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# Revolutionary Stability: The Election of 1800

# Warmup

1. What adjectives or phrases would you use to describe the nature of elections today (in other words, how would you characterize the dialogue and candidate interactions)?
2. What conflicts (if any) do you think existed between the Founding Fathers in the early days of our nation? Do you think they were more or less divided than today's politicians?

## Letter: Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestley, 21 March 1801

The mighty wave of public opinion which has rolled over it [the US] is new. But the most pleasing novelty is it's so quickly subsiding, over such an extent of surface, to it's true level again. The order & good sense displayed in this recovery from delusion, and in the momentous crisis which lately arose, really bespeak a strength of character in our nation which augurs [speaks] well for the duration of our republic, & I am much better satisfied now of it's stability, than I was before it was tried. I have been above all things solaced by the prospect which opened on us in the event of a non election of a president; in which case the federal government would have been in the situation of a clock or watch run down. There was no idea of force, nor of any occasion for it. A Convention, invited by the republican members of Congress with the virtual President & Vice President, would have been on the ground in 8. weeks, would have repaired the constitution where it was defective & wound it up again.

## Letter: John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 14 June 1813\*

I cannot write Volumes in a Single Sheet: but these Letters of yours require Volumes from me.

“The mighty Wave of public opinion, which has rolled over”! ... Oh! Mr Jefferson! What a wave of public opinion has rolled over the Universe? By the Universe here, I mean our Globe. I can yet Say there is nothing new Under the Sun ... The Reformation rolled a Wave of public opinion over the Globe, as wonderful as this; A War of thirty years, was necessary to compose this wave. The Wars of Charlemagne rolled a Wave. The Crusades rolled a Wave, more mountainous than the French Revolution.

...

Had “The Clock run down,” I am not So Sanguine [upbeat], as you, that the Consequence would have been as you presume. I was determined in all Events to retire. You and Mr Madison are indebted to Bayard, for an Evasion of the Contest. Had the Voters for Burr, addressed the Nation, I am not Sure that your Convention would have decided in your Favour.

# 'Feuding Fathers,' presented by Monticello

*"...a bastard brat of a Scotch peddler."*

*John Adams on Alexander Hamilton*

What does this suggest to us about the political climate of the late 18th century?

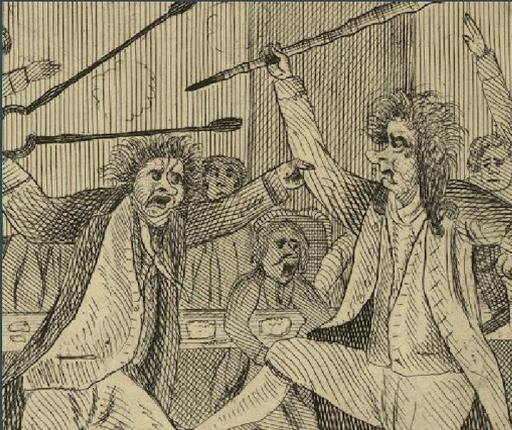
# Historical Context

Click [here](#) for an historical essay that covers the major issues and problems facing the US in the year 1800.

Click [here](#) for a second perspective, presented in a newspaper format, with additional context on the election of 1800.

# Document Analysis

You will be assessed on your understanding of several documents using the exhibit 'A Nation Divided: The Election of 1800' on [Google Arts & Culture](#). Scroll through the presentation or use the direct document links in the handout until you find the following images. After analyzing them, listen to and assess the excerpt from Jefferson's Letter to Philip Mazzei.



To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Take a stand, and be prepared to defend your position.

The Election of 1800 was an uglier affair than Jefferson's 1801 reflection lets on.

The criticism of the candidates in 1800 is similar to the ways candidates are criticized today.

The outcome of the election reflected  
more a spirit of compromise than  
conflict.

A peaceful transition of power  
between rivals can still be  
characterized as a revolution.