

# John Quincy Adams Battles For the American System

by Denise M. Henderson

*This article has been edited from four feature stories by the late Denise Henderson, which appeared in The New Federalist newspaper on Sept. 8, 1989, Oct. 13, 1989, May 15, 1995, and Aug. 24, 1998. A longtime member of the LaRouche movement, the author died in 2003.*

Between the years 1800 and 1815, but for a handful of patriots, most notably John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and Mathew Carey, the United States might have easily been di-

vided and reconquered by the British crown, still smarting from its defeat in the Revolutionary War. Adams and Clay saved the young United States, primarily because they possessed the leadership qualities of mind which allowed them to rise above the divisive factions which existed in both the party of Thomas Jefferson, known as the Democratic-Republican, and the party of the deceased Alexander Hamilton, known as the Federalist, which had proposed to several New Englanders that they would send military might from Canada at the outbreak of war between the United States and Great Britain, to enable New England to secede from the Union.

John Quincy Adams brought to these years of crisis a remarkable background: an education grounded in the Greek and Roman Classics, as well as 18th-Century European culture, ten years of political intelligence and diplomatic experience under the Washington and Adams Administrations, and a profound Christian morality.

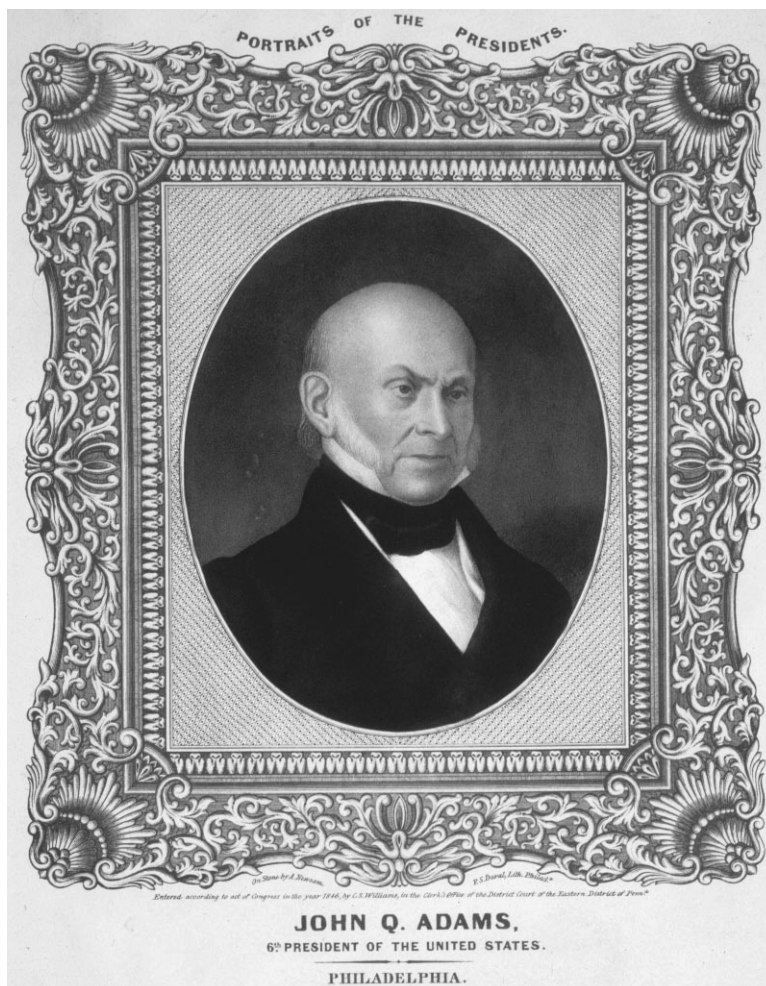
Between 1803 and 1809, John Quincy Adams became the conscience of New England. Not only did he provide leadership to the troubled young nation, he sought to reproduce it in the next generation of Americans. In addition to his responsibilities as Federalist Senator from Massachusetts, he agreed to serve as the first Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University. Adams viewed his responsibility to the students at Harvard, of whom he had been one, in the most far-ranging way possible: He appealed to their souls more than to their speaking abilities. From the Inaugural Oration of 1806, given one month before his 40th birthday, to his resignation in 1810, Adams provoked his students to examine the purpose of their future lives, and their principles. Unless his students were to take up the challenge of the ancient Greek sage Socrates, to “know thyself,” they would fall short of the qualities of leadership needed to defend the endangered young republic.

## What Is an American Patriot?

This article is part of a series aimed at unearthing the real history of the American patriotic tradition, and causing its revival. The purpose is to create the political and intellectual climate in which a genuine American patriotic candidate can emerge for the 2008 Presidential elections—a candidacy which does not yet exist.

Of special relevance is the period of the early 19th Century, when patriots had to fight in the context of series of poor, or even treasonous Presidents. The fact that our greatest President, Abraham Lincoln, was produced from this political environment, testifies to the effectiveness of the network of republican forces from this period, many of whom are unknown to the American public today. The LaRouche movement has worked for decades to uncover the original writings and other evidence of this network, materials which will form the basis for many of the articles in this series.

This week’s installment takes up the towering figure of John Quincy Adams, who served as Senator, Secretary of State, President, and finally Congressman, in his courageous fight for the American System of political economy, for a community of interests among sovereign nations, and against “the slave power.”



*John Quincy Adams was one of a very few patriots of the first half of the 19th Century who was able to rise above the bitter partisanship of the day, and fight for the universal principles that allowed the nation to survive.*

## Early Education of a Statesman

John Quincy Adams was born in 1767. In 1775, he witnessed some of the fighting which occurred after the first battle of the American Revolution, the battle of Lexington and Concord. His mother, Abigail Adams, reported to John Adams, who was sitting in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, on how well their son had withstood the terrors of the battles occurring in their vicinity.

What concerned Abigail and John most, however, was that John Quincy could not receive the necessary education in war-torn Massachusetts. John Adams expected his oldest son to master Latin and ancient Greek, beginning at the age of eight.

In 1778, when John Quincy was 11, John Adams was sent to France on a diplomatic mission. Abigail and John Adams determined that their son could receive a more steady education under the watchful eye of his father in Europe, than in revolutionary America. For the next eight years, John

Quincy received his formal and informal education in Europe. It was in 1778 that he wrote to Abigail, "My Pappa enjoins it upon me to keep a Journal, or Diary of the Events that happen to me, and of objects that I see, and of Characters that I converse with from day to day; and although I am convinced of the utility, importance, and necessity of this Exercise, yet I have not patience and perseverance enough to do it so constantly as I ought."

So began the most remarkable record of 70 years of American history. The diaries of the young John Quincy Adams chronicle both the history of one individual who spent his entire life in public service, as well as the most significant aspects of American history between 1778 and 1848, when Adams died in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In 1781, at the age of 14, John Quincy travelled with Francis Dana, who was sent to Russia to seek Russian diplomatic recognition of the United States. John Quincy's knowledge of French, the diplomatic and court language of Russia, proved to be invaluable.

The most crucial years of his stay in Europe were 1783-85, years which John Adams and John Quincy Adams spent in Great Britain and France. In 1784, John Adams was sent to Paris to negotiate, along with his colleagues Benjamin Franklin and John Jay, a commercial treaty with Great Britain.

In Paris, John Quincy met regularly with most of the prominent individuals who were providing support to the American Revolution through their diplomatic missions abroad, including Lt. Col. David Humphreys, the Marquis de Lafayette, and Caron de Beaumarchais, the weapons suppliers to the U.S. war effort, as well as his old mentor, Dr.

Benjamin Franklin.

In 1785, John Adams was appointed ambassador to Great Britain. John Quincy, then 18, decided to return to the United States to further his education at Harvard.

## Student Years at Harvard

John Quincy arrived back in the newly created United States of America in July of 1785. He spent from July to March of 1786 reacquainting himself with friends and relatives, and remedying supposed deficiencies in his education. In March 1786, Adams passed his entrance examination into Harvard University. By the time he graduated, among other achievements, he had mastered the flute, and had demonstrated his abilities in fluxions (Leibniz's differential calculus), conic sections, and astronomy.

At a public exhibition in his senior year, John Quincy Adams delivered an oration on the topic, "Whether the introduction of Christianity has been serviceable to the temporal inter-

ests of man,” in which he declared: “Christianity, it is true, has been the immediate object of many contests: But when mankind have an inclination to quarrel with one another, a motive is easily found; the causes of dispute are innumerable, and had Christianity never appeared, the power of Discord would probably have been much greater than it has been. Every candid reader of history will acknowledge that the Christian institution, has gradually inspired into the hearts of men, sentiments of compassion, benevolence and humanity even towards their enemies, which were entirely unknown to the savage barbarians of antiquity.”

Wittingly or unwittingly, Adams’ argument in favor of Christianity parallels many of the arguments articulated by Saint Augustine in *The City of God*.

John Quincy Adams graduated in 1787, second in his class. He gave an oration at the Harvard commencement which was attacked in the press—on the grounds that John Quincy Adams was the son of John Adams, and adhered to his father’s republican principles!

In 1787, the Federal Constitution had not yet been born, and, in Massachusetts, Shays’ Rebellion had just ended. Shays’ Rebellion, an armed uprising of farmers in Massachusetts, was a reflection of national economic conditions. The lack of a centralized system of government had created such diverse fiscal policies among the states, that the credit of the United States was in a state of national ruin. Everyone knew that the Articles of Confederation could not hold the Union together, and the Constitutional Convention was working to hammer out an alternative plan. Adams delivered a beautiful, optimistic oration, indicating his belief in the correctness of the American Revolution, and the durability of the American republic. He elucidated his vision of the future state of America:

“Gentle Peace, and smiling plenty would again appear and scatter their invaluable blessings round the happy land: the hands of Commerce would recover strength and spread the swelling sail: arts and manufactures would flourish here, and soon would vie with those of Europe, and, Science here would enrich the world, with noble and useful discoveries. The radiant Sun of our union would soon emerge from those thick clouds, which obscure his glory, shine with the most resplendent lustre, and diffuse throughout the astonished world, the brilliant light of Science, and the general warmth of freedom. An eagle, would soon extend the wings of protection to the wretched object of tyranny and persecution in every quarter of the globe.... Here would [the Muses] form historians who should relate, and poets who should sing the glories of our country.”

Soon after his graduation from Harvard, John Quincy began his apprenticeship in the law under Theophilus Parsons, who later became Chief Justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. By 1790, he was admitted to the bar. By 1794, he received an appointment as ambassador to The Hague (Netherlands) in the Washington Administration. George Washington

later indicated his appreciation of John Quincy’s intelligence-gathering ability.

With the election of John Adams as President in 1796, John Quincy was appointed the U.S. consul to the Court of Prussia, an important listening post for the United States in Europe. But it also gave John Quincy a chance to study German, and he translated poems of Friedrich Schiller, for whom he had the utmost respect, as well as a full-length translation of the epic poem *Oberon* by Christoph Martin Wieland.

## Senator and Teacher

In 1803, Adams was appointed the junior U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. His “independent turn of mind,” often expressed in the Congress, made him the prophet not honored in his own country. He and his fellow Senator, Timothy Pickering, barely spoke to each other. Among Federalists, it was believed that Senator Adams had sold himself to President Thomas Jefferson for the price of some office or other, even though the much-rumored patronage never materialized.

In 1804, after several months in Washington, D.C., Adams wrote in his *Diary*: “I have already had occasion to experience, what I had before the fullest reason to expect, the *danger* of adhering to my own principles. The country is so totally given up to the spirit of party, that not to follow blindfold the one or the other is an inexpiable offence.... Between both, I see the impossibility of pursuing the dictates of my own conscience without sacrificing every prospect, not merely of advancement, but even of retaining that character and reputation I have enjoyed.”

Adams knew that his views put him in a minority. But Adams, unlike his colleague from Massachusetts, Pickering, who was a Federalist Party man, wished to serve his whole country. Having had the advantage of traveling abroad and serving in the diplomatic corps under President Washington, John Quincy Adams was able to conceptualize the *consequences* of legislative proposals and actions taken by the Senate decades into the future. Unlike most of his colleagues, he also had been trained in political intelligence, and understood the motives of nations such as Great Britain, France, and Spain, relative to the New World.

While still a Senator, Adams returned to Harvard as a professor in 1805. He continued to pursue his scientific studies, and was part of a study group which met once a week, and replicated the experiments of Lavoisier, as well as of other members of France’s Ecole Polytechnique.

As a professor of rhetoric and oratory, Adams outlined the fundamental principle which was the basis for all his lectures, in his Inaugural Oration:

“The peculiar and highest characteristic, which distinguishes man from the rest of the animal creation, is *reason*. It is by this attribute, that our species is constituted the great link between the physical and intellectual world. By our passions and appetites we are placed on a level with the herds of the



forest; by our *reason* we participate of the divine nature itself.”

In other words, man should speak for the highest purpose, for the Good. Adams concluded his Inaugural Oration: “Under governments purely republican, where every citizen has a deep interest in the affairs of the nation, and in some form of public assembly, has the means and opportunity of delivering his opinions, and of communicating his sentiments by speech; where government itself has no aims but those of persuasion; where prejudice has not acquired an uncontrolled ascendancy, and faction is yet confined within the barriers of peace; the voice of eloquence will not be heard in vain. March then with firm, with steady, with undeviating step, to the prize of your high calling. . . . Consecrate, above all, the faculties of your life to the cause of truth, of freedom, and of humanity. So shall your country ever gladden at the sound of your voice, and every talent, added to your accomplishments, become another blessing to mankind.”

Adams had been immersed in Homer and other Greek and Latin Classics from his youth. But he had a very discerning mind, and held no illusions, like many of his contemporaries, about the “idyll” of ancient Rome. There existed for Adams one criterion that divided these societies of antiquity from the American republic: In moral terms, he called that dividing line *equity*; in political terms, a *purely republican government*; and in religious terms, *Christianity*.

## Oratory and Politics

John Quincy Adams divided oratory into three different categories: *deliberative oratory*, which meant speeches given before legislative bodies; *judicial oratory*, which meant the pleadings of lawyers before the bar; and *pulpit oratory*, which meant the religious and moral discourse of ministers. Within these three categories, the speaker must speak from a moral purpose. Truth ought to be the basis for all undertakings, particularly in oratory, where the citizen’s emotions could be swayed by narrow interests, as their reason might be by a just cause.

In Adams’ mind the *sine qua non* of all oratory for his audience of American students had to be the speaker’s commitment to the American republic, as an institution of *the good*. He rejected the notion that “great oratory” was borne of a desperate political situation. Although he admired Cicero’s speeches known as the *Philippics*, given in opposition to Mark Antony after the assassination of Julius Caesar, he told his students:

“The only birth place of eloquence therefore must be a free state. Under arbitrary governments, . . . where the despot, like the Roman centurion, has only to say to one man, go, and he goeth, and to another, come, and he cometh; persuasion is of no avail. . . . Eloquence is the child of liberty, . . . she will find her most instructive school . . . in a country, where the same spirit of liberty, which marks the relations between the individuals of the same community, is diffused over those

more complicated and important relations between different communities . . . where the independence of the man is corroborated and invigorated by the independence of the state . . . where the same power of persuasion, which influences the will of the citizen at home, has the means of operating upon the will and the conduct of sovereign societies. . . . [There,] eloquence will spring to light; will flourish; will rise to the highest perfection of which human art or science is susceptible.”

Many of Adams’ students believed that “the noble experiment” of American independence was doomed to fail. A general war was looming between Great Britain and France. In New England, the political sentiment favored Great Britain, and many believed that a re-union with Great Britain was only a matter of time. Without Great Britain, it was claimed, America could never defend itself. Professor Adams used the forum of his lectures to explain to his students the evil policies which had separated the United States from the British Empire, and why that separation was still vital in 1806.

Adams’ most scathing argument against the British Empire is found in his Lecture XXXII, on “Figurative Language.” As his example of figurative language, Adams chose to analyze a debate in Britain’s Parliament after the outbreak of the American Revolution, regarding the rate of population growth in the American states.

Adams used the debate between Edmund Burke and Dr. Samuel Johnson, to contrast the two different prevailing views on population growth, particularly the growth of the United States. These examples aptly demonstrate the irreconcilable differences between the British Empire and the newly created United States of America.

Edmund Burke’s desire was to “promote peace, and restore harmony,” and consequently, he drew an argument “in favor of conciliatory measures from the . . . great and growing population of this country. The first thing, that we have to consider with regard to the nature of the object, is the number of people in the colonies. . . . I can by no calculation justify myself in placing the number below two millions of inhabitants of our own European blood and color. . . . Whilst we spend our time in deliberating on the mode of governing two millions, we shall find we have millions more to manage. Your children do not grow faster from infancy to manhood, than they spread from families to communities, and from villages to nations.”

Dr. Johnson, on the other hand, advocated a new war with America: “His purpose was . . . to rouse and stimulate the violent and angry passions.” Wrote Johnson, “But we are soon told that the continent of North America contains three millions, not of men merely, but of whigs; . . . that they multiply *with the fecundity of their own rattlesnakes*; so that every quarter of a century doubles their numbers . . . *When it is urged, they will shoot up like the hydra*; [the English hearer] *naturally considers how the hydra was destroyed.*”

For Adams and every other American patriot, the *rate of*

increase of population growth represented the potential and actual development of the republic. Man's reason and scientific contributions, as well as his labor power, were known to be the key to the economic growth of the United States; in 1806, Adams wished to impart a profound sense of the worth of every individual life in a republic. He also wished to convey the perfidy of the British. As he pointedly told his students, the hydra had been killed by Hercules, who "cut off all its heads successively; and to prevent their shooting out again in double number, he seared with a hot iron the wound of every head, as he cut it off. This is the remedy, which suggests itself to Johnson's mind and which he suggests to his readers, as fit to be employed for arresting the rapidity of American population [growth]."

### Growing Clashes With Britain

Adams knew that the foreign affairs of the United States would not remain in equilibrium much longer, and that soon Great Britain and France would be at war.

To increase the Crown's sea power, the British were already impressing seamen who sailed on American ships, using the pretext that no trade by a neutral nation with a belligerent power, in time of war, is lawful. If a seaman had the slightest sign of a British accent or did not carry the appropriate papers, he was whisked off the unarmed American merchant vessel to a waiting British ship which was heavily armed. Often, the American ship would be left with only half its crew. The British were also seizing the cargo of American vessels bound for any country associated with Napoleon Bonaparte, which meant practically all of continental Europe at this time.

This practice amounted to piracy, but was justified by Great Britain in order to prevent American goods from being handed over to Napoleon and France.

"Memorials from the merchants of all the commercial cities of the Union were addressed to Congress," recalled Adams in 1828, "and pledges of support were given for any measures which might be deemed necessary, even to the extremity of war. This interest, at the session of Congress of 1805-6, absorbed all others. Had Mr. Jefferson and his administration at that time shaken off their inveterate and deep-rooted prejudices against a naval power; had they then commenced that system of gradual increase of the navy now happily established, and for which the circumstances of the country were then not less favorable than when the system was actually commenced,—the subsequent war with Great Britain would probably never have happened; or, if it had, with a preparation of six years at the declaration of war in 1812, and a hearty cooperation of the people of the Eastern States in its prosecution, deeds of glory would have signalized the war by sea and land."

But Albert Gallatin sat in the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Gallatin was a Swiss-born agent of the European oligarchy, who insisted to Jefferson that there was no money to

build a navy. And Jefferson, who could not see the rising storm, willingly complied with Gallatin's treachery.

But soon, a scandal involving the American ship *Chesapeake* demanded that each individual Congressman take a stand. "On the 22d June, 1807," explained John Quincy Adams, "the American frigate *Chesapeake* sailed from Norfolk, for service in the Mediterranean. A British squadron was lying at anchor in the same port. The *Leopard*, a fifty-gun ship of this squadron, weighed anchor immediately after the *Chesapeake*, and demanded the delivery of four seamen, three of whom had deserted from the British frigate *Melampus*, into which, though native Americans, they had been impressed. The fourth was said to be a deserter from a British merchant vessel. On the refusal of Commodore Barron to deliver up the men, a fire was commenced from the *Leopard* upon the *Chesapeake*, wholly unprepared for action as she was, and unsuspecting of attack; and the flag of which was struck, after the loss of three men killed and sixteen wounded. A lieutenant from the *Leopard* was then sent on board of the American frigate; her crew was mustered upon the deck; the four men who had been demanded were taken from the ship, carried on board the *Leopard*, transported to Halifax, there tried by a naval court-martial, and one of them hanged. One died there in confinement; the two others, five years afterwards, on the 13th June, 1812, were returned to the *Chesapeake* frigate at Boston."

Out of this incident was born the Embargo Act, which decreed that American merchant vessels should stay at home. Adams supported the embargo only as a stop-gap measure; he believed that America ought to use the time gained by the embargo to build a navy.

But Adams was in the minority—not even the Federalists agreed with him, although they were the ones suffering the most from the embargo. They insisted that America ought to shelter itself under the protection of the British Navy. The pacifism of the Federalists was so great that, after the *Chesapeake* was seized, Adams was shocked when John Lowell, Jr., the chief organizer of the Essex Junto of New England secessionists, told him "that British naval officers had a *right* to seize and carry away from an American ship-of-war any deserter from the British navy. The discussion between us assembled a circle of citizens around us, and became so painfully animated that, from that day, there has been little personal intercourse between that citizen and me."

The primary cause of this pro-British hysteria in the commercial states, was Thomas Jefferson's loss of political will. Under no circumstances would he be persuaded to begin a military-preparedness program. This laid the basis for the British to begin a whisper campaign against Jefferson, that he was an agent of Napoleon Bonaparte, which the Federalists willingly believed.

Adams assessed the situation as follows: "Mr. Jefferson's political system considered France as then, at least, the natu-

ral ally of the United States, and he had purchased Louisiana from the government of Napoleon. The Federalists had always considered France with some jealousy and suspicion. They now looked upon the French Revolution as a great imposture,—a calamity to the human species; and they observed the character and career of Napoleon with terror and abhorrence....

“Partaking something of the panic themselves, [the British] infused it (from motives of policy as well as of patriotism) throughout the nation; and they proclaimed and preached, over the whole civilized world, that they were fighting, not only for their own existence, but for the liberties of mankind, and that Britain was the last and only barrier against the universal conqueror. The extent to which the Federalists yielded their assent to these mystifications would at this day be incredible.”

Between 1807 and 1808, Adams discovered that the Essex Junto, encouraged by the British, had revived their plan to form a Northern confederacy; there had been a letter from the governor of British Nova Scotia, which offered assistance at the right moment to the “confederates,” as Adams called them later.

In 1808, Sen. John Quincy Adams visited Thomas Jefferson, and told him that the British were accusing Jefferson of being a secret Bonapartist, which was fueling the pro-confederacy hysteria. That interview was used to convince New Englanders that Senator Adams was an apostate—even though he had been the first in Boston to call a town meeting after the *Chesapeake* affair. Former friends were led to believe that Adams was now a Jeffersonian. They would cross to the other side of the street when they saw him coming.

The most insulting act of all, however, was the decision by the Federalists to nominate a candidate to replace Adams as Senator, nine months early, in late 1807. James Lloyd was selected. Lloyd, a New England merchant and a Federalist through and through, voted with John Lowell, Jr.’s faction, against the declaration of the War of 1812, when President Madison sent his message to the House of Representatives. Adams, who had not expected to be reelected, resigned his Senate seat.

On Dec. 31, 1807, Adams had ended his yearly assessment of his accomplishments by writing: “On most of the great national questions now under discussion, my sense of duty leads me to support the Administration, and I find myself of course in opposition to the Federalists in general.... In this state of things my situation calls in a peculiar manner for prudence; my political prospects are declining, and as my term of service draws near its close, I am constantly approaching to the certainty of being restored to the situation of a private citizen. For this even, however, I hope to have my mind sufficiently prepared. In the meantime, I implore that Spirit from whom every good and perfect gift descends to enable me to render essential service to my country, and that I may never be

governed in my public conduct by any consideration than that of my duty.”

## Diplomacy in Russia and Europe

When James Madison was elected President in 1808, he immediately asked Adams to become the American ambassador to Russia. Because of the war in Europe, Madison told Adams, America would have to open up more commercial markets. Russia had asked the United States to send an ambassador, and there seemed to be an opportunity for expanding American shipping with Russia. Adams accepted.

Once again, John Quincy’s full powers of intellect, his intelligence-gathering capabilities, his diplomatic skills, and his political acumen, came into play. Russia, too, was crucial for the United States. Czar Alexander I, who had been defeated by Napoleon in two major battles, was re-marshalling his forces, and was indirectly in touch with some of the leading Prussian military reformers, including the great Gen. Gerhard von Scharnhorst, about a war-winning strategy against Napoleon. At the same time, Friedrich Schiller’s brother-in-law was at the St. Petersburg court, reading Schiller’s plays almost nightly with the Czarina.

Adams and Alexander I developed an informal, as well as a formal diplomatic relationship. Adams, who loved to walk, discovered that Alexander often walked along the quays of St. Petersburg. The two men often “accidentally met” during their walks, and discussed the gathering war clouds in Europe, Russia’s intentions, Napoleon’s plans, and so forth.

While in Russia, Adams revised his Harvard *Lectures* for publication. He also began to formulate one of his greatest contributions to the United States, which became known as the Monroe Doctrine. The Monroe Doctrine had as its intent to foster republicanism among the nation-states of the Americas. Adams observed that not only did the great powers of Europe have designs on the Americas, but so did imperial Russia. All that he had seen of the so-called great powers of Europe, including Russia, led him to believe that the Western Hemisphere could ensure its independence only through the Monroe Doctrine, and its corollary, the idea of a community of principle among nation-states.

After the war broke out in Europe, Adams was deployed, along with Albert Gallatin and Henry Clay, to the peace negotiations at Ghent to end the War of 1812.

He was then named U.S. Ambassador to the Court of St. James, in Great Britain, where he remained for two years. By 1816, however, Adams was ready to return home and was informed that he had been appointed Secretary of State under President James Monroe.

Adams was to serve as Secretary of State until 1824, and his expertise was crucial on a number of foreign policy issues. The most well-known is the Monroe Doctrine, which Adams in large part drafted, and which expressed the U.S. commitment to keeping British gunboat diplomacy out of the Western



Hemisphere, out of North and South America. [See accompanying article by Nancy Spannaus—ed.]

## Adams in the White House

By 1824, when John Quincy Adams became President, the Federalists had little overt influence on national affairs.

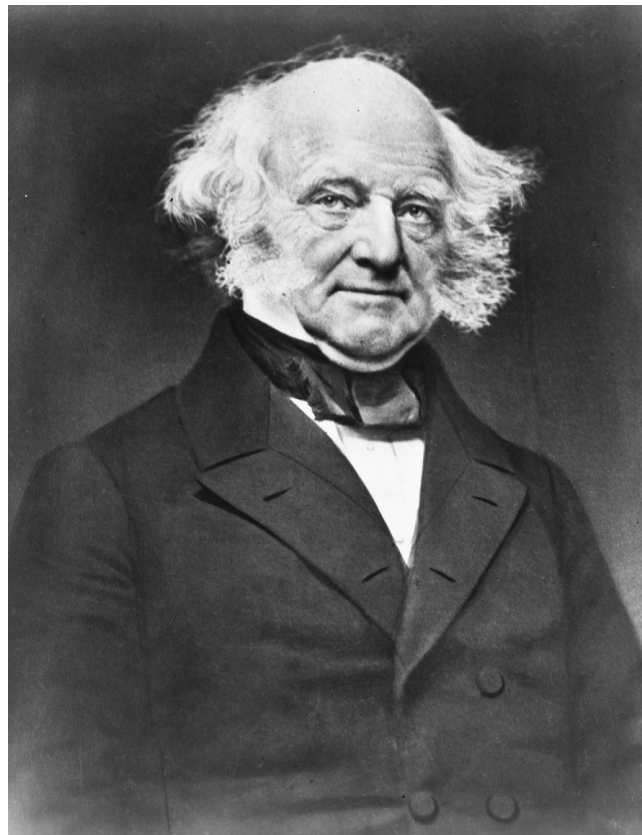
Adams was elected President in a heated four-way contest, between himself, incumbent Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford, Gen. Andrew Jackson, and Spaker of the House Henry Clay. Clay realized that Andrew Jackson would be elected if the general's aggressive politicking went unchecked. Since Clay opposed Jackson's plan to dismantle the Second Bank of the United States, he decided to throw his support behind John Quincy Adams. Combined with General Lafayette's triumphal tour of the Eastern seaboard during the election campaign, Clay's sacrifice guaranteed the election of Adams, and staved off for four more years the reversal of the policies of internal improvements which Clay and Adams had both developed, beginning under President Monroe. In turn, Adams named Clay as his Secretary of State.

In 1825, John Quincy Adams delivered his first State of the Union message to Congress. In that historic speech, he called for, among other things, the building of a national astronomical observatory. Adams' far-reaching vision permitted him to foresee a time when the pursuit of science would be as valued in republican America as it was in imperial Russia, which then had the most scientifically advanced observatory in the world.

Although Adams lost the fight for a national observatory, he won battles in the first two years of his administration for internal improvements, like the development of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal which connects Maryland to the West. These improvements, canals and roads, were absolutely essential, if the frontier areas of states like Ohio and Kentucky were ever to be connected to the rest of the country. By 1828, the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was completed, and Adams dedicated the canal. [See accompanying excerpts of a speech by Anton Chaitkin—ed.]

But in 1827, Andrew Jackson's controller, Martin Van Buren of New York, managed to sweep the Congressional elections and to bring in a group of Congressmen who would block any further internal improvements, on the same grounds that Albert Gallatin had tried to prevent the building of a navy: They cost too much. And, in the 1828 election, Van Buren and Jackson succeeded in buying the vote and creating a hoked-up corruption scandal surrounding the Administration. Adams was out.

Adams remained in public service throughout the rest of his life, and continued to play a role in creating key initiatives which helped to develop America. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1830—the first ex-President to serve there—to which seat he was reelected for the next 18 years.



Library of Congress

*Martin Van Buren (President, 1837-41). John Q. Adams described him as "a northern President with southern principles," whose pliancy in the face of the slave-traders was shameful. He was Andrew Jackson's controller, and referred to the Presidency as a "joint stock company" between himself and Jackson.*

## 'Old Man Eloquent' in Congress

Given the crises facing the United States, including the threat posed by the Jackson Presidency (1829-37), which dismantled the Second Bank of the United States and brought on the Panic of '37, as well as the ever-growing tensions sparked by the British-inspired secessionists in South Carolina, it was no wonder that Adams saw it as his patriotic duty to return to Congress.

Because of his ability to concisely put an issue, and to address the overall principle involved in any fight, he became known, during his years in Congress, as "Old Man Eloquent," and was often asked to mediate disputes which could not have been settled without that venerable Congressman's wisdom.

When Adams entered the House, Andrew Jackson had been President for two years, and had begun to dismantle what Henry Clay, in 1824, had called the American System. The American System has been perhaps most pithily described by Abraham Lincoln, in his candidacy for the Illinois legislature in 1832. "My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance," he wrote in a circular to pro-

spective voters in Sangamon County. "I am in favor of a national bank. I am in favor of the internal improvement system and a high protective tariff. These are my sentiments and political principles."

The dismantling of that American System began with the fight over the tariff, which was required to protect young American industries from annihilation by cheap foreign imports. What Adams saw beginning to operate in those years, was the so-called "will of the people." It was alleged that the Northern "aristocrats" had been suppressing the "common man" through the tariff system, and through the Bank of the United States, which was alleged to be the "bank of the wealthy." It was said that "the people" wanted political power vested in the states, not the centralized power of the Federal government.

Adams saw clearly that President Jackson and his crowd were invoking "the will of the people" as a means of destroying the American System of political economy, as well as a means of guaranteeing the ascendancy of the slave power (the Southern states) over the rest of the country, something they were advantaged to do by the three-fifths rule: Under the compromise reached at the Constitutional Convention, each slave counted as three-fifths of a person, which meant that Southern states had more representatives in the House than Northern or Midwest states.

But the pro-Jackson party in the House and Senate were not merely country populists who felt it necessary to capitulate to the "the will of the people" on every issue. Throughout his career, Jackson had worked with the pro-British traitor Aaron Burr and with Albert Gallatin. On Feb. 24, 1831, Adams recorded in his diary that he had been told that the British would have taken certain measures in their trade policy to ensure Jackson's victory, if they had been advised to do so.

In 1834, the fight over whether the charter of the Bank of the United States would be renewed had begun. As part of their ploy to get rid of the Bank altogether, the "Jackson men" demanded an investigation into the operation of the bank, including visits to the bank and any of its branches. Adams, recognizing this as a ploy to put the bank out of operation and put

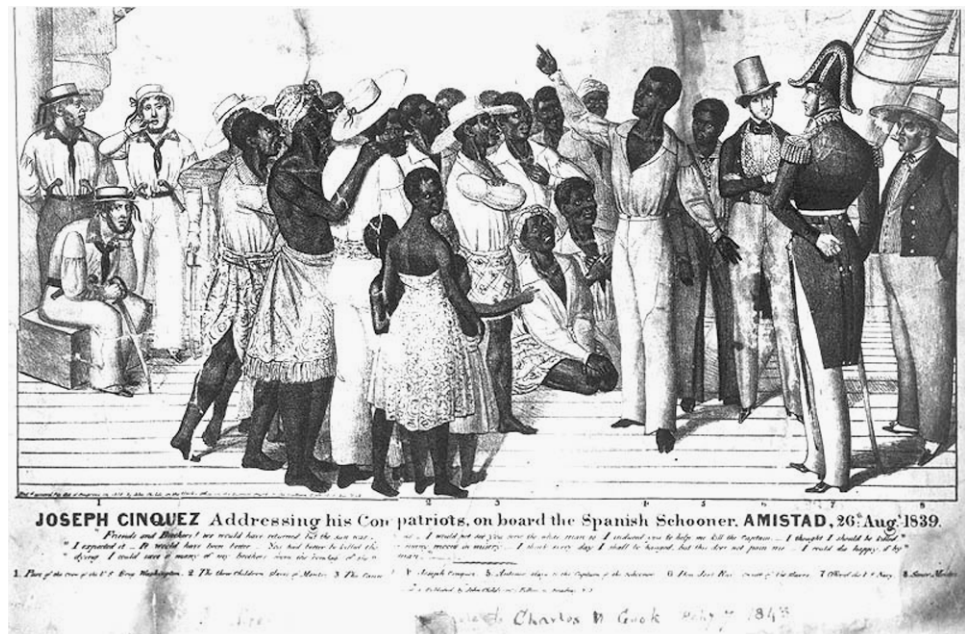
the funds of the Treasury of the United States into the hands of state and private banks, wrote in his diary on April 4, 1834 that he was "mortified" by the proposed investigation. He called it "arbitrary" and "tyrannical," and compared it to the laws enacted in revolutionary France in the 1790s. "It proves how feeble even in this country," he wrote, "are all the principles of freedom in collision with a current of popular prejudices or passion."

Over the years, Adams became a rallying point in the House for constitutional principles. He was involved in organizing the Anti-Masonic Party, and looked for ways to build new political parties when the Anti-Masonic Party and the Whig Party were falling apart.

## The Right To Petition

The battle for which Adams is most known, however, was on the right to petition. The right of citizens to petition their government is affirmed in the First Amendment to the Constitution. It was then the custom in Congress to set aside one day a week for petitions from constituents on all issues to be heard. But the question of slavery was taboo.

There had been a "gag order" in effect in Congress ever since 1790, when the Pennsylvania Abolition Society filed a petition calling on Congress to make both slavery and the



Mystic Seaport website

*Captured slaves aboard the Amistad. When asked to argue their case before the Supreme Court, Adams wrote: "The world, the flesh, and all the devils in hell are arrayed against any man who now in this North American Union shall dare to join the standard of Almighty God to put down the African slave trade; and what can I, upon the verge of my 74th birthday, with a shaken hand, a darkening eye, a drowsy brain, and with my faculties dropping from me one by one as the teeth are dropping from my head—what can I do for the cause of God and man, for the progress of human emancipation, for the suppression of the African slave-trade? Yet my conscience presses me on; let me but die upon the breach."*



## The Amistad Case

In 1997, the movie *Amistad* was released by director Steven Spielberg, covering the historic events surrounding the attempt by Africans who had been kidnapped on the west coast of Africa, to seize control of the slave ship on which they were being transported from one Cuban port to another, and to try to return home. The ship went off course; they were captured, and kept in prison in the United States for two years, while their fate was being decided in the U.S. courts. Spielberg's film depicts the 1839-41 legal fight, all the way up to the Supreme Court, waged by abolitionists to secure their freedom. The Supreme Court appeal was argued by Rep. John Quincy Adams, age 74, in the midst of his Congressional battles over the right to petition.

The case had quickly become a *cause célèbre* among Abolitionists, but Adams raised it to an even higher, more universal principle: the principle of justice for each and every individual, black or white, young or old, male or female, "slave" or "free." For Adams, it was impossible that the Africans aboard the *Amistad* were slaves, according to either international law or U.S. law, but especially universal law. For this great American constitutionalist, there was only one issue: the inalienable rights of man.

Adams, in his argument to the Supreme Court, stressed that the Constitution nowhere recognizes slaves as property, but only as persons—even if three-fifths of a person. "The words slave and slavery are studiously excluded from the Constitution," he said. "Circumlocutions are the fig-leaves under which these parts of the body politic are decently concealed. Slaves, therefore, in the Constitution of the United States are recognized only as *persons*, enjoying rights and held to the performance of duties" (emphasis in original).

Adams was trying to re-open the issue publicly, that slavery was supposed to have been extinguished by the United States after 1808, according to the original idea of a majority of the Founding Fathers. But because of the intransigence of the Southern states, the institution had continued, even though importation of slaves was not permitted. Virginia, for example, was breeding slaves to be sold further south, into the inhumane labor conditions which existed in the cotton fields and sugar plantations of Georgia, North and South Carolina, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

### Declaration of Independence vs. Hobbes

Adams affirmed that the dispute over slavery had existed as far back as Homer. Said Adams, "In the estimate of that Prince of Grecian Poets,

"'Jove fix'd it certain that whatever day  
"Makes man a slave, takes *half* his worth away—'

"and in the political statistics of the author of the Declaration of Independence the degradation of the character of man, by the infliction upon him of slavery, is far greater than is asserted by the blind old rhapsodist of Smyrna [Homer]."

Indeed, it was well known that one crucial provision, denouncing slavery, had been struck from the Declaration of Independence in order to guarantee the support of the South in the American Revolution. That provision read that the King of England "has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of distant peoples who never offended him; captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. . . . Determined to keep open a market where *men* should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative by suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce . . . he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another" (emphasis in original).

But as for the argument that slavery has historically been a privilege of the victor in war, said Adams, all of those notions were swept away by the Declaration of Independence. He pointed out that this was one of Thomas Hobbes' "war of each against all" arguments. Hobbes, he added, had assumed that "government and despotism are synonymous words. I will not here discuss the right or the rights of slavery, but I say that the doctrine of Hobbes, that *War* is the natural state of man, has for ages been exploded, as equally disclaimed and rejected by the philosopher and the Christian. *That it is utterly incompatible with any theory of human rights, and especially with the rights which the Declaration of Independence proclaims as self-evident truth. The moment you come to the Declaration of Independence, that every man has a right to life and liberty, an inalienable right, this case is decided. . . .*" (emphasis added).

In concluding his argument, Adams told the Supreme Court, "I can only ejaculate a fervent petition to Heaven, that every member of [this Honorable Court] may . . . be received at the portals of the next with the approving sentence—'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of the Lord.'"

Adams' argument won the day, and ultimately, the *Amistad* captives were returned to Africa.

—Denise Henderson

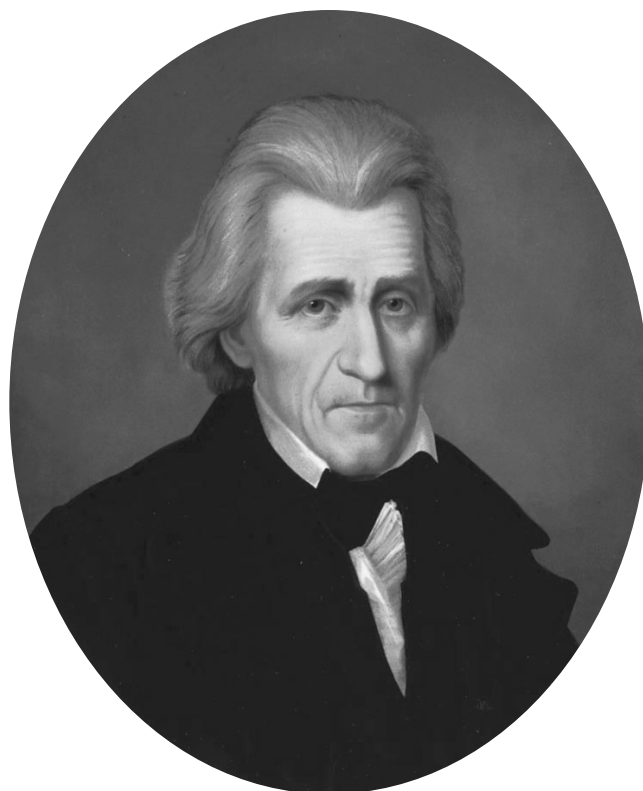
slave trade illegal. The petition was signed and upheld by Benjamin Franklin, in the last political effort of his long life. As a result of Franklin's intervention, an entire day was devoted to discussion of the issue in Congress—but the Southern side prevailed, and Congress voted that it would henceforth have no power to interfere in the issue of slavery *in any way, at any time*. This silenced any discussion of the slavery issue, until John Quincy Adams and a few collaborators took the point, a generation later. [See Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, 2000; and William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States*, 1966—ed.]

While Adams was in Congress, abolitionist groups tried again, submitting petitions to be read on the floor of the House, opposing slavery, demanding the immediate or gradual abolition of slavery, demanding the rights of slaves, etc. Needless to say, this enraged the Southern pro-slavery Congressmen. When Adams decided to make it his priority to read aloud every petition that came to him from his district regarding slavery, Southern Congressmen struck back.

The demand that opponents of slavery, particularly Adams, be gagged, was first made in 1835 by South Carolina Rep. James Hammond, a student of the rabid Thomas Cooper. Hammond, like Cooper, was a Mason, and there is no doubt that he spoke on behalf of the coterie of what Adams had called the “South Carolina men,” who were some of the chief supporters of the annexation of Texas to the United States as a slave state, designed to increase the power of the slaveholding states. An increase in their representation in the Senate and House, as their opponents well understood, could lead to a situation in which the slave states could pass any legislation they wanted and could even amend the Constitution—e.g., legalizing slavery forever, not only in their own states, but in the entire Union.

Jackson's Presidency was the beginning of the secessionist movement in the United States. But worse was to come. Although Adams was sometimes verbally abused and witnessed one physical assault which occurred in the House during this time, it was nothing compared to what was to follow, as the “slave power” became bolder. As the British-inspired U.S. press inflamed the pro-secessionist feelings of Southern Congressmen, the incitement to verbal and physical abuse increased.

With the annexation issue being pushed by the Jackson Administration beginning in 1836, the House was flooded with petitions from citizens and legislatures of the slaveholding Southern states, supporting annexation and that Texas be admitted as a state—a slave state, of course. Thus, the issue of the expansion of slavery, and with it of the right of Congress to prohibit it in the territories, erupted with a vengeance. The House was now presented with not just anti-slavery petitions, but large numbers opposing annexation as well. In an effort to ram through annexation and silence all opposition, the House adopted a resolution in 1836, which it would re-



Library of Congress

*Andrew Jackson (President, 1829-37), representing the “slave power,” defeated Adams’ bid for re-election to the Presidency. The drive for Southern secession began under Jackson’s rule. He also dismantled the Second Bank of the United States and brought on the Panic of 1837.*

new in every session until 1845, “That all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers, relating in any way or to any extent whatever to the subject of slavery, or the abolition of slavery, shall, without being either printed or referred, be laid upon the table, and that no further action whatever shall be had thereon.”

So Adams, now 70 years old, found himself quickly becoming the champion of the right of U.S. citizens to free speech and the right to petition. No one, no matter from what section of the country, had a right to deny those rights on the grounds that they didn't like what they were hearing. What resulted was one of the most important constitutional battles in this nation's history, and also one of the most articulate and principled defenses of not simply the right of freedom of speech, but also of the fundamental principles which the Founding Fathers had intended the nation to stand upon.

In his diary, Adams recorded instances in which he overheard Southern Congressmen discussing how it would be better for all concerned if Adams were dead; he received death threats regularly from citizens who lived in the South. At the same time, however, slaves in the South, particularly house slaves, would listen carefully to their masters' talk about what “Old Man Eloquent” was up to.

It was in this way, reported Frederick Douglass, that he got the news of the fight being waged by John Quincy Adams and a handful of others in the House on behalf of the slaves. In fact, Douglass reported to an audience in 1841 that while still a slave, he had read a speech by John Quincy Adams in which Adams was attempting to present petitions to the House for the abolition of slavery, specifically in the District of Columbia. Douglass added that he had read the speech aloud to other slave boys. "Waiters hear their masters talk at table, cursing the abolitionists, John Quincy Adams, etc.," he added; "the masters imagine that their poor slaves are so ignorant they don't know the meaning of the language they are using." But, noted Douglass, it was the knowledge that this fight was going on, which gave slaves the hope that they would soon be free.

### **Attempt To Expel Adams**

On Jan. 24, 1842, Adams, still fighting for his right to introduce petitions from U.S. citizens, asked to be allowed to introduce a petition from 46 citizens of Haverhill, Mass., which called for the immediate dissolution of the Union, on several grounds, including that "that Union, if persisted in, in the present course of things, will certainly overwhelm the whole nation in utter destruction."

Adams himself was not, of course, for disunion. For one thing, as he had emphasized in his role as chairman of the Committee on Manufactures, and in speeches before the House, had the system of internal improvements and the program known as the American System been continued after his Presidency, the United States would never have had the Panic of 1837. It would have continued to develop economically, and economic development was the condition needed for making the backward South develop; it was the condition needed to end slavery.

But the representatives of the slave power were up in arms at once, ostensibly over the idea that a Congressman would "propose" the dissolution of the Union. (All Adams was doing, was asking that a citizens' petition proposing disunion be studied by the appropriate committee, which would then recommend what action should be taken.) He was accused of "subornation of perjury and high treason," and the Southern members, in concert with Northern Democrats, demanded that Adams be tried under the rules of the Congress, with the intent of expelling him from the House.

Adams was not merely up against the slave power. Backing up the slave power which hated Adams so, were Northern Congressmen who benefitted from slavery either directly or indirectly. Some were outright traitors; others ran textile factories in the North, and wanted to keep the price of Southern cotton low, which was best done through slave labor.

Adams was 75 at the time. He often wrote about his infirmities in his diaries. But he quickly dismissed them by returning to the necessity that he continue his fight in the House for

the U.S. Constitution. He knew that someone had to stand up to the slave power. Someone had to expose the fact that they were prepared to destroy the American System and hand the United States over to Britain as a ruined colony, in order to preserve the system of slavery which had become entrenched in the South. As he put it, the liberties of the United States were on trial in his person.

In the speech he gave in his defense, Adams nailed the slave power in Congress, naming names and identifying the conspiracy against him as a defender of the U.S. Constitution, to such a degree that the slave-power Congressmen decided to drop their trial against him. Adams referred to an epigraph he had received, which was an assassination threat, in January 1842. The epigraph was almost identical to words that had been spoken directly to him in the House by a Congressman, the ringleader of the expulsion attempt. He also pointed to the "base conspiracy of three Virginians, banded here, together with numerous accomplices in and out of the House, for my destruction."

The trial was stopped in mid-course. It had become clear to the slave power that Adams, un-gagged so that he could defend himself in the trial, was more effective against the slave power than if he were still gagged. As part of his defense, he was even allowed to speak out on the slavery question. Adams' own evaluation was that the whole thing had been "senseless" on the part of the conspirators. But, he wrote on Feb. 6, 1842, "One hundred members of the House represent slaves; four-fifths of whom would crucify me if their votes could erect the cross; 40 members, representatives of the free, in the league of slavery and mock Democracy, would break me on the wheel, if their votes or wishes could turn it round..."

Although Adams was victorious against the bid to unseat him, the gag rule remained in effect. It was only finally resolved under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, with the Union victory in the Civil War.

### **The Legacy of a Patriot**

Despite these bruising battles in the Congress, Adams left a broader legacy, much of which is unknown and unappreciated today. One of the least-known aspects of his work in the Congress is his fight to develop astronomical observatories. He called observatories the lighthouses of the sky, a beautifully poetic image which we of the Space Age can appreciate even more fully than John Quincy Adams. Were Adams alive today, he would have no difficulty in comprehending the need to establish a Mars-based scientific colony, and therefore a crash program to colonize the Moon and Mars.

In 1843, Adams' last public appearance was his attendance of the dedication ceremonies for the Cincinnati Observatory, the first observatory in America, which had become the living dream of Cincinnati professor Ormsby McKnight Mitchel. Adams' journey to the dedication ceremonies took two weeks—and would have taken longer had it not been for



the existence of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, which he had promoted during his Presidency. Mitchel's efforts to build the observatory had been heroic: He had promised himself that he would raise the money for the 12-inch telescope, and wouldn't stop until he had been turned down by 1,000 residents in Cincinnati. They did not turn him down.

After the ceremonies, which were quite fatiguing for the 77-year old Congressman, Adams confided to his Diary: "I have performed my task. . . . It is not much in itself. . . . In my motives and my hopes, it is considerable. The people of this country do not sufficiently estimate the importance of patronizing and promoting science as a principle of political action; and the slave oligarchy systematically struggle to suppress all public patronage or countenance to the progress of the mind. Astronomy has been specially neglected and scornfully treated. This invitation had a gloss of showy representation about it that wrought more on the public mind than many volumes of dissertation or argument."

In his last days, Adams was accorded the respect and honor he had always deserved. According to Josiah Quincy III, the former Congressman and Mayor of Boston, at the beginning of John Quincy Adams' last term in Congress, in 1848, "the House rose as one man, business was at once suspended, his usual seat surrendered to him by the gentleman to whom it had been assigned, and he was formally conducted to it by two members." In that very seat, on Feb. 21, 1848, at the age of 82, Adams suffered his final stroke. He died, two days later, on a bed at the apartment of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Adam's courage and inspiration had not gone unnoticed by a young Congressman named Abraham Lincoln. Although historians would like us to believe that the young Midwesterner and the old Yankee never met, one need only examine the House records, to discover that they shared the fight for internal improvements, industrial progress, and the development of the railroads. And it was Congressman Lincoln—not Adams' corrupt, British-influenced son Charles Francis Adams, or his hate-filled grandson Henry Adams—who was chosen as one of Adams' pallbearers.

Adams, the "good and faithful servant" for the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution—in short, for the inalienable rights of man—upon his death in 1848 no doubt "entered into the joy of the Lord" (see box on the *Amistad* case). And that which he accomplished in his lifetime, was made a part of the moral and intellectual life of the United States as a nation, a part of what made America the greatest and noblest experiment of mankind ever to be attempted, as Alexander Hamilton put it in the *Federalist Papers*. It is our responsibility today to ensure that that spark not only does not die out, but that it flames ever higher, inspiring a new generation of Americans and citizens around the world in the fight for a more profound sense of justice as represented in the U.S. Constitution, and as articulated by that great American patriot, John Quincy Adams.

# Adams' Community Of Principle: The Monroe Doctrine

by Nancy Spannaus

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John Quincy Adams, the son of Founding Father John Adams, and the intellectual heir of Benjamin Franklin, played a pivotal role in defining the foreign policy of the young United States. His concept for that policy flowed directly from his belief that the United States of America was founded upon principles which were derived from the Christian religion,<sup>1</sup> and that the United States should preserve and extend those principles, without any compromise with imperial or colonial powers, and without becoming an imperial power itself.

During his tenure as Secretary of State, under the Monroe Administrations, Adams produced an abundance of memoranda and speeches which defined his view of American foreign policy, especially around the period of the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, and the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine (1823). The events around preparing these two documents show that Adams was fully committed to creating a continental republic based on anti-colonial principles, and that he based his idea of international alliances upon the concept of a *community of principle* with fellow sovereign republics.

According to Samuel Flagg Bemis, a leading 20th-Century historian, Adams's diplomatic history defines him as a, if not the, leading protagonist of what became known later as "Manifest Destiny." But while the specific coiners of that phrase, notably John O'Sullivan of New York,<sup>2</sup> used it to justify merely a land grab, including President James Polk's war with Mexico (1846-48), Adams and his faction insisted that the westward expansion of the United States not result in the spread of slavery, or conquest of other lands, but rather the extension of republicanism as expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Adams opposed the Mexican war, and was prepared to dump his continental aspirations, if necessary, if it meant the expansion of slavery.

1. See "An Oration Delivered Before the Inhabitants of the Town of Newburyport on the Sixty-First Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence," reprinted in part in *The New Federalist*, Vol. 13, No. 32.

2. See Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963).

## A Continental Republic

From his entry into politics at a very young age, John Quincy Adams advocated the expansion of the United States to dominate the North American continent. He supported the Louisiana Purchase, for example, as a move in this direction—as did Alexander Hamilton. One major underpinning of his reasoning was that allowing any of the European powers to maintain a foothold in North America—Spain, France, Russia, or Great Britain—would tend to lead to constant wars, and toward balkanization of the continent.

In a letter to his mother in 1811, right before the War of 1812, Adams wrote the following: “If that Party [Federalist]

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*Adams was adamant, that the United States should not act as a “cockboat in the wake of a British man-of-war.”*

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are not effectually put down in Massachusetts, as completely as they already are in New York, and Pennsylvania, and all the southern and western states, the Union is gone. Instead of a nation coextensive with the North American continent, destined by God and nature to be the most populous and most powerful people ever combined under one social compact, we shall have an endless multitude of little insignificant clans and tribes at eternal war with one another for a rock, or a fish pond, the sport and fable of European masters and oppressors.”<sup>3</sup>

During the War of 1812, and thereafter, there was no lack of evidence that the European imperial powers might want to take advantage of the young, and militarily weak, United States. Spain, at that time, controlled Florida and Cuba. Mexico, which had declared independence in 1813, reached well up into what is now the southwestern United States. Both Russia and Great Britain had claims on the West Coast, and, of course, Great Britain had control over Canada. There was also considerable rivalry between these powers, and various efforts were made by Russia and Great Britain, in particular, to get alliances with the United States for various purposes—the kind of alliances which George Washington would correctly have called “entangling.”

In this context, Adams considered it critical to negotiate expansion of the boundaries of the United States all the way to the Pacific Ocean, thus establishing a foothold for the U.S. to become a continental republic. The vehicle which he used was his negotiations with Spain over the years 1818 and 1819.

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3. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundation of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950).

While the detonator for the negotiations was the threat to American lives in Spanish-occupied Florida, the final treaty, called the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, not only resulted in the cession of Florida to the United States, but it established the claim of the United States to the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the 42nd to 49th parallel. Why did the Spanish do this? According to Bemis, it was because that monarchy, being hard-pressed by the British Empire, wanted a free hand to turn its attention to South America, where its former colonies were making rapid moves toward independence.

## Community of Principle

Through the course of the negotiations with the Spanish, the Russians, and the British in the period, Secretary of State Adams was walking a tightrope. On the one hand, he and President Monroe were committed to firm support for emerging republics, in the name of the principles of self-determination, independence, and human liberty. By March 1822, in fact, the United States had recognized the new republics of Chile, the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata (today Argentina), Peru, Colombia, and Mexico. On the other hand, Adams held firm to Washington’s principle of refusing to enter military, or positive, alliances with any of the imperial powers, or even with their former colonies.

What came first with Adams, was the maintenance of the American System of republican liberty, as it was defined by the principles laid out in the Declaration of Independence. Any nation which did not abide by such principles, could not be part of a “community of principle” with the United States. Adams even told a Spanish diplomat in 1820 that he considered the United States to be the only example of the American System. “There is no community of interests or of principles between North and South America,” he said.

Meanwhile, Britain, of all places, was putting pressure on the United States to unite with it, allegedly in support of liberation movements against Spain, France, and Russia. In response, Adams gave a Fourth of July speech in 1821, in which he outlined two basic principles of America’s relations with all other nations and peoples: first, the anticolonial principle, and second, the anti-entanglement principle. It was in this speech that Adams asserted that, from the moral and physical nature of man, “colonial establishments cannot fulfill the great objects of governments in the just purposes of civil society.”

He described the American revolution’s universal significance thus: “In a conflict [of] seven years, the history of the war by which you maintained that Declaration, became the history of the civilized world. . . . It was the first solemn declaration by a nation of the only *legitimate* foundation of civil government. It was the cornerstone of a new fabric, destined to cover the surface of the globe. It demolished at a stroke, the lawfulness of all governments founded upon conquest. It swept away all the rubbish of accumulated centuries of servitude. From the day of this Declaration, the people of North

America were no longer the fragment of a distant empire, imploring justice and mercy from an inexorable master in another hemisphere. They were a *nation*, asserting as of right, and maintaining by war, its own existence. A nation was born in a day. . . . It stands, and must for ever stand, alone, a beacon on the summit of the mountain, to which all the inhabitants of the earth may turn their eyes for a genial and saving light . . . a light of salvation and redemption to the oppressed.”<sup>4</sup>

Adams said that colonial establishments “are incompatible with the essential character of our institutions,” and concluded, “that great colonial establishments are engines of wrong, and that in the progress of social improvement it will be the duty of the human family to abolish them, as they are now endeavoring to abolish the slave trade.” The message was not missed by the Russian imperial minister, who reported it to have been “a virulent diatribe against England.”

The British under Prime Minister George Canning, however, did not give up. Although Britain had not recognized the new republics of South America, and the United States had, Canning approached the U.S. Ambassador to England with a proposal for an alliance on the question of South America. While others in the cabinet, and former Presidents Jefferson and Madison, were inclined to accept, especially because the United States did not have the military capability to defend its position against recolonization, Adams was adamant, that the United States should not accept, and act as a “cockboat in the wake of a British man-of-war.”

But there were principled reasons as well. Despite apparent tactical agreement on the issue of South America, “Britain and America . . . would not be bound by any permanent community of principle,” Adams said. In other words, the nation of the Declaration of Independence, and the British Empire, did not share objectives, and thus could not make such an alliance.

But Adams did outline a positive policy toward South America, which Bemis summarizes as 1) upholding the republican principle against monarchy; 2) support of the American System of separation from the monarchical system of Europe; 3) a positive view toward the idea of an inter-American Congress; and 4) treaties of commerce and amity should be forged on the basis of the “most-favored-nation” principle.

In a memorandum to Richard C. Anderson, U.S. Minister to Colombia, in 1823, Adams put it eloquently: “The emancipation of the South American continent opens to the whole race of man prospects of futurity, in which this union will be called in the discharge of its duties to itself and to unnumbered ages of posterity to take a conspicuous and leading part. It invokes all that is precious in hope and all that is desirable in existence to the countless millions of our fellow creatures, which in the progressive revolutions of time this hemisphere is destined to rear and to maintain. That the fabric of our social

connections with our southern neighbors may rise in the lapse of years with a grandeur and harmony of proportions corresponding with the magnificence of the means, placed by providence in our power and in that of our descendants, its foundations must be laid in principles of politics and of morals new and distasteful to the thrones and dominations of the elder world, but coextensive with the surface of the globe and lasting as the changes of time.”

## The Monroe Doctrine

Thus, on Dec. 2, 1823, President Monroe, feeling impelled to take action in the face of possible European moves to reconquer the infant South American republics, issued his Monroe Doctrine. It was composed of three principal elements, all of which had been shaped by John Quincy Adams:

1. Non-colonization: “The American Continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintained, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European power.”

2. Abstention: The United States will not involve itself in European affairs unrelated to its interests: “It is only when our rights are invaded, or seriously menaced, that we resent injuries, or make preparations for our defense.”

3. Hands off: “We could not view any interposition for the purpose of oppressing them, or controlling in any other manner, their destiny, by any European power, in any other light, than as the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition towards the United States.”

As Bemis points out, the Monroe Doctrine was the other side of the Manifest Destiny policy of extending the republican principle throughout the continent. If imperialism was not to be allowed, that only left peaceful expansion, or cooperation, by or between sovereign republics. And Adams was clear that he did not see expansion by conquest, even of Canada.

The Monroe Doctrine was honored by those Presidents who clung to the American System. Presidents Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were the most notable ones to rise to this standard—not to mention John Quincy Adams’s Presidency (1824-28). During the rest of the 19th Century, the “American System” Presidents also pursued the spread of economic development projects internationally, as an indispensable spur to building republican nations.

But the breaches of these principles became increasingly numerous—from the Mexican-American War, to the Spanish-American War, to the (Teddy) Roosevelt corollary to the Doctrine (calling for intervention to collect debt), to the invasions of Mexico under Woodrow Wilson’s Administration. In 1982, the United States support for Great Britain’s war against Argentina in the Malvinas, was a complete violation of the Monroe Doctrine.

That said, the John Quincy Adams approach to foreign policy remains the standard that must be readopted today.

4. Cited by Anton Chaitkin in a speech delivered to the Schiller Institute Labor Day Conference, 1998.



# J.Q. Adams Promotes Internal Improvements

by Anton Chaitkin

*This document is edited from a transcript of a speech by Anton Chaitkin at the ICLC/Schiller Institute conference on Labor Day weekend, 1998.*

In 1806, while trying to stiffen Americans' resolve to stand up to the British, Sen. John Quincy Adams introduced a resolution calling for the Treasury Department to issue a plan for "internal improvements," to build canals and roads to develop the West, as a national project of the United States. That's what is meant by nationalism, against the foreign enemy!

Within a few weeks, another Senator offered an identical resolution, and the Treasury Department was ordered to draw up a plan, which it did. Unfortunately, the government at the time was President Thomas Jefferson and Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin, and on domestic policy they were insane; and the project was never put into effect, in that purely national form. (When Quincy Adams became President, railways were built at government expense, with Army engineers, but using railroad companies often owned jointly by private individuals and municipal or state governments; and canals were built by the states, subsidized by the federal government.)

In 1809, the next President, James Madison, appointed Quincy Adams as U.S. Ambassador to Russia. While there, Adams proposed to industrialize Russia through a deal with the Czar to have Robert Fulton build steamboats in Russia, and put them on the rivers to integrate that nation and turn it into a modern country. (Two years earlier, Fulton's new steamboat had been introduced onto New York's Hudson River. Earlier, Alexander Hamilton had subsidized Fulton to go to France, where he had worked on designing a submarine to destroy the British Navy.)

The Adams-Fulton Russia steamboat deal fell through because of the imminence of the War of 1812 between the U.S. and Britain. But Adams' own later actions would lead to the building of Russia's railroads.

John Quincy Adams' Presidency (1825 to 1829) was a brilliant success. Specifically, he launched an infrastructure-building spree that revolutionized the transportation network of the country.

In his first Annual Message to Congress, President Adams spoke of the government's powers and duties to foster progress. He did not wait upon public opinion, he led it:

"The great object of ... civil government is the improvement of the condition of those who are parties to the social compact, and no government ... can accomplish [its] lawful ends ... but ... as it improves the conditions of those over

whom it is established. Roads and canals, by multiplying and facilitating the communications and intercourse between distant regions and multitudes of men, are among the most important means of improvement. ..."

He said that the people and nations of Europe are beginning to take up this concept of "internal improvements," to conquer nature with infrastructure building. And, "while foreign nations less blessed with freedom than ourselves are advancing with gigantic strides in the career of public improvement, were we to slumber in indolence or fold up our arms and proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not be to cast away the bounties of Providence and doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority?"

In groundbreaking ceremonies for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, Adams said: "[A]t the creation of man, male and female, the Lord of the universe, their Maker, blessed them, and said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.' To subdue the earth was, therefore, one of the first duties assigned to man at his creation; and now, in his fallen condition, it remains among the most excellent of his occupations. To subdue the earth is pre-eminently the purpose of this undertaking. ... [we pray for] this joint effort of our great community, ... that He would make it one of His chosen instruments for the preservation, prosperity, and perpetuity of our Union."

## Industrializing the United States

Let us now see how the United States was industrialized, by John Quincy Adams and his allies.

First of all, President Adams assigned the United States Army to begin developing the railroads of the country. We had no trains, no railroads, no tracks, no nothing. He assigned the Army engineers of West Point to make the surveys, the plans, and the designs for railroads. Eventually 60 such railroads were planned in that way.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, chartered in 1827, was the first of these, to which Adams assigned Army engineers. These were mostly private owned companies, *financed by government*. They got money from state governments, from city governments, and federal land grants also, later on.

Adams' protégés, William Seward and Edward Everett, became governors of New York and Massachusetts, respectively, and built the great railroads there, using state funds and U.S. Army engineers.

The Bank of the United States at this time was led by the very close personal friend of John Quincy Adams, the Greek scholar Nicholas Biddle, who marketed the railroad bonds that were issued. Our nation's bank marketed those bonds, in a whole complex of government-led activities, with private cooperation, to build up the country.

The Erie Canal was finished in the year John Quincy became President, 1825, as a state government project. President Adams now launched a new era of canal-building.

In 1823, under President James Monroe, about 100,000 acres of federal land was donated to the states, for them to sell

FIGURE 1



The second feature of the canals, which is crucial to understand: Inside Pennsylvania, canals were built primarily for the purpose of getting coal out of the mines, down to Philadelphia for manufacturing, and to go by sea to Boston, New York, and other cities, to build up industry; these Pennsylvania canals also helped integrate eastern Ohio into the Pennsylvania industrial machine.

Next we come to the heart of the issue, as to how we industrialized the United

States. Before the 1820s, we were producing less iron than we had been in the colonial period! We were smashed by the British, and we did not really recover that capacity until we did things on an entirely different scale. The nationalists—Henry Clay leading Congress, and then with the Presidency under John Quincy Adams—passed protective tariffs. The first really good tariff was in 1824, and then a huge one in 1828. This is a tax against foreign imports, to favor our manufacturing, so producers could make a profit and pay a decent wage.

to settlers, and use the money from the land sale to build roads. Under President J.Q. Adams, the U.S. government suddenly, in 1827, gave 2 million acres to the states, including Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, to build canals, and a substantial amount for road-building. The next year, about another million acres of land was granted.

How would you finance these constructions? Well, you could sell land. The government used every method possible to do this, because you had a lot of free-trade crazies running around saying nothing should be done. So you use every method you can to get this done. And we also had substantial work for river improvements, clearing those snags in the rivers, so we could get through the Ohio and westward.

Here's the way this thing worked. There were two great features of the canals that were built (**Figure 1**). First: Follow the line of a shipment up the Hudson River, to just north of Albany, then west on the Erie Canal, out to Lake Erie. Go down Lake Erie to three canals, one of them over from Toledo, through Indiana, all the way down to the Ohio River. Go back up that canal and trace the branch down to where Cincinnati is on the Ohio River. Trace also the canal down from Cleveland on Lake Erie, in through the heart of Ohio to Portsmouth on the Ohio River.

These canals linked up with the Erie Canal. They brought settlers to the Midwest, who built agriculture and industry. *This created New York City as a great metropolis*, with this trade that was mostly flowing into New York. It also created Chicago. Trace the shipment line out there to Lake Michigan. You have a canal built from Chicago, then only a little dump, to the Illinois River, that connected to St. Louis on the Mississippi River.

So all of a sudden, you have a system of canals linking up a whole new vast area.

At the same time, anthracite coal production was suddenly started up in Pennsylvania. None was produced before this point. What happened? We built these canals at state expense, and it was now only a penny a ton to move that coal. So they poured it out into factories. They started building iron forges, protected by the government from foreign competition. And we thus started building iron mills; we didn't do it before that.

Adams proposed that the government would build an astronomical observatory. This was laughed at. But his work in these areas, including creating the Smithsonian Institution, helped set up the government base for science in America. John Kennedy, whose program got us to the moon, focussed quite a bit on the integrity and pioneering spirit of John Quincy Adams.

Adams introduced in January 1826, a bill to create a U.S. Naval Academy. It was passed by the Senate, defeated in the House. In February 1827, he introduced a bill for a naval expedition to explore the South Seas and Antarctica; it passed the House, and failed in the Senate. But these things he originated were successfully pushed through not long after, by his faction.