

1. Research Dolly Madison and the British invasion of Washington D.C in 1812. What did Dolly have removed from the White House and why in that short space of time? What would you have chosen and why?

When the British were approaching the White House, Dolly Madison ordered her servants and slaves to remove the important documents and other items that were critical to the presidency (as well as the curtains!). But she also took something else; a huge portrait of George Washington. The reason she took it wasn't just sentimental, it was because she took into account the psychological toll it would take on the young nation if the British were able to seize one of the few national icons they had. I think I probably would have made much the same decision in her place, although I wouldn't have been as worried about the curtains.

2. Take a look at the early years of our Republic from 1789-1815. Look at how the constitution is interpreted and write a general history too.

One of the first things that happened after the constitution was rewritten and the Bill of Rights was created was that George Washington was elected president of the United States. His vice president was John Adams, who became the next president after Washington. During Washington's presidency, Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury, tried to pass many new and controversial laws to help fix the National Debt and other problems, most of which ended in a compromise. He was a federalist, and frequently disagreed with Jefferson, who was a Democratic-Republican (which sounds a little bit weird to us now, seeing as Democrats and Republicans are two separate parties!) and argued for a strict interpretation of the constitution.

When John Adams became president, the runner up was Thomas Jefferson, who, thanks to a loophole, became his vice president. But they were political opposites! They often disagreed, and Jefferson vocally opposed many of Adams' acts as president. The biggest event in Adams' presidency was, in my opinion, the quasi-war with France (or the XYZ affair). France was angry that the Americans had signed a treaty with the British, and so Adams sent a delegation to France to avoid war. The French refused to meet with them, although the Americans were offered a chance to bribe their way in. The delegates refused, and so began a quasi-war with France that was never really declared as a war and that I didn't even know about before hearing of it!

Adams passed several new acts during this period of semi-wartime, the most notable being the Alien and Sedition Acts, which gave Adams powers to expel or jail any foreigner who spoke up against him, and the residency for citizenship was raised from 5 to 14 years. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison worked on the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions and published them anonymously, fearing that they could be jailed. These resolutions stated that if the national government overstepped its bounds, the state government could nullify laws voted unconstitutional. The Alien and Sedition Acts did hurt people's rights to free speech, so it is amazing they weren't nullified by the courts (it probably would have been if the courts weren't in the control of the federalists).

Next President to come along was Jefferson, a character who, in his public image, seemed very larger than life. He was fond of greeting ambassadors while in his bathrobe and sought to overthrow the social norms of high-level parties and dinners. Unsurprisingly, he made a lot of people quite angry. One interesting note is that he and the man who became his vice president, Aaron Burr, were tied in the election, and he eventually was named president because the house of representatives (largely federalist and anti both of them) was forced to choose who won. He seemed like the lesser of two evils to

Alexander Hamilton, who hated Burr and urged the others to vote for Jefferson.¹

Anyway, there were many events that occurred in Jefferson's term, including Madison, his Secretary of State, challenging Adams' "midnight appointments" to the judiciary and the Louisiana purchase. The next president was James Madison, who was forced to declare war on the British in the war of 1812. The war of 1812 is sometimes referred to as the second war of American independence, and had been coming for decades, really, looking back at it. In the war between Britain and France, America had done quite well out of trading with both sides, but eventually the British and French began to attack American ships trading with the other side. British captains would board American ships in order to seize British deserters, but ended up seizing plenty of American sailors too, pressing them into service for the crown. Also, an Indian chief, named Tecumseh and his brother, The Prophet, fought back against American colonists to the Northwest Territories (and were supported by the British!). These served as the three main reasons for going to war.

The decision Madison made to declare war on Britain was not terribly popular. His critics labeled it "Mr Madison's War" and his moral code against using the power of the president to imprison those who spoke out about him (you'll remember he spoke out about this in Adams' presidency) was viewed as weak. The most famous battle of the 1812 war was the Battle of Bladensburg, where the Americans were routed by the British, who marched into Washington and put it to the torch, but the war dragged on long after that. Finally, in 1814, the Treaty of Ghent was signed and two months later, when the news reached America, all fighting stopped. In the meantime, Andrew Jackson became a national hero by defeating the British at New Orleans, technically *after* the war had ended.

There is one last topic to discuss in this era, and that is the Hartford Convention, where the Federalists met and proposed constitutional amendments: 1. Require a 2/3 vote to declare war; 2. Prohibit the election of two successive presidents from the same state. This failed and the Federalists were seen as traitors, which led to the eventual "death" of the Federalist party. And that pretty much closes off this brief look at the history of the United States from 1789-1815. If there's something I missed, or that was wrong, please let me know.

¹ Hamilton later died in a pistol duel with Burr, who was charged with murder and later, high treason!