blessing of the institution and the economic fact that the Deep South could not survive without it. Smith reminded his colleagues that the Constitution would not have been ratified — and no union established — without the implicit understanding that there would be no interference with slavery. Abraham Baldwin of Georgia, a veteran of the Constitutional Convention, reminded the body of the pain and difficulty the question had raised in Philadelphia, and warned against revisiting it. John Laurence of New York questioned the biblical argument and declared that this short-term anomaly in the American republic was destined for abolition. Scott advised they look past the Constitution to the Declaration of Independence for guidance. Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts wanted to table discussion until a plan for compensating slave owners could be established. John Page of Virginia declared opposition to the topic in the Deep South was misguided, for silence would convince slaves they had no hope and encourage insurrections. Madison summarized: the Constitution was crystal clear on the slave trade, but the House could talk about anything it wished, including regulation of slaves in the Western territories. He was silent on whether slavery was on the road to extinction or forever protected. The House then voted overwhelmingly to refer the petitions to committee.

By hindsight, we know slavery would occupy the next 70 years of U.S. history and end in the nation's bloodiest war, but the actors in the 1790 drama could only know the past. The debate proceeded on which of America's "original intentions" would predominate — 1776 or 1787 — and the sides formed along strictly geographic and demographic lines. The initial draft of the Declaration of Independence had been explicit: the slave trade was a perverse British plot to contaminate the colonies. This was deleted from the final draft, but the document still spoke of natural rights that certainly must lead to abolition. The Continental Congress had toyed with abolition. Most northern states had outlawed it in their new constitutions or legislation. Only New York and New Jersey — with the

largest slave populations — had demurred. In 1782, Virginia made voluntary manumission legal, and Thomas Jefferson had called for gradual emancipation.

Slavery, however, was so deeply imbedded in the structure of society as to be impervious to wishful thinking and revolutionary expectations. Property rights were too sacred a part of the principles of '76 to be dismissed based on morality. The longer slavery was tolerated, the more difficult it would be to eliminate. At the Constitutional Convention, Luther Martin of Maryland and Gouverneur Morris of Pennsylvania had raised forceful moral arguments for abolition behind closed doors, and the Deep South had countered with a demand that the basis of their entire economy not be touched. Implicit from the start was the threat of secession. Neither side got what it wanted, and the Constitution was purposefully evasive on the question. Clarity would have doomed its ratification. Two bargains were struck: 1) in July 1787, the Confederation Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance, which forbade slavery north of the Ohio River — and was open to interpretation on its status southward; and 2) the "Sectional Compromise" saw New England accept twenty years more of slavery in return for Southern support of navigation legislation. Southerners took comfort in the fact that the federal government could not act in areas not explicitly authorized by the Constitution.

Virginia debated the question most fully, talking Northern but thinking Southern. The most populous state had the largest slave population and the largest free-black population, but its political leaders stood firmly by the radical principles of '76. Slavery was an evil embarrassment. It was also, however, a matter of state control. In 1790, Virginia occupied the middle ground and urged caution between the Northerners, who saw 1776 as a promissory note that slavery would end, and the Southerners, who saw 1787 as a gentlemen's agreement that it would be left alone.

When the committee report was ready in March, the Deep South rose in an attempt to block hearing it, but lacked the votes to prevent this. Jackson and Smith prepared the fullest public exposition of the pro-slavery position yet heard, touching upon every argument that would be raised in the next seventy years. Jackson spoke for two hours, condemning the Quakers' sanctimonious attitudes and declaring slavery a "necessary evil," imported by the British and so firmly entrenched in the economy as to be as "self-evident" a reality as Jefferson's truths. Jackson next rose to quote the Bible, studies on the contemporary African slave trade, and Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia.* This book examined the unthinkable sociological problems that emancipation would pose in the South. The cost of restitution and the question of where to relocate the free slaves were both insuperable problems. Smith reiterated Jackson's arguments in a less volatile style. From Jefferson he drew the conclusion that integration would result either in the extinction of one race or the other, or a mulatto breed. Emancipation was folly. Never before had the racial (and racist) argument been so clearly laid down. That the U.S. was an Anglo-Saxon society had been accepted as self-evident from the start, but 1790 demanded that the question be put on the table.

The 1790 census, being counted as the Quaker debate raged, made clear that slavery was a sectional phenomenon, dead or dying in the North and flourishing in the South. Virginia would be the key state if a national plan for ending slavery were to succeed.

The slave population was doubling every 20-25 years, and emancipation would become economically and politically more difficult the larger it grew. The Quakers had raised the question at perhaps the last moment it could be peacefully settled.

The Deep South monopolized Congressional debate over the report, and argued: 1) the census proved the utopian vision was false — slavery would not die out; and 2) the model of the North, where blacks numbered under 10%, was impractical in the South. No one from the Upper South or North rose to oppose them, either because they saw the problem was intractable or because they were unwilling to call the secession bluff of South Carolina and Georgia. Two Virginians, Fernando Fairfax and St. George Tucker, subsequently fleshed out Jefferson's sketchy emancipation plans. Any political solution in 1790 would have to begin swiftly, before the demographics grew larger, and implemented gradually, to spread the cost over multiple generations. The cost of compensation was estimated to be prohibitive — double the existing annual federal budget. Tucker therefore proposed amortizing the debt and folding it into Hamilton's plan to settle the total wartime debt. Relocating the freed slaves was an even greater problem. History knew of no genuinely biracial society. Repatriation to Africa had been attempted by the British but failed; the vast open spaces of the Louisiana Purchase lay in the future. Black "homelands" east of the Mississippi, along the lines of Indian relocations, was feasible but difficult. Any federal project would be destined to raise the same "consolidation" fears in Virginia as did Hamilton's financial package.

A very old and very ill Benjamin Franklin, the seemingly immortal, ubiquitous founding grandfather of the nation, adopted emancipation as his life's last cause. Sixty years earlier, he had published Quaker tracts and written against racist theories, but had never thrown the weight of his vast prestige behind the issue. In 1787, he agreed to preside over the revitalized Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and withdrew a proposal at the Constitutional Convention to condemn slavery and the slave trade on principle only because it endangered the Constitution itself. He promptly re-introduced the matter in 1790 at the first Congress. Writing under the pseudonym "Historicus," Franklin published a parody of James Jackson's speech, changing the slave owner into an Algerian pirate named Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, the slaves to Christians, and the theological justification from Christianity to Islam. Franklin died three weeks later, catalyzing a Northern response to the anti-slavery arguments by William Scott after Smith dared dismiss Franklin's views as the result of senility.

Franklin's last gesture of leadership set him apart from Adams, Hamilton, Washington, and Jefferson, all of whom found the debate embarrassing. Madison, who saw the taboo subject as premature and politically impractical, raised a "verbal fog bank" of "willful confusion" to make it go away. He left no footprints, but it seemed clear that some sectional bargain was struck to clarify the Constitutional ambiguities about slavery. The committee report included seven resolutions that offered something for everyone. Using the parliamentary tactic of calling the House into a committee of the whole, Madison reduced the resolutions to three, the heart of which was that Congress had no authority to interfere with the abolition of slaves. By a vote of 29 to 25, the House put the question out of bounds within its chamber. Washington was relieved. The

precedent would be cited in 1792 and 1833 to close off debate. The debate over a national purging of sin moved into the churches.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3, "The Silence," discusses the first public debate of slavery and the slave trade in 1790. The heart of the matter was the Constitution's Article I, Section 9, paragraph 1, which states, "The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight." Two groups of Quakers petitioned Congress to do something about the moral blot that slavery made on the new nation, and the Deep South reacted with such vehemence that it could not be allowed to die a quiet legislative death. Theology and economy marked the early debate, but moved on to outright racism, when the practicalities of emancipation were considered. The U.S. was, self-evidently, an Anglo-Saxon nation until this debate. For the next 70 years, the country would be divided over what to do with the black population, slave and free. Integration had never succeeded in history. Relocation was problematic. As in 1787, the first Congress in 1790 dodged the question, setting up the crisis of the Civil War.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

George Washington was covered with an aura of omnipotence on September 19, 1796, when he announced to the people his intention not to stand for reelection in the upcoming election. Only Benjamin Franklin approached Washington in prominence, and he acknowledged the latter's preeminence. Many of the stories about Washington's bravery under fire were true, and in war and peace he had been the one indispensable character, the uniter. Every major newspaper published his "Farewell Address" — actually more an open letter rather than a speech. Its Olympian tone guaranteed that it would be studied for generations. Its most important point was that the President was laying down power voluntarily after two terms and that the office would be rotated. The American people were now on their own.

Insiders had seen the announcement coming and knew it would usher in an era of partisan politics, with Jefferson and Adams likely to face off first. Virginians were as lyrical about the retirement as was the ancient Roman Cicero. Washington had threatened to retire in 1789 and 1792, but agreed to continue serving the nation. In 1796, however, age and illness were catching up with him. He had begun to let others act and even think for him, and seemed dazed while delivering speeches. He did not want to die in office (as he surely would if he accepted a third term), because this would set an improper precedent. The office should properly outlive the incumbent; even the most indispensable person is inherently disposable. More importantly, during his second term, Washington had been wounded by criticism by Tom Paine. His critics were in the minority, but their persistent attacks hurt deeply, no matter how he might feign utter disregard. Some charges were simply preposterous — that he was a traitor; others criticized him for acting as a quasi-king. His natural aloofness lent credence, and there were no European precedents for how a republican leader ought to act. The new nation needed a dominant leader and Washington accepted the role of embodying national authority, even though the Declaration of Independence saw inherent evil in any kingship, not just in George III. By laying down power voluntarily, Washington was demonstrating his republican allegiances.

The Farewell Address pleaded for national unity, denounced excessive partisanship, and called for strict American neutrality and diplomatic independence from European affairs. Various aspects have been emphasized by successive generations, but it is essential to recover three factors that Washington's contemporaries would have taken as obvious and elemental. First, Washington's reputation rested less on his prudent exercise of power than on his virtuoso ability to exit. People remembered that before appearing before Congress in 1783 to resign his commission, he had quelled an officers' rebellion that would have made him an American Caesar. Second, he had demonstrated that the war was not won by capturing ground, but by keeping the Continental Army intact, to give the British the time and space needed to collapse. Sustaining the national purpose would require the same tactics. Third, Washington did

not want to keep the U.S. out of foreign conflicts as a philosophical exercise; he was the mirror image of Jefferson in this regard. Speculation and sentiment had not swayed him from hanging John André as a spy in 1780 or opposing a French invasion of Canada in 1778. The national interest had always to be concrete. His Circular Letter of 1783 to the states most clearly laid out Washington's views of the national interest: Providence had given Americans a vast continent of physical wealth and obliged them to develop both it and the reservoir of philosophical wealth that had developed during the Enlightenment. He knew one big thing: the West was the key to the future. Developing it would require twenty years of peace, as he made clear in his 1793 Proclamation of Neutrality. The U.S. could not afford to involve itself in conflicts before victory would prove possible.

This view was not self-evident to other members of the revolutionary generation. The question came to a head in 1794, when Chief Justice John Jay returned from London bearing a treaty that granted major concessions to England in return for strategic security on the western frontier. It was a shrewd bet that England would defeat France in the on-going war and it postponed conflict with England at a time of American vulnerability. Contemporaries could not foresee the future, and criticism was virulent and painful — leaving an imprint on the Farewell Address two years later. Mobs cursed Washington, demanded war on England, and sided with the French patriots. Washington knew that the Constitutional Convention had intended that the executive branch have the sole power to negotiate treaties, with the Senate offering advice and consent. Jefferson concluded that the House was empowered to veto any treaty, and trusted that it would do so with this "infamous act." Madison, more cautiously, saw that the House's control over funding could accomplish the same effect while avoiding an assault on executive power. Opposing Washington was still a hopeless endeavor, and Madison lost the vote in April. Jefferson and his followers did not view this from the modern perspective of effective executive leadership. Rather, their view still drew on the radical utopian ideal of a self-governed humankind purged of kings and priests. Since his return from France in 1790, Jefferson had worried about the counterrevolutionary character of Hamilton's financial scheme and the turn away from the agrarianism that he idealized. Jefferson chose to believe that Washington was wholly oblivious to the diabolical schemes swirling around him until the President used massive military action to quell the Whiskey Rebellion in Western Pennsylvania. Jefferson denounced Washington's rationale, but was careful never to do so publicly. In private letters, however, he portrayed the sad image of a senile old soldier. One such letter, to Philip Mazzei, was shrouded in allusions to Samson and Solomon, but could not be mistaken as speaking of anyone but the President, head shorn by the "harlot of England." Convinced that the entire world would follow the example of the American Revolution, Jefferson wanted foreign policy to accommodate an overarching, almost cosmic pattern. As for the present situation, he saw the French Revolution, despite its gory results, as the continuation of '76, and England as the counterrevolutionary villain. Jefferson felt justified in lying to Washington about the campaign of vilification he was conducting against him because the larger cause required deception. Washington made clear he knew what was going on, but allowed the veneer of friendship to continue for a year. When the old letter to Mazzei appeared in the press, however, communications between them ceased forever.

However the personal rift and sense of betrayal might have hurt Washington personally, the greater importance was to heighten the retiring President's concerns about the meaning of the Revolution and how America's best interests could be advanced. In both the Whiskey Rebellion and the Jay Treaty, duly elected representatives of the people had acted under the Constitution — and had not, as Jefferson would hold, reined in the liberating impulses of the Revolution. Jefferson's zealous protégé, James Monroe, was serving as U.S. minister to France, where he encouraged the French to disregard the President's messages and retaliate against American shipping on the high seas, and leaked confidential communiqués to Washington's journalistic nemesis, Benjamin Franklin Bache of *Aurora*. A second disloyal colleague, Edmund Randolph, the Secretary of State, was quoted by Joseph Faucher in a dispatch that the British intercepted at sea and sent back to Washington. It pictured a dazed and confused President.

These events dictated that when Washington sat down to write his Farewell Address, 1) he had to demonstrate he was still in control, 2) he advocated a middle course and moderate tone, and 3) the American Revolution required that the people remain united against those who would subvert its principles by divisive politics, foreign and domestic. Both Madison and Hamilton collaborated in putting Washington's valedictory ideas into words. Madison had written a draft in 1792, and it was tucked away when Washington accepted a second term. Washington sent it to Hamilton in 1796 to clarify the language and emphasize that sectional and ideological differences had to be subordinated to the larger national purposes. Incorporating the 1792 text, he emphasized that he had not even wanted a second term, which undermined the credibility of arguments that he feared being defeated in a third run. Washington emphasized that the section on neutrality was to reflect none of Hamilton or Jay's pro-English prejudices. Hamilton, who had written for Washington in the army and in the cabinet, needed little instruction. After two months of steady work, he delivered a draft that pleased the President more than a second version a dissatisfied Hamilton produced independently. They exchanged drafts several times, and Washington performed very close last minute editing before handing the manuscript to the printer in September.

Hamilton's contribution was watching the rhetorical framework, dignified tone, cogency, and sense of proportion. In a few cases, his distinctive voice breaks through. He moved a somewhat pathetic *cri de coeur* from the beginning to the end and turned it into a dignified personal testimonial. He long resisted Washington's requests to insert a section advocating creation of a national university, feeling it would be more fitting for it to be included in his final message to Congress. Washington was not pleased with the short shrift his pet project finally received. He had seen inhabitants from various parts of the country solidify their feeling of Americanness in the Continental Army and wanted young men to experience this accelerated bonding in university. He anticipated that Americans would come to hold a collective identity and goals.

Washington used the Farewell Address to justify the strong executive leadership he had wielded at a time when the nation's long-range destiny demanded this. Full-blooded republican principles could wait. The center would have still to hold as he departed. The

three army veterans, Washington, Hamilton, and John Marshall, understood the need for a continuing strong government, but the civilians Jefferson and Madison did not.

In his eighth and final message to Congress, Washington saw serenity settling over the country, with the French sea marauders the only exception. Confidence was a self-fulfilling prophecy. He introduced an agenda not matched in scope until John Quincy Adams in 1825. The federal government had to be empowered to deal institutionally with all the matters he had handled personally.

When Washington talked to the citizenry, he had the white, male yeomanry in mind. Their wives and children were citizens through them. The poor and landless were potential citizens, depending on their efforts at self-help. Blacks were simply ignored. Washington had long wanted slavery off the national agenda. He believed slavery was a cancer, but an inoperable one. He seemed to believe (over against Jefferson's objections) that the condition of the Black population was a question of nurture rather than of nature. His will made provision for the freeing of his slaves after his wife's death and the sale of his properties to provide for their welfare — suggesting he did not agree with the Virginians that freed slaves would have to be relocated away from Whites. An "Address to the Cherokee Nation" envisioned Native Americans assimilating to the American nation by accepting farming as a way of life.

Most Americans were tearfully exuberant and regretful at the departure of their first president. The minority Republican press continued to demonize him. Leaving supremely confident that he had done right to the end, he worried that the Republicans might derail his legacy. Retirement to Mount Vernon heightened his concerns, because his estate was an enclave in the enemy territory of Republican opposition, and they viewed him as a potential Trojan horse. His attention to the construction of the city that would bear his name pointed up the threat of conspiracy to the Spirit of '76.

Washington died December 14, 1799, after asking the doctors to "cease their barbarisms." His last words were, "'Tis well," pronounced as he checked his failing pulse.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Chapter 4, "The Farewell," deals with Washington's Farewell Address, published September 19, 1796. Much of the chapter deals with the trying conditions of his second term, when a man accustomed to getting his way was sorely tried by a vicious Republican press and the rupture of his friendship with Thomas Jefferson. Ellis works to make clear how Washington's contemporaries would have understood the message, without the clouding and clarification, that hindsight offers us. Ellis cites the modern British philosopher Isaiah Berlin's distinction between how political leaders approach their task; some are hedgehogs, knowing one big thing, and some are foxes, knowing many little things. Washington was a hedgehog, and he made sure that his Farewell Address made clear the one big thing he knew: America had an opportunity unprecedented in history to expand and prosper, provided the people would pull

together and become Americans. He relinquished office after two terms in order to make clear that the presidency ought to outlive each incumbent, but he knew that he had played a quasi-monarchical role that no successor could fill. The federal government had to develop the ability to do institutionally what he had done personally.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The political parties that began congealing during Washington's second term were tested in the election of 1796. It was assumed that the candidates would be "the odd couple of the American Revolution," John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. As charter members of the "Band of Brothers" of '76, they had worked closely together in Philadelphia, Paris, and London, despite their profound political and ideological differences. They gained fame as a team.

Adams' revolutionary credentials were unbeatable. He was sent to Harvard to become a minister, but turned to law. His marriage in 1764 to Abigail Smith and the Stamp Act of 1765 changed his life's course: he stepped forward to lead the rebellion to British policy. At the Continental Congress in 1774, he was "the Atlas of Independence" for resisting reconciliation with England. He lobbied for Washington to head the army and Jefferson to draft the Declaration of Independence, in order to secure Virginia's support for the cause. He played the role of Secretary of War during the conflict. In 1777, Congress sent Adams to Paris to join Franklin (for whom he swiftly developed a life-long enmity) in negotiating an alliance. During a brief visit home in 1779, he wrote a constitution for Massachusetts, and then returned to Paris to negotiate a peace treaty. He remained in Europe until 1788, working with Jefferson for diplomatic recognition of the new nation and securing bank loans, and finally as the first U.S. minister to Britain. This service abroad kept away from the Constitutional Convention America's most sophisticated student of government. He returned in time to be elected the first Vice President. Adams first joked about the insignificance of an office that had only two duties: remain available to succeed the President and break ties in the Senate, over which he presided. Adams cast more such votes than any successor. His early efforts to take part in debates were rebuffed and he chided about sitting silently, marginalized. Worse, Washington seldom consulted him on policy questions, believing that Adams' role in the legislature precluded activity in the executive branch. As combative and combustible as ever during the revolutionary years, Adams felt extraneous and invisible in his present role. His silencing began after he raised the question of how the President ought to be addressed in public — there were no precedents. His suggestions ("His Majesty" or "His Highness") made him the butt of jokes and earned him a reputation as a closet monarchist that he never managed to live down. The impression was deepened by his advocacy of a strong executive in a series of articles in the *Gazette of the United States,* subsequently published separately as *Discourses on Davila.* Many of his comments seemed almost designed to invite misunderstanding: he wanted to be president for life and be succeeded by his son, John Quincy Adams.

The book also created the first rift between Adams and Jefferson, whose off-the-record comments about *Davila's* "political heresies" found their way into a "blurb" by the American publisher. Adams was hurt and outraged. Jefferson lied his way out of the uncomfortable situation. Adams' style was always to confront; Jefferson's was to evade.

They retained cordial relations through Washington's first term, even though they found themselves consistently on opposite sides of the growing Federalist-Republican rift. Jefferson's enthusiasm for the French Revolution, despite its bloody excesses, finally pushed Adams over the edge. He began to think of Jefferson as a dangerous dreamer, too Anglophobic to keep America's overseas interests in focus. When Jefferson stepped down as Secretary of State in 1793, ostensibly into permanent political retirement, Adams judged his friend as poisoned with passion, prejudice, and fiction. He saw in him vaunting ambition and a penchant for elaborate denial mechanisms. The great collaboration was destined soon to become the great competition.

James Madison assumed the role of junior collaborator with Jefferson (Adams was always Jefferson's senior collaborator, by virtue of age and experience) during the Revolution, and Jefferson's most trusted source of information about the home front during Jefferson's years in Paris. Madison's work in the drafting and ratification of the Constitution marked his most creative moment and the only occasion in which he acted independently of Jefferson's influence. In the 1790s, they assumed joint leadership of the Republicans in opposition to the Federalists. Their collaboration was seamless, because Madison always subordinated his agenda to Jefferson's will. They bonded as Virginians (rather than Americans — as circumstances had forced Adams and Jefferson to) in a tightly focused political agenda, with Jefferson serving as the grand strategist and Madison as the agile tactician. Jefferson attended to improving his estate at Monticello and other non-political matters, while Madison kept track of Hamilton's treacheries, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the Jay Treaty. Many of their letters were written in code to thwart snoops. Madison was quietly working to have Jefferson succeed Washington as President, and alarmed Federalists began generating propaganda demonstrating why Jefferson would not be a good first magistrate. Madison worked silently and surreptitiously, giving Jefferson "deniability," both publicly and inwardly, as he struggled with his political ambitions. Jefferson may well have been the last person in America to recognize in 1796 that he was running against Adams.

Abigail Adams' political instincts rivaled Madison's and she knew her husband's emotional make-up intimately: his self-doubts, vanities, and overflowing opinions. She was his chief — and nearly sole — collaborator. They maintained a regular correspondence during the three months a year he spent in Philadelphia attending to his do-nothing job. The letters were playfully personal, but also revealed how completely he depended on her advice. Adams considered the Presidency his revolutionary right and recompense for languishing eight years in the Vice Presidency. He could not live without it, even though he knew Washington's successor would inherit a "devilish load" and likely fail. Abigail helped her husband follow his inevitable decision-making pattern: denial, confrontation, guilt, fidgeting, and admission. When she agreed to leave their Quincy, MA, home to be by his side, he was ecstatic and declared he would need no cabinet to assist him. Abigail foresaw the possibility that Adams and Jefferson could end up in the awkward situation of sitting as President and Vice President (a possibility later ended by the Twelfth Amendment), but she still had a soft spot for their old friend and thought it could work. She was half-right. Adams won 71 to 68, but the two men were unable to resume their collaboration.

Jefferson had posed as indifferent during the long vote counting, but predicted the three-vote margin. He congratulated Adams and worked to squelch rumors he would resent serving under him. They remained friends, despite their political differences. Adams looked forward to their working closely together in bipartisan fashion to fill the void Washington was leaving. Adams believed that intimacy trumped ideology. He maintained close friends among ardent Republicans and was willing to forgive or ignore political differences among the "Band of Brothers" of '76. Jefferson learned from the press that Adams was considering naming him or Madison to head a delegation to France analogous to Jay's mission to Britain, in order to avert war with another European power. Abigail liked the plan, but Federalist leaders saw it as a Trojan horse. Jefferson was at first disposed to agree to a bipartisan political alliance. He too saw the long shadow of Washington causing insuperable problems for his successor and the reality of parties that viewed each other as perfidious and treasonable. He penned a letter to Adams expressing his honor at playing a constructive role in the Spirit of '76 — at meeting him more than halfway. Madison, however, convinced Jefferson not to send the letter, challenging him, in effect, to choose between affection for Adams and leadership of the Republican party. Jefferson usually listened to Madison's tactical advice, and agreed to a personally uncomfortable role. Ideology trumped intimacy. Adams was not informed for several weeks. In the meantime, he made his greatest blunder by retaining most of Washington's advisers. On March 6, 1797, the two men dined with Washington at the presidential mansion, and parted, never again to consult on governmental policy. The first transfer of executive power took place smoothly on March 13, and Jefferson began setting up a Republican government in exile at Monticello. Adams, opposed by a pro-Hamilton cabinet, turned to Abigail alone for advice. History was to shape his Presidency rather than vice versa.

Internationally, the U.S. was in an undeclared war with French privateers in the Atlantic and Caribbean, and Adams committed to building up the navy to fight a defensive war should negotiations break down. Until Napoleon emerged as dictator, the French lacked the stability to negotiate and looked upon the infant American republic as no more than a minor distraction. Domestically, a "wall of separation" had risen between Federalists and Republicans and the political culture was nearly scatological. Jefferson, who condemned the atmosphere, contributed to it by rejecting Adams' bipartisan plans. Neither side realized it was acting party-like, while condemning the other side's narrowmindedness. There were no standards of ethics for journalists, no vocabulary yet existed to help politicians overcome the tense situation, and chaos ensued. While aware that they were making history, the participants lacked clairvoyance. The constitutional institutions were too immature to cope effectively with the challenges before them.

Adams had no experience as an executive and no appetite for partisan leadership. He showed this by insisting that Elbridge Gerry be included in the peace delegation to France. Gerry was easily swayed by prevailing ideological breezes, and they blew in favor of seeing the French Revolution as a continuation of the American experience. Adam's second mistake was naming his son, John Quincy Adams, as minister to Prussia, dismissing suggestions that this would be viewed as nepotism. In both cases, Adam acted because each nominee could be trusted to send him valid information from Europe — and in both cases, his intuition paid off. The unscrupulous foreign minister of

France, Charles Talleyrand, demanded a bribe of £50,000 before receiving the delegation. Adams was outraged, recalled the envoys, and withheld the dispatches about the "XYZ Affair" in order to buy time for diplomacy, knowing their revelation would fuel patriotic calls for war. Gerry remained in Paris unofficially, and John Quincy Adams urged enlightened procrastination. Abigail monitored the rising national anger against France (and the press's turning on the "frenchified" Jefferson).

It appears that Abigail was behind Adams' grudging signing of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the biggest blunder of his presidency. The infamous statutes targeted foreign-born residents (mostly French) for deportation or disenfranchisement for publishing anything false, scandalous, or malicious against the U.S. government. She did not share moderate Federalists' compunctions, and advocated the removal of Swiss-born Albert Gallatin from his seat in Congress. Adams probably would not have signed the blatantly partisan legislation without her urging. This is the only situation in which Abigail's intimate advice led him astray. She was absent in Quincy, recovering from rheumatic fever, when Adams impulsively made his most successful decision: to send another peace delegation to France. It took everyone by surprise and raised speculation over how balanced his mind was in the absence of his wife. The delegation ended the "quasi-war" and secured American isolationism for a century. It was political suicide however, because it removed him from the mainstream of the Federalist party. Adams acted for three overlapping reasons: 1) Hamilton had for two years been acting behind Adams' back to control the cabinet, and had persuaded colleagues in Congress to authorize a Provisional Army that he would surely command (under Washington's mantle). Adams saw a clear rationale for a navy but none for an expensive standing force. Adams by this point hated Hamilton, an American Napoleon with grandiose plans for expanding the republic into Mexico and South America and then establishing a military dictatorship. Abigail said that Adams moved to avert war with France in order to remove the rationale for Hamilton's army. 2) John Quincy Adams' European network suggested Talleyrand had grown eager for peace. 3) Adams derived deep personal satisfaction from defying the agendas of both parties. Warnings that he was committing political suicide confirmed in his mind that he was doing right. His style had always been "enlightened perversity," with a record of self-sacrifice. The second peace delegation was Adams' personal declaration of independence.

Jefferson and Madison relished the conflicts Adams faced, seeing an opportunity to undermine the Federalist party, divided sharply between Hamiltonians and Adamites. Madison had never shared Jefferson's personal affection for Adams, and had little trouble intimating that Adams secretly wanted a war with France and concocted the XYZ Affair to ignite it. Jefferson went along with Madison, using blatantly false gossip and rumors to isolate Adams. Their joint efforts solidified their belief that they were in a battle to the death against a Federalist perversion of the Spirit of '76. Jefferson proved himself the Hercules of self-denial, commissioning a notorious scandalmonger, James Callender, to calumniate the president. When confronted, Jefferson denied knowledge, but Callender published documents proving him a liar. Jefferson had reason to fear that the Sedition Act was aimed at him, because he had passed information to the French through Bache's *Aurora*. Jefferson refused to regard his behavior as seditious or treasonable because the Federalist government, though duly elected, was itself guilty of

treason. Their expansive agenda violated the tenets of the Revolution. By modern standards, Jefferson and Hamilton both committed impeachable offenses, but in the 1790s, no "center" yet existed between the partisans.

The capstone of the Jefferson-Madison collaboration occurred in their joint authorship of the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions, local reactions to the Sedition Act in those two states. They began with a pamphlet campaign against the "reign of witches." Jefferson declared the Sedition Act unconstitutional and subject to nullification — or secession — by the individual states. His Kentucky Resolution was modified by the state legislature to delete the risky nullification proposal. Madison's Virginia Resolution judiciously followed suit; he called for the federal courts to become the ultimate arbiters of the Constitution. Jefferson's thoughts led logically to the compact theory of the later Confederacy in 1861, while Madison's led to the modern doctrine of judicial review and guarantees of free speech and press. Jefferson, who always deferred to Madison on Constitutional questions, softened his position.

The Republicans wisely did nothing to interfere with the Federalists' self-destruction. Eighteen federal indictments under the Sedition Act were viewed as persecutions and traditional Federalists changed party affiliations. In other cases, not guilty verdicts made for political comedy. The good news of a treaty with France arrived too late to affect the outcome of the 1800 election. Adams received all the blame for problems and no credit for success. Jefferson swiftly reversed his opinions on France when Napoleon declared himself dictator; they were no longer needed as a political weapon because the Republicans were far better organized at the state level than the Federalists. Adams did surprisingly well, despite maneuverings by Aaron Burr, a pamphlet by Hamilton that ruined his own reputation rather than the President's, and a Republican landslide in Congress. Adams lost in the House of Representatives by 73 to 65. The Federalist party died, never to be resurrected. The Jefferson-Madison collaboration was the politics of the future — although no one knew what this would mean in terms of actual policy. The Washington-Adams vision of nonpartisanship was gone. Adams saw this as moral degeneration, but left office knowing that his discredited policies and singular style had worked.

Waiting to learn whether she would live there beyond March, Abigail resentfully presided over the set-up of the yet-unfinished Presidential Mansion on the Potomac. Aaron Burr was working to take the top job from Jefferson, with whom he tied in the Electoral College, and Adams contemplated resigning in order to give Jefferson the advantage. Jefferson was, after all the superior man and the voters' choice, despite constitutional technicalities. The crisis passed when Jefferson was elected on the 37th ballot in the House. The Adams acted magnanimously towards their treacherous "former friend" before his inauguration, but the ex-President skipped the ceremony and the two exchanged no words for twelve years.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Adams left the Presidency at age sixty-six and carried with him back to Quincy, MA, a soul filled with vengeance. Hamilton topped his list of enemies, followed by Jefferson, for whom the hate was less but the hurt greater. In 1804, Jefferson's youngest daughter, Maria Jefferson Eppes, died during childbirth, and Abigail wrote a touching letter of condolence. The usually astute Jefferson misjudged her intention and took it as an opportunity to resume their friendship. Reviewing his long collaboration with her husband, he stated only once had he felt personally offended — when the lame duck President appointed Jefferson's long-time enemy John Marshall as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Jefferson forgave this crafty move, however. Abigail flew into a rage and replied that Jefferson was the one requiring forgiveness — for political betrayal. She defended her husband's right to appoint the "midnight judges," and attacked Jefferson's "blackest calumny and foulest falsehoods" during the 1800 election. She observed the justice of the fact that Callender had revealed Jefferson's liaison with Sally Hemings in that context. Jefferson had never received a letter like this; although detractors had been plenty, no friend had ever questioned his honor and trust. He lied about promoting Callender's libels. Abigail knew better and saw this as further proof of Jefferson's duplicity. Though her affection still lingered for him, no esteem remained — it was mortgaged to win the election.

Had Adams believed in the *code duello,* he would certainly have been justified in calling Jefferson out. He saw the letters only months later, and made a note to that effect. Eight years passed before Quincy and Monticello communicated again. Jefferson was busy in this period, concluding the Louisiana Purchase (1803), which doubled the nation's boundaries, and battled domestically and externally through his second term. Adams saw the government left "infinitely worse" when Jefferson left than when he took office. He obsessed over Jefferson's growing reputation, knowing that his own role in the founding of the nation had been greater than the mere draftsman of the Declaration of Independence. Adams had little to take his mind off his jealousy and vanity. Fighting his inner demons, he sought catharsis in incoherent autobiographical jottings. Undeterred by criticism, he launched a second series of emotional eruptions in the *Boston Patriot,* aiming to "set the record straight." He came off looking like the erratic, uncontrolled character that Hamilton portrayed in his pamphlets in 1800.

Adams continued his soul baring in eight years' worth of correspondence with Benjamin Rush. The colorful, playful, and revealing exchange had a ground rule set by Rush: they would report their respective dreams. Each emphasized the power of the irrational, and the letters have an "Adams and Rush in Wonderland" tone. Adams anticipated the postmodern distinction between history as experienced and history as remembered. Events and heroes who neatly fit a dramatic formula were getting preference in official chronicles. Adams knew from experience how contentious 1774-78 had been, how little a sense of inevitability there had been, and how they had felt themselves improvising on

the edge of catastrophe. He had been "present at the creation," from the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 to stepping down from the Presidency in 1801, and felt entitled to tell the true story. He saw the faults in Franklin, Washington, and the Virginian "puffers" (spin doctors). His wounded vanity drove him to set the record straight for Rush. Adams was not, however, a systematic writer, and all of his works, published and unpublished, were more transcriptions of notes than books. His thoughts and his feelings about them were never distinguished. Perfectly symmetrical narratives with bigger-than-life heroes and obvious moral messages were foreign to him — but not to Jefferson.

Beginning in 1807, Jefferson's name began appearing in the Adams-Rush correspondence, recalling the shrewd tactical retreat that led to his election as Vice President. His views on France and England had already proved incorrect by history, but failed to tarnish his reputation or popularity. Jefferson was being romanticized into the history books. Indeed, Jefferson, through duplicity and disposition, was able to will himself into believing anything. It had taken Adams a decade of agonizing with this unattractive truth: Jefferson would receive the mausoleums and monuments. Adams' only legacy would be telling the people the truth. He was bittersweet in 1809 when Rush told of a dream in which Adams and Jefferson were reconciled as philosopher-kings, recovered their friendship, and "sunk into the grave nearly at the same time." Adams responded with a satirical recollection of how he had mentored Jefferson, and noted that the junior would have to initiate any reconciliation. Rush had been writing simultaneously to Jefferson and knew this would not happen. He tried for two years to budge Jefferson without success. In 1811, Edward Coles, a Jefferson protégé, visited Quincy to discuss slavery. He bore back to Monticello Adam's profession of love for his old colleague. Adams told Rush he knew what he was up to, and set him up to pass along a willingness to undertake a dialogue with humor and diplomatic nonchalance. This was all it took. A short note written on New Years Day 1812 began a fourteen-year lopsided exchange of 158 letters. It remained awkward for a while, as the "North and South Poles of the American Revolution" struggled to reestablish trust in each other. Adams more than doubled Jefferson's output, because 1) he realized he was the challenger in this debate over the meaning of the American Revolution — he needed to get his views into the record for posterity; and 2) it offered him his chance for literary immortality as Jefferson's costar.

The correspondents knew their role perfectly — retired patriarchs beyond ambition and above controversy. They wrote in timeless soliloquies, past each other to the future. Their restored friendship even survived the 1823 publication of letters Adams had written much earlier, describing Jefferson as a duplicitous political partisan. Jefferson refused to let it poison his mind. The remarkable correspondence gained poignancy when Rush's prophecy came true. Many of the topics discussed between the two gods on Mount Olympus were selected to allow them to display their verbal prowess without risking conflict. Most modern readers are surprised to find Adams so adept at verbal dueling. Jefferson's words were calming breezes on the pages, while Adams was all excitement, exclamation, and naughtiness. Adams could not stay in character as a philosopher-king; he had to argue.

Adams remained on his best behavior for over a year until a twelve-year-old letter from Jefferson to Joseph Priestly was published. In it, he called Adams a retrograde thinker in opposition to modernity. Adams exploded with thirty letters over six months, disclaiming the thesis. Jefferson responded with five, claiming it had been a private communication that reflected the party wars of the era. Jefferson went on to recognize that Adams had tried to stay above politics and had been unfairly targeted for remarks at the Hamiltonians. Adams was able to see this concession as a quasi-apology, and was emboldened to discuss inaccuracies in the historical record of their administration: the Alien and Sedition Acts and the peace delegation were Jefferson's responsibility as well. From 1813 onward, the two men took up the previously unmentionable subjects of the revolutionary legacy. Abigail added a postscript to one letter, signaling that Jefferson had been forgiven. Jefferson wanted to go on record as agreeing with Adams that they had been engaged in a timeless political argument over dichotomies that went back to the ancient world — the forces of light vs. the forces of darkness. Adams advocated for the few, Jefferson for the many. Jefferson conceded that Adams had a different story to tell, and was willing to allow posterity to judge who was right. Adams' blustering was not equal to Jefferson's coherent storytelling to dominate the history books. Conversational give-and-take better fit the episodic surging of Adams' mind, and Jefferson allowed him the forum from 1813 onwards.

They debated the age-old question of social equality and the role of elites. Adams was convinced that they were inevitable in any society and lamented his unfortunate inability to make himself understood. They were permanent fixtures, just as the passions are permanent fixtures in the human personality: channelable but not removable. Jefferson differentiated the natural aristocracy of "virtue and talents" from the pseudo-aristocracy of "wealth and birth." The Band of Brothers in '76 benefited from the republican selection process. He also observed that hereditary aristocracy was left behind in Europe. Adams contested both claims: wealth and property would create inequalities in America just as in Europe — a classless society was a pipedream. Forty percent of the population of the Chesapeake region was remnants of feudalism, after all. Just as the five Pillars of Aristocracy — Beauty, Wealth, Birth, Genius, and Virtues — blended in human nature, so did they in society. In a separate correspondence with Virginian John Taylor, Adams mocked the irony of a New England farmer being accused of aristocratic tendencies by a Virginian slave owner who had inherited his wealth from his wife. Adams could never fathom how "aristocracy" became an epithet. Elites had dominated history, and the task in America was to have the elected elite speak for the many not the few. Republicans grasped this in the 1790s; the Federalists never did.

They also debated the French Revolution, because Adams was so pleased that his early apprehensions had been vindicated. Jefferson admitted he had been bested as a prophet, and admitted Adams was due an apology for the political advantage the Republicans had taken of Adam's unpopular stand. Adams was thrilled at this vindication, but continued arguing that England would dominate Europe in the 19th century.

Both recognized the building crisis between North and South, and Adams accepted that slavery was still off limits for discussion, a topic for the next generation to work out. To

others, Adams welcomed the debate over the Missouri Compromise that Jefferson abhorred. Federal jurisdiction would have to be exercised as it had been in the lands of Jefferson's vast purchase, made by executive order. Jefferson's views led to the Confederacy's emphasis on popular sovereignty, while Adams' led to Lincoln's "house divided" position. In order to gain ratification by the South, Adams had deferred leadership of the antislavery movement to the Virginians — and was disappointed. He was not willing in 1820 to endanger the rapprochement by debating slavery.

In 1819 newspapers published a forgery claiming that the Declaration of Independence plagiarized a citizens' statement in Mecklenburg County, NC, issued fifteen months earlier. Adams assured Jefferson that he considered this nonsense — while telling others that this confirmed his belief that the Revolution had been the result of many venues, including his May 15, 1776, resolution calling for new state constitutions. These meant that '76 was less a clean break with England as it was a political evolution.

Adams mellowed after Abigail's death in 1818, and both men spent time musing about their long-held position that each generation has the obligation to make way for the next by dying. They recalled the past fondly and looked to an afterlife where the Band of Brothers would laugh together at human foibles and follies. Neither appears to have taken heaven as more than a metaphor, and devoted time to organizing their personal papers as the source of their immortality. Adams and Jefferson never resolved their political differences; they simply outlived them. The Marquis de Lafayette visited both men in 1824 and drew great crowds; the sculptor John Henri Browere made "life masks" of each. As the fiftieth anniversary of independence neared, both men were asked for statements. Jefferson expended great effort perfecting a statement about defying political institutions with coercive powers, borrowing the dying words spoken by a Puritan soldier hanged in 1685. He still saw and wrote movingly about the revolutionary spirit expanding to fill the world. Adams, irreverent to the end, said, "I will give you INDEPENDENCE FOREVER," and "not a word" more. He finally gave in and elaborated a bit: America will be judged in the future as either the brightest or darkest page in history. The ship of state could sail into the sunset or flounder on slavery. For Jefferson only the former was possible, and his version triumphed in the history books.

Jefferson fell into a coma on July 3, 1826, and rallied only once to ask if it were the Fourth. He held on, semiconscious until noon. Adams collapsed that same morning, and lapsed into consciousness at the time Jefferson expired, stating "Thomas Jefferson survives" (or "still lives"),, then himself died at 5:30. Adams was wrong in the short-term but correct in the long-term.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter 6, "The Friendship," continues the Adams/Jefferson story and recapitulates many of the themes that Ellis set out in the Preface and touched upon throughout the book. It deals with the correspondence between the two ex-presidents late in life, after they had outlived the controversies that tore them apart at the height of their careers. Ellis portrays the two men posturing for posterity like Olympian gods, and says that

Jefferson alone was able to hold the pose consistently. Adams, however, appears the more consistent: pugnacious and playful. Jefferson summons the courage to admit he had wronged his old friend — a considerable feat for someone who had taught himself to deceive.

Characters

John Adams

The first U.S. Vice President and second President, John Adams was also father of John Quincy Adams, the nation's sixth President. He was present at every stage and important event in the American Revolution. Born in Braintree, MA (later renamed Quincy), he graduated from Harvard College in 1755, and taught school while studying law. In 1764, he married Abigail Smith, who became his lifelong adviser as well as beloved wife. Adams originally stood in the shadow of his second cousin, Samuel Adams, but gained a solid reputation as a Constitutional lawyer. John Adams emerged as a leader in opposition to the Stamp Act of 1765. As a member of the Continental Congress he suggested naming George Washington as commander-in-chief of the army, in part in order to gain Virginia's support for the war. He suggested writing constitutions for the various states, in order to couch the separation from England in terms of standing tradition of self-government. He suggested that Thomas Jefferson be entrusted with writing the Declaration of Independence, and took a prominent place in the debate over its adoption. During the war, Adams headed the Board of War and Ordinance. In 1778, Adams was dispatched to Paris, but returned home briefly to write the Massachusetts constitution. Returning to France, he worked with Benjamin Franklin (whose style he detested) and Thomas Jefferson to negotiate peace with the British. He secured badly needed loans and recognition of American independence. In 1785, Adams was appointed the first American minister to the Court of St. James, where King George III, snubbed him. He penned *A Defence of the Constitution of Government of the United States.*

Returning to the U.S., Adams came in second to Washington in the first election and became Vice President, a do-nothing job he loathed. When Washington retired in 1796, it was a foregone conclusion that Adams and Jefferson would face off in the nation's first contested election. Adams, as victor, suggested they cooperate as they had in France in order better to fill Washington's boots. After considering the bipartisan proposal favorably, Jefferson allowed Madison to dissuade him, and he became the leader of the opposition to Adams. Adams' Presidency was marked by the unpopular Alien and Sedition Acts, which he signed against his better judgment (and probably at his wife's suggestion). Hamilton conspired with members of Adams' cabinet (whom Adams unwisely retained from Washington's inner circle), and by the XYZ Affair, which Adams tried to downplay, in hopes of averting war with France. Adams was a President without party in 1800, and lost the election to Jefferson, who stooped to calumny to bring down his former friend. Adams retired to Quincy to work out the demons that tormented him his whole life. Mutual friends worked long to reconcile Adams and Jefferson, and after Adams offered an olive branch, the two men began a fourteen-year exchange of 158 letters. It remained awkward for a while, as the "North and South Poles of the American Revolution" struggled to reestablish trust in each other. Adams more than doubled Jefferson's output, because he realized he was the challenger in this debate over the meaning of the American Revolution and needed to get his views into the record for

posterity as Jefferson's costar. Remarkably the two men, having outlived their political rivalry, died within hours of one another on July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, Adams' famous last words were "Thomas Jefferson survives" (or "still lives").

Thomas Jefferson

The political philosopher best remembered as the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson was also the first U.S. Secretary of State and second Vice President, under his former friend and political rival, John Adams. Their collaboration in France brought an end to the revolutionary war, and in Philadelphia, Adams proposed to the Continental Congress that Jefferson draft the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson's advocacy of an agrarian nation of yeoman farmers sharply contrasted with the vision of Alexander Hamilton, who wanted a nation of commerce and manufacturing. Collaborating with James Madison, Jefferson rejected Adam's suggestion that they serve in bipartisan cooperation in 1796. He ran against his old mentor in 1800 in a bitter contest that resulted in an electoral tie between himself and Aaron Burr. It was resolved in the House of Representative when Hamilton threw his support behind Jefferson as the more honest of the candidates. Jefferson's greatest triumph as President was the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, concluded, surprisingly — given Jefferson's republican views — by executive order. Ellis presents Jefferson primarily in the context of collaboration — with Adams in France and Madison in partisan politics. Jefferson's idealism rendered him vulnerable to willing himself into believing things and lying whenever this served the greater cause.

The last chapter of the book shows the gradual rapprochement of the two great men through a remarkable correspondence that eventually dealt with all the issues that separated them except slavery. Jefferson owned 187 slaves, some inherited from his wife. Nevertheless, he spoke out publicly about the immorality of the institution. In the first draft of the Declaration of Independence, he condemned the British for sponsoring the importation of slaves to the colonies as a "cruel war against human nature itself." The language was dropped from the final text at the request of delegates from South Carolina and Georgia. Jefferson tried unsuccessfully in the Virginia legislature to emancipate slaves. Late in life, he felt the issue had to be left to the next generation, and Adams agreed not to discuss it further. Their other great dispute was over whether the bloody French Revolution was a continuation of the American experiment; only after it was no longer a political asset did Jefferson admit his error. He never lost his hatred of the British and of any government — or aristocracy — that sought to impose itself on the sovereign rights of the people. Remarkably, Jefferson and Adams died within hours of each other on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

George Washington

Indisputably the "Father of his Country," George Washington served as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War, as President of the 1787

Constitutional Convention, and finally as the first U.S. President under the Constitution. Ellis portrays his greatest accomplishment as his voluntary relinquishment of power in 1796, which established an important precedent. Washington was born into Virginia's slave-owning elite, served with distinction in the French and Indian War, and in 1774, was selected to represent Virginia at the first Continental Congress. He attended the second Continental Congress in military uniform, anticipating war, and was appointed to command the newly formed Continental Army on John Adams' suggestion. Against tremendous odds, Washington kept his army together throughout the Revolution, allowing the superior British forces to defeat themselves. He resigned his commission to Congress, in an action that established the precedent of civilian authority over the military. Washington presided over the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, but took little part in the closed-door debates, allowing his prestige to hold things together. Ellis supports the view that the Presidency was written into the Constitution with Washington in mind.

Washington was the unanimous choice of the electorate in 1788 and 1792. The runner up in the balloting, John Adams, served as his Vice President, and was relegated for eight years to obscurity because of Washington's qualms over violating the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. Washington had to be talked into a second term as President, and very reluctantly agreed to it - having already commissioned a draft of his Farewell Address from James Madison. During his second term, Washington's tough reaction to the Whiskey Rebellion brought out lurking tensions in his cabinet, between Hamilton and Jefferson, which led to the formation of political parties, a tendency Washington deplored in the Farewell Address announcing his refusal of a third term. Washington retired to his estate at Mount Vernon profoundly relieved to give up the burden, and turned his attention to designing the new capital on the Potomac that everyone assumed would be named in his honor following his death. Ellis only alludes to Washington's appointment as a major general in the U.S. Army by Adams, to serve as a warning to France when war appeared imminent. Ellis portrays this more as an attempt by Washington's former adjutant, Alexander Hamilton, seeking to establish a base for a military seizure of power. As President, Washington saw that the risk of discussing slavery as too great for a struggling young republic, and was pleased when the House of Representatives took the question off the agenda in 1790. Unlike many of his Virginia colleagues, however, Washington was troubled by slavery, treated his humanely, and made provision for their emancipation (and support) in his will. Washington died peacefully after ordering physicians to end their barbaric efforts to prolong his life.

Benjamin Franklin

The oldest member of the Band of Brothers and "Grandfather of the Revolution," Benjamin Franklin was the only figure who approached Washington's stature in the popular mentality. Early in life, he became involved in anti-slavery activities, publishing Quaker tracts, but never made it a major cause. He achieved fame in Philadelphia in publishing, science, and philanthropy. He worked in London to seek repeal of the Stamp Act, which was flaming American passions for independence, and sought to avert a war.

Returning to Philadelphia, he served in the Continental Congress and helped edit the Declaration of Independence. In 1776, he was dispatched to Paris and remained there until his retirement in 1785, becoming a great favorite in French society.

Working with Jefferson and Adams, Franklin secured a military alliance that probably saved the American Revolution, and negotiated the Treaty of Paris in 1783. While in retirement, he attended the Constitutional Convention. At the end of his life, Franklin signed the anti-slavery petition of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1790, effectively forcing the House of Representatives to take up the question. His last written piece was the satirical "Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade," which sought to cast new light on the morality of slavery by showing how Muslims justified enslaving Christians. Except in this last scenario, Ellis portrays Franklin through the eyes of Adams and Jefferson, both of whom found his work habits and relishing of the cult of personality that surrounded him in France distasteful.

Alexander Hamilton

Born on the West Indian island of Nevis, the illegitimate son of a local beauty and a hard-drinking Scottish merchant, Alexander Hamilton spent his life proving himself and imposing his visionary fiscal program on a new-formed country. He led the bayonet charge on Yorktown during the Revolutionary War, and left the army with the honorary designation of general in 1799. Known as the "little lion of Federalism" because of his short stature, he loomed tall as a constitutional lawyer. He was influential at the Constitutional Convention and as principal author (with James Madison) of the *Federalist Papers,* defended the new Constitution to skeptics in New York. As the nation's first secretary of the treasury, Hamilton established the First Bank of the United States and restored public credit by convincing Congress to assume the states' wartime debt. His *Report on the Public Credit* in 1790 was opposed by Jefferson, Madison, and Burr, but passed Congress overwhelmingly when Hamilton agreed to support the Potomac as the future capital, in return for Jefferson's support of debt assumption. After resigning from the cabinet, Hamilton remained Washington's friend and adviser, and helped compose Washington's Farewell Address. Relations with Adams were strained, as Hamilton manipulated holdovers from the Washington cabinet, winning himself a place at the top of the second President's list of enemies. The non-partisan Adams was blamed for Hamilton's philosophy and lost the election of 1800 to Jefferson when Hamilton managed to split — and destroy — the Federalist Party. When Jefferson and Burr tied in the Electoral College, Hamilton threw his support to Jefferson because "at least Jefferson was honest."

The Republicans continued to view Hamilton as the greatest threat to the spirit of the American Revolution by creating the kinds of strong administrative structures and authority that Britain had wielded. In 1804, Hamilton sought to block Vice President Aaron Burr's return to New York politics by taking part in the smear campaign that defeated him in the governor's race. At a political dinner, Hamilton expressed a "still more despicable opinion" of Burr, which was described by Dr. Charles D. Cooper in a local newspaper. Burr demanded an explanation, and when Hamilton refused a blanket

apology, Burr challenged him to a duel. Hamilton was mortally wounded on July 11, 1804, in a duel at Weehawken, NJ, believing he had made good on his vow not to fire on his opponent. Ellis portrays Hamilton as a foil for other characters: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Burr. He stands apart from the dark Burr as peaches-and-cream, gallant, animated, and visionary, but shadowy and manipulative in opposition to Adams. Hamilton comes off worst in his plot to create a standing army intended to conquer Mexico and South America and install him as military dictator. Hamilton comes off best preparing Washington's Farewell Address, giving the retiring president's thoughts rhetorical power and structure.

Aaron Burr

The grandson of the great theologian Jonathan Edwards, Aaron Burr served as a colonel in the Revolutionary Army before entering New York politics. His break came when Governor George Clinton appointed him Attorney General. In 1791, Burr defeated Alexander Hamilton's father-in-law, Philip Schuyler, in the U.S. Senate race, the event that marked the beginning of a personal quarrel. Burr wanted to be ambassador to France, but Washington passed him over, and when he lost his Senate seat in 1797, he entered the New York state legislature as a Republican, and increased his power in state politics beyond Hamilton's. His control of New York helped Burr tie Jefferson in the Electoral College in 1800. Although everyone knew that Jefferson was the popular choice for President,. Burr refused to accept the Vice Presidency graciously, and the decision went to the House of Representatives. There, Federalists led by Hamilton and the independently-minded President Adams backed Jefferson as the more honorable character. Even critics admitted that Burr did a fine job presiding in the Senate, but he was dropped from the ticket in 1804. Burr returned to New York politics, running unsuccessfully for governor.

Hamilton took part in the smear campaign that defeated him, alleging Burr was conspiring in a Federalist secession movement. At a political dinner, Hamilton expressed a "still more despicable opinion" of Burr. The incident was described by Dr. Charles D. Cooper in a local newspaper, and Burr demanded an explanation. When Hamilton refused a blanket apology, Burr challenged him to a duel. The two met on July 11, 1804, at Weehawken, NJ, and Burr killed his opponent with a single shot. He was demonized as a second Benedict Arnold, and murder charges were filed in New York and New Jersey but never prosecuted. Burr completed his term as Vice President. He further darkened his reputation by participation in a plot to create a nation in the American southwest, and although found not guilty in a treason trial, fled the U.S. for several years. He returned to live out his final years quietly in New York. Ellis paints Burr as shadowy, severe, conniving, and secretive.

Abigail Smith Adams

The wife of John Adams, the second U.S. President, Abigail Smith was born in Weymouth, MA, and despite her lack of formal education, took part in a remarkable

lifelong correspondence with her often-absent husband. She married Adams in 1764 and they lived on a small farm at Braintree (later renamed Quincy). She bore six children, one of whom, John Quincy, was destined to become President. She was her husband's closest, most influential, and politically astute adviser, generally helping him make good decisions. Her advice failed him only once, when she advocated the Alien and Sedition Acts. She was absent when he made his most unpopular decision - to send a second peace delegation to France. She grudgingly oversaw the occupation of the unfinished presidential mansion on the Potomac as the votes in the 1800 election were being counted. The couple retired to Quincy, where she initiated and then broke off communications with Jefferson following the death of his daughter, for whom she had cared in England. Abigail Adams died in 1818, leaving her husband longing to join her.

John Quincy Adams

John Adams' son, whom he selected as U.S. minister to Prussia. The son saw the danger of this appointment — strengthening the Republicans' ridiculous claims that the President intended to reign for life and designate his son as hereditary successor — but was compelled to accept the assignment. His European network detected a change of mind in revolutionary France towards signing a treaty with the U.S. Although not covered in this book, John Quincy Adams went on to serve as the sixth U.S. President after a distinguished diplomatic career capped by formulating the Monroe Doctrine as James Monroe's Secretary of State.

Samuel Adams

John Adams' second cousin, better known at the start of the Revolution, and considered one of Washington's potential successors.

Benjamin Franklin Bache

The radical Republican publisher of *Aurora,* which claimed preposterously that Washington was a traitor, revealed diplomatic dispatches from Paris, and calumniated John Adams based on material fed him by Jefferson and Madison.

Abraham Baldwin

The congressman from Georgia, a veteran of the Constitutional Convention, who reminded his colleagues in 1790 of the pain and difficulty that the question of slavery had caused that body in 1784.

James Callender

The unscrupulous scandalmonger who revealed Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds. He also contended in *The Prospect Before Us* that John Adams was intent on declaring himself President for life and his son John Quincy Adams as his hereditary successor. When Jefferson denied complicity, Callender published proof to the contrary, and while jailed under the Alien and Sedition Acts, disclosed Jefferson's liaison with Sally Hemings.

Elbridge Gerry

The congressman from Massachusetts who in 1790 urged tabling discussion of slavery until a plan for compensating slave owners could be established. John Adams insisted that his ideologically ungrounded friend be part of the peace delegation to France, only to find he was influenced by Jefferson's views on the French Revolution.

James Jackson

The congressman from Georgia, who first rose to oppose the Quaker anti-slave petitions in 1790. He quoted the Bible to show God blessed the institution and argued that the Deep South could not survive economically without it. He spoke in the volatile revivalist style. He summarized Jefferson's arguments for racial segregation.

John Jay

The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court whom Washington sent as his emissary to London in 1794 to conclude a landmark treaty securing peace for the U.S. for twenty years. The treaty's unpopularity — fanned by Jefferson and the Republicans — clouded Washington's second term. Earlier, Jay made a modest contribution to the *Federalist Papers*.

John Laurence

The congressman from New York who in 1790 questioned the biblical argument in favor of slavery and declared that this short-term anomaly in the American republic was destined for abolition.

John Page

The congressman from Virginia who in 1796 declared that opposition to the discussion of ending slavery was misguided, for silence would convince slaves they had no hope and encourage insurrections.

Nathaniel Pendleton

Alexander Hamilton's loyal associate, who served as his second during the Duel.

Benjamin Rush

John Adams' lifelong friend, who helped effect the reconciliation with Thomas Jefferson. The long Adams-Rush correspondence helped the ex-president deal with his inner demons about being overshadowed in future history books.

Thomas Scott

The congressman from Pennsylvania, who in 1790 spoke in support of the Quaker anti-slave petitions. He suggested that while the slave trade was protected constitutionally until 1808, the institution itself was not. Scott advised they look past the Constitution to the Declaration of Independence for guidance.

William Loughton Smith

The congressman from South Carolina, who in 1790 seconded James Jackson's objections to the Quaker anti-slave petitions. He emphasized that the union would not have been formed without implicit acceptance of slavery.

William Van Ness

Aaron Burr's devoted disciple and protégé, who served as his second during the Duel.

Objects/Places

Assumption

Alexander Hamilton's plan to restore U.S. financial credit abroad by having the federal government assume the wartime debt of the various states. Southerners, who had done a better job of retiring their debt, resented the imposition of new taxes to cover the debt, but agreed to a deal to locate the national capital on the Potomac River.

Constitutional Convention

The secretive gathering in Philadelphia, PA in 1787, intended to address serious problems that arose in the U.S. following its successful war of independence from Britain. It was called to revise the Articles of Confederation, but James Madison and Alexander Hamilton from the start pushed to create an entirely new Constitution that would give the federal government real power to take the economic and political steps needed to assure the continuation of the work begun in 1776. In the partisan battles that began during Washington's second administration, the Federalists, led by Adams and Hamilton, stressed 1787 as the great founding moment of the republic. Meanwhile, the Republicans, led by Jefferson and Madison, saw it as a betrayal of the Spirit of '76, creating centers of power analogous to the ones against which the Band of Brothers had fought.

Continental Congress

The body that governed the British thirteen colonies and independent United States during the revolutionary period, 1774-89. There were two Continental Congresses, held in various locales. The first drafted the Articles of Confederation to boycott British goods if the Stamp Act was not repealed. The second issued the Declaration of Independence, created a Continental Army commanded by George Washington, and sent delegation to France to seek a military alliance and badly-needed supplies to prosecute

Residency

The debate over where the permanent U.S. capital should be located — a question left to Congress in the Constitution. Every state had its own proposal and refused compromise. Ultimately, a site on the Potomac received the nod after an agreement to trade Northern and Southern votes over assumption. Thomas Jefferson hosted a dinner for James Madison and Alexander Hamilton to work out the practical details, which were conveniently not mentioned publicly. Philadelphia, the interim capital, hoped that once the government established itself there (after moving from New York), it would not be removed, but its hopes were dashed. George Washington personally supervised the design of the city that everyone assumed would be named posthumously in his honor.

Slavery

A subject never mentioned by name in the U.S. Constitution, and kept taboo until two groups of Quakers demanded it be discussed in 1790. Slaves were a vital part of the economy of the Deep South and important in the Upper South. The institution was generally denounced and outlawed in the North. Thomas Jefferson, an opponent of slavery, failed to get it condemned in the Declaration of Independence, and ratification of the Constitution was made continent on its tacit acceptance. Slaves were included as 3/5ths their number in determination of representation in the House, and Congress was forbidden (Article I, Section 90, paragraph 1) to interfere with the importation of slaves until 1808. Jefferson also raised the sociological problem of what to do with freed slaves, assuming that Blacks and Whites could not live together. The Band of Brothers left solving the question to future generations, but prepared the arguments that unionists and secessionists would utilize prior to resorting to bloody civil war.

Themes

History

The Adams-Jefferson correspondence in particular raises the question of whether history should be written as experienced or remembered. Jefferson's role as the author of the Declaration of Independence became the canon of U.S. history, and Adams was only partially able to get his experience into the record, which suggested a far more complex origin to the document and more limited role for the drafter. Similarly, the diverging versions told by their seconds of what happened at Weehawken, NJ, between Hamilton and Burr, was decided in favor of the loser of the duel and entered the official history. Ellis displays a superior, more critical and thoughtful way of approaching history throughout this book.

Ideology

Strict ideology — that the inalienable human rights had to be defended to the death — marked the Spirit of '76, as the revolutionaries rallied around the determined John Adams rather than the compromising Benjamin Franklin. Once independence was achieved, however, the creation of new political structures required that ideology be set aside in favor of compromise, most notably on deferring any discussion of slavery and the slave trade for twenty years. Zeal for the revolutionary ideals remained, however, and solidified in two opposing views of its original intent. As these views solidified into opposing ideologies, political parties were formed, incapable of compromise.

Honesty

Members of the founding generation of the U.S. valued their personal honesty, but most proved capable of compromising it in order to achieve a greater good. They rather freely lied, gossiped, and hired rumormongers to best their opponents. Jefferson was the most accomplished at convincing himself of the truth of his convictions and rationalizing outright mistruths - and was many times publicly caught in the act. Hamilton, who went to his death to preserve his honor (and thereby, his political credibility) apparently thought nothing of calumniating his opponent, Aaron Burr for decades, or working behind the back of John Adams by organizing his cabinet against him. Even Adams, for whom honesty was a supreme virtue, was capable of telling different versions of a story to two friends.

Style

Point of View

Founding Brothers is written by a respected scholar of the revolutionary era who knows from classroom experience the misconceptions that have attached to this period. He has mastered the scholarly material and helps interpret for the reader how to balance the long- and short-term views of history, which is particularly important in covering an era in which the principals were acutely aware that they were making history.

Setting

Founding Brothers is set in Britain's former American colonies in the decade following their successful war of independence. Much of the action takes place in the two early capitals, New York and Philadelphia, but spreads out to John Adams' home in Quincy, MA, Thomas Jefferson's estate at Monticello, VA, and George Washington's Mount Vernon and the adjoining site of the permanent capital on the Potomac, Washington, DC. The first dramatic scenario plays out on a ledge overlooking the Hudson River in Weehawken, NJ.

Language and Meaning

Founding Brothers is a series of studies in early American history written by a leading specialist. Ellis uses his considerable gift for story telling to produce a lively, engaging account accessible to non-specialists. It is easy-flowing and clear, the author taking pains on several occasions to make clear how late 18th century Americans would have understood events that have subsequently become overgrown with legend and myth.

Structure

Founding Brothers begins with a preface, "The Generation," which lays out the book's themes and purpose. Ellis then presents six vignettes: 1) "The Duel," devoted to the dramatic Burr-Hamilton shootout in 1804; 2) "The Dinner," devoted to the Jefferson's bringing together Hamilton and Madison to thrash out a solution to two intractable problems facing the first congress; 3) "The Silence," devoted to debates over the taboo subject of slavery, occasioned by petitions to congress by two groups of Quakers unwilling to allow the question to be ignored until 1808; 4) "The Farewell," devoted to George Washington's precedent-setting relinquishing of power after two terms as president, announced in his Farewell Address of September 19, 1796; 5) "The Collaborators," examining three remarkable pairings: Adams/Jefferson, Jefferson/Madison, and John/Abigail Adams; and 6) "The Friendship," which reconciles Adams and Jefferson at the end of their lives. Each story is designed to be self-contained, but the overlap is considerable, and the last two chapters, in fact, form a unit.

Quotes

"So, there you have it: Hamilton safely buried and assuming legendary proportions as a martyr; Burr slipping out of town, eventually headed toward bizarre adventures in the American West, but already consigned to political oblivion. This seems the most appropriate closing scene in our attempted recovery of 'The Duel' as a famous and eminently visual story.

The missing ingredient in the story, of course, is the four- or five-second interval when the shots were actually fired." Chapter 1, pg. 26.

"No one in the revolutionary generation needed to be reminded who Catalan was. He was the talented but malevolent destroyer of republican government. If each member of the revolutionary generation harbored secret thoughts about being the modern incarnation of a classical Greek or roman hero — Washington was Cato or Cincinnatus, Adams was Solon or Cicero — no one aspired to be Catalan.

"Did Burr fit the role?" Chapter 1, pgs. 42-43

"Madison possessed the subtlest and most intellectually sophisticated understanding of the choices facing the new American republic of any member of the revolutionary generation. No crude explanation of the decisions he made can do justice to the multiple loyalties he felt, or the almost Jamesian way he thought about and ultimately resolved. The more one contemplates the mentality of the Virginia planters — the refusal to bring their habits of consumption and expenditure into line with the realities of their economic predicament, the widespread pattern of denial right up to the declaration of bankruptcy — the more likely it seems that an entrenched and even willful ignorance of the economic principles governing the relationship between credit and debt had become a badge of honor in their world." Chapter 2, pg. 65.

"Was he a Virginian or an American? Did he think the truly founding moment for the new nation was 1776 or 1787? These dramatic questions, as much as the location of the capital on the Potomac, were the residual legacies of the dinner at Jefferson's." Chapter 2, pgs. 77-78.

"What one historian has called 'the perishability of revolutionary time' meant that the political will to act was also racing against the clock. In effect, the fading revolutionary ideology and the growing racial demography were converging to close off the political options. With the advantage of hindsight, a persuasive case can be made that the Quaker petitioners were calling for decisive action against slavery at the last possible moment, if indeed there was such a moment, when gradual emancipation had any meaningful prospect for success.." Chapter 3, pg. 104.

"The core of the disagreement in the debate of 1790 revolved around different versions of what has come to be called America's 'original intentions,' more specifically what the Revolution meant for the institution of slavery. One's answer, it turned out, depended a

great deal on which founding moment, 1776 or 1878, seemed most seminal. And it depended almost entirely on the geographic or demographic location of the person posing the question." Chapter 3, pg. 88.

"A detached description of his physical features would have made him sound like an ugly, misshapen oaf: pockmarked face, decayed teeth, oversized eye sockets, massive nose, heavy in the hips, gargantuan hands and feet. But somehow, when put together and set in motion, the full package conveyed sheer majesty." Chapter 4, pg. 124.

"But in this instance, hindsight does not make us clairvoyant as much as blind to the ghosts and goblins that floated above the political landscape in the 1790s. What we might describe as admirably strong executive leadership struck Jefferson and his Republican followers as the arbitrary maneuverings of a monarch. And what appears in retrospect like a prudent and farsighted vision of the national interest looked to Jefferson like a betrayal of the American Revolution." Chapter 4, pg. 139.

"For now, however, the center needed to hold. That meant a vigorous federal government with sufficient powers to coerce the citizenry to pay taxes and obey the laws. Veterans of the Continental Army, like Hamilton and John Marshall, fully understood this essential point. Intriguingly, the two chieftains of the Republican opposition, Jefferson and Madison, had never served in the army. They obviously did not understand." Chapter 4, pg. 155.

"The man famous as the indefatigable orator of independence in the Continental Congress was obliged to remain silent in the legislative councils of the new government. 'My office,' Adams complained, 'is too great a restraint upon such a Son of Liberty.' The great volcano of American political debate was required to confine himself to purely private eruptions." Chapter 5, pg. 166.

"The Adams style was to confront, shout, rant, and then to embrace. The Jefferson style was to evade, maintain pretenses, then convince himself that all was well." Chapter 5, pg. 170.

"The legal guidelines that might permit a clear answer to that question had not yet congealed. By modern standards Jefferson's active role in promoting anti-Adams propaganda and his complicity in leaking information to pro-French enthusiasts like Bache were impeachable offenses that verged on treason. But then Hamilton had been guilty of similar indiscretions with pro-English advocates during the Jay's Treaty negotiations." Chapter 6, pg. 199.

"The end came quickly, at about five-thirty that afternoon. He wakened for a brief moment, indicated that nothing more should be done to prolong the inevitable, then, with obvious effort, gave a final salute to his old friend with his last words: 'Thomas Jefferson survives,' or, by another account, 'Thomas Jefferson still lives.' Whatever the version, he was wrong for the moment but right for the ages." Chapter 6, pg. 248.

Topics for Discussion

Why is John Adams not on Mount Rushmore or U.S. currency like Washington and Jefferson?

How, with all his battlefield setbacks, has Washington retained his reputation as a great general?

How was the French Revolution a continuation of the American Revolution? How did it differ?

Why could slavery not be dealt with in the revolutionary generation?

Was Aaron Burr a bad guy?

Could Jefferson have changed the vice presidency from a "do-nothing" job if he had cooperated with Adams?

Was Abigail Adams a political asset or liability to her husband John?

How did Washington's flair for making dramatic exits influence the early republic?

Was Hamilton's plan for assumption essential to the new republic, given its partisan

How did Adams and Jefferson set the stage for the Civil War?

How is hindsight a historical asset and how is it a liability?

Who is Ellis' favorite Founding Brother?