

# A Man of the People: Thomas Jefferson

Alex Criddle

Though America is still viewed as a young nation, great men have risen to help shape the country into what it is today. One of those men influenced the nation both politically and physically. Thomas Jefferson, also known as the “Man of the People,” was born April 13, 1743 in Shadwell, Virginia. His parents were both distinguished members of their communities. His father was a planter and a surveyor; and his mother came from a highly

respected family. Jefferson married Martha Wayles Skelton on January 1, 1772 and had six children, but only two lived to adulthood. He attended the College of William and Mary in



Williamsburg, Virginia, after which he practiced law and became involved in local government. After a long life of governmental success, Jefferson died on the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Once the United States of America was officially its own nation, political parties began to form throughout the thirteen colonies. Jefferson helped shape the Democratic-Republican Party in 1793—known at

the time as the Republican Party—after disagreements among cabinet members ensued. This party believed that a strong government would undermine the rights of the states and the rights of the people. Jefferson believed in strong state and local governments, and as a founder of the party, attempted to incorporate government by the people throughout his presidency.

Although the Declaration of Independence was written before he was president, it is one of Jefferson’s most famous legacies.

Before his death, he told James Madison, one of his closest friends, that he wanted to be remembered for two things: the author of the Declaration of Independence and the founder of the University of Virginia.

Jefferson ran in the 1800 election with fellow Republican, Aaron Burr. They were pitted against the Federalists John Adams and Charles Pinkney. The

Republicans won, but

Jefferson and Burr had the same number of electoral votes—73. At the time, whoever received the second highest number of votes would become vice president. Because there was a tie, the House of Representatives had to vote. In February 1801, Jefferson was elected to be President of the United States by only one vote. In the following election in 1804, Jefferson ran for another term against Charles Pinkney, and this time, won decisively.

During his first presidency, Jefferson attained the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803. Because France was in the midst of preparing for war with England, Bonaparte was desperate to receive money. The 512 million acre purchase cost \$15 million, about three cents per acre. Jefferson expanded American territory in one action and soon after, the concept of Manifest Destiny was born. Once the purchase was made, Jefferson sent his secretary, Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark to explore the new that led to the Pacific Ocean, as well as to trade with Native Americans, and to record the terrain and animals that they discovered along the way. Lewis and Clark made several maps of the territory they surveyed and wrote about their travels, which were then published for the public to consume. After the explorers returned, many people began to head west to settle in the newly acquired territory. They believed they had been given the duty to move across the continent by God and that they needed to enlighten others about their democracy.

Because of the flaws of the electoral system, Jefferson set out to ratify the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment. It was ratified during his first term as president in June 1804. The 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment created a new electoral system in which the president and vice president are voted for separately which is still done today.

During his second term as president, Jefferson faced foreign were at war and both wanted to trade with America. The Embargo Acts were passed in order to keep America out of the war. In the end, Americans became

angry with the Embargo Acts because they could not trade in order to make a living. Farmers and merchants began to smuggle their goods to other countries through Canada and the Acts were eventually appealed.

Thomas Jefferson expanded the United States to twice its size with the Louisiana Purchase. He ensured that the electing process was smoother and fairer. He created the lasting legacy of the Declaration of Independence. He helped form a rising country that is still admired today. A founding father, Jefferson remains part of the American legacy.





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