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The Election of 1800 - II

Lead: The US presidential election of 1800 has been called the third, or political American Revolution. For the first time in a major way competition in American electoral life was organized by political parties.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 1796 John Adams laid his claim to the Presidency. In revolutionary credentials and early driving support for independence, only Washington, Franklin and Jefferson equaled this lawyer/farmer

from Baintree, Massachusetts. He beat Jefferson by three electoral votes and for four years continued the rule of the Federalists, that loose network of merchants, bankers, aristocrats and politicians seeking to firmly establish the national or common interest as opposed to state or local interests and to secure the Federal government as pre-imminent in national affairs.

The problem for Adams was that many of the Federalists, particularly those closely allied with Alexander Hamilton, felt the new President was insufficiently enthusiastic for their party principles and they were right. Adams, following George Washington, despised political parties

feeling them hostile to the common good of the Republic. He generally accepted a moderate version of the Federalist program, but he lacked Hamilton's brilliance, Jefferson's ability to connect with popular sentiment and for a major politician, was unusually tone deaf to matters the public considered important. Hence, when he stood for re-election in 1800 the unpopular Adams was consumed by a political tsunami, which, probably to the end of his life, he never understood.

Thomas Jefferson was different. While leaders in that era were not supposed to "run" for President and the Sage of Monticello would have denied that he was breaking that

convention, perhaps even to himself, he instinctively understood and, more importantly acted on the notion, that for a Republic to operate successfully, political parties were absolutely essential for recruiting political talent and managing competing interests and impulses in national life. Next time: The Third Revolution.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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