An Uncertain Destiny Alternate

George Washington left office after nearly 8 years as the President. He left a nation that had changed a lot. It had faced and survived its first homegrown rebellion. It was building a new Capitol city at the District of Columbia. The Department of the Navy had been established to help fight Pirates. The northwest Indian War against Tecumseh and his allies had been won. A new treaty with Great Britain was signed even as the alliance with France weakened.

Washington had been a very successful President. He was much admired, so most people did not argue with him. In most cases, he got his own way. He had been allowed to select his own Vice President.

After his two four year terms, Washington retired from politics. The government he left behind had some major problems. The worst problem was that there were two groups in the government that disagreed about how to run the country. The first group was led by Thomas Jefferson, a Virginian and a plantation owner who had been a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, authored the Declaration of Independence, and believed strongly that the future of the country should be determined by the actions of individual well-educated gentleman farmers such as himself. Jefferson was opposed to strong central governments because he feared they would restrict his personal freedoms. He also believed the U.S. should support the rebels in the French Revolution. He founded and led the Democratic-Republican Party, a group of politicians that opposed government expansion, military power, and taxation as threats to individual liberty. (This party is sometimes called the Jeffersonians, the Democrat-Republicans, or the anti-federalists. Even though the name Democrat – Republicans sounds like our modern political parties, it is not the same. )

The second group was known as the Federalists. It was led by Alexander Hamilton, a young man who had worked for George Washington during the Revolutionary War. He strongly believed that a strong Federal Government was necessary to stop powerful groups from bullying others around. He also believed a strong central government was good for the economy. In Washington's administration, Jefferson had been the Secretary of State, where he worked on treaties with other countries. Hamilton had been the Secretary of the Treasury, where he directed things like collecting taxes and paying government employees. They had hated each other and opposed each other. They agreed on virtually nothing, including of how to interpret the Constitution.

When Washington refused to be elected third time, John Adams ran to be President. John Adams had been Washington’s Vice President for the past 8 years. John Adams was a Federalist like Alexander Hamilton, and had written a series of newspaper articles arguing in favor of the Constitution. These articles were called the Federalist papers. (He was also the Lawyer who had defended the British soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre.) Since he had been Washington's vice-president, he had the best chance at winning the election. Many federalists would have preferred to elect Hamilton, but the man was too unpopular.

The Democrat-Republicans nominated Thomas Jefferson as a candidate. When the election arrived, Adams received 71 electoral votes to Jefferson's 68 votes. Oddly, this did not mean that the Federalists had won outright. Instead, the way the original laws stating how presidential elections worked meant that the first place winner became president. The second place winner became the *vice*-president. This meant that a Federalist was our second president, but that his political enemy Thomas Jefferson the anti-federalist was his Vice-President.

The first challenge of Adams’ administration was the dilemma of what to do with France. The French had executed their King, and were now a sort of democracy. They wanted the USA to join with France as allies, since France was still at war with Britain. The Jeffersonians (who were also called the anti-federalists) believed that the U.S. should support the rebels in France. They also believed that the new Jay Treaty with Britain could lead to the British taking over again, and a loss of independence. The Federalists disagreed. The federalists were afraid that if we helped France, our relationship with Britain would get worse. John Adams though the USA would be safer if it was friendly with Britain and less friendly with France. This put Adams in a tough spot, since most Americans approved of France at the time.

Then, the XYZ Affair was made public. This was a scandal that would turn public opinion in the USA against the French. Members of the new French Republic had refused to talk to U.S. diplomats unless the USA bribed them first. Adams knew if this became public knowledge, Americans would be angry at the greed of the French. As a result, the Adams administration released copies of letters from the French. These letters proved the French were demanding money before they would talk to diplomats from the USA. Instead of releasing the names of the French diplomats, the letters were printed with the letters X, Y and Z in the place of the French names. After the letters were printed, most Americans got angry with the French. Now the Jeffersonians were left supporting an unpopular relationship with France. As the relationship with the French got worse, the USA chose to stop paying back loans for money the French had loaned us during the Revolutionary War. In 1798, the USA and France ended their alliance. French warships began capturing American merchant ships because they were trading France's enemy, Britain. Because the French were attacking American ships, the USA built more ships for its new Navy. While there was no declaration of War between France and the USA, their ships started fighting at sea. Because no formal declaration of war was ever made, this was a known as the Quasi-War.

As the relationship with France got worse, the Federalists became more popular. The Quasi-War gave Adams another advantage. Many of the Jeffersonian supporters were foreign born. Because of the Quasi-War, many Americans were suspicious that immigrants were secret agents. This meant that many Americans were suspicious of the Jeffersonians. Even worse, some Democrat -Republicans (aka Jeffersonians) were refusing to enforce federal laws. Some Jeffersonians even argued that some states should break away from the USA to form their own nation. This was known as secession. Because people were worried about secret agents, they passed new laws called the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. These made it illegal to criticize the government (sedition.) They also lengthened the amount of time an immigrant had to live in the U.S. before becoming a citizen. This was meant to make it harder for foreigners to influence the USA. It also weakened the Jeffersonians, because many immigrants join the Jeffersonian Party. The Alien acts also gave the President the power to arrest and deport immigrants he considered dangerous.

Many people in the USA were angry about the Alien and Sedition Acts. They felt it gave the federal government too much power. The passage of these acts would mark the high point of Federalist influence in the government. By early 1799, Adams had worked out a treaty France, ending the Quasi-War. Later that year, George Washington passed away. Washington was the most famous man associated with the Federalists. When he died, the Federalists became less powerful, and the party split into two smaller groups. The 1800 election would be a defeat for Adams. He would move into the newly completed White House in the city of Washington D.C. just before surrendering the Presidency to Thomas Jefferson. The next few decades were a time when the government was controlled mostly by the Democratic - Republican Party. The age of the First Party System was at its midpoint, but the age of Federalist power was over.

Use the SARs format to answer the following questions.

1. What was a major flaw in how the Vice President was elected?

2. What were the names and beliefs of the two political parties that emerged in the First Party system?

3. How did the French Revolution affect the relationship of France and the U.S.?

4. What was the XYZ affair, and how did it affect the U.S. government?

5. What was the Quasi-war, and how did it affect the U.S. government?

6. What were the Alien and Sedition Acts, and how did they affect the U.S. government?