

1776-1790

Founding Fathers of the United States

George WASHINGTON John ADAMS
Thomas JEFFERSON Alexander HAMILTON
George MASON Benjamin FRANKLIN



Above: Presentation of the Declaration of Independence in Congress, at Independence hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 4th 1776. Painting by John Trumbull, 1817.

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.

Thousands of  people could

be considered leaders in the war of U.S. independence from Britain.



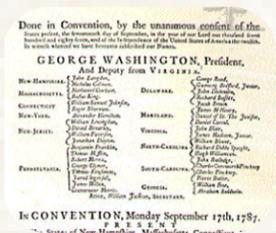
A relatively small group of men,

however, led the way in forming a new

nation based on ideals of freedom,

representative government, and basic

human rights.



These are the Founding Fathers.

Above: Federal Hall in New York where in 1789 the First Congress met and George Washington took the oath of office for his first term as first president of the United States. Insets from top: American revolutionary flag with "Don't Tread on Me" slogan and a rattlesnake, a symbol of the American colonies since the 1750s; map of British North American colonies in 1776; signed copy of the Declaration of Independence from August 1776; resolution to ratify the Constitution, September 1787; first public reading of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia.



*Let us therefore animate
and encourage each other,
and show the whole world
that a Freeman, contending
for liberty on his own ground,
is superior to any slavish
mercenary on earth.*

George Washington

GEORGE WASHINGTON

1732-1799

GEORGE WASHINGTON BECAME THE NEW NATION'S FIRST AND GREATEST LEADER. WASHINGTON COMMANDED THE RAGGED AMERICAN REBELS AGAINST BRITAIN'S PROFESSIONAL TROOPS AND MERCENARIES

in the Revolutionary War that began in 1776. He revived the spirits of his men and country



in seasons of defeat and despair by conducting cunning, bold attacks. Washington led the American side to victory after eight hard years of war with his courage, discipline, devotion to his men, sound judgment, and determination. Always the dutiful patriot, Washington presided over the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and later served two terms as first president of the United

States. As president, Washington established the new government's power by commanding troops to put down a rebellion over a whiskey tax. He kept the country neutral and at peace in the British-French conflict. By acting with integrity, honor, dignity, and restraint in public office, Washington set an enduring model of republican virtue for his countrymen.

Left: Washington presides over the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Opposite: 1824 painting by Rembrandt Peale of George Washington at the 1781 siege of Yorktown, where the British surrender ended the military phase of the Revolutionary War.



1732

GEORGE WASHINGTON

1799

There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public liberty.

John Adams

JOHN ADAMS

1735-1826

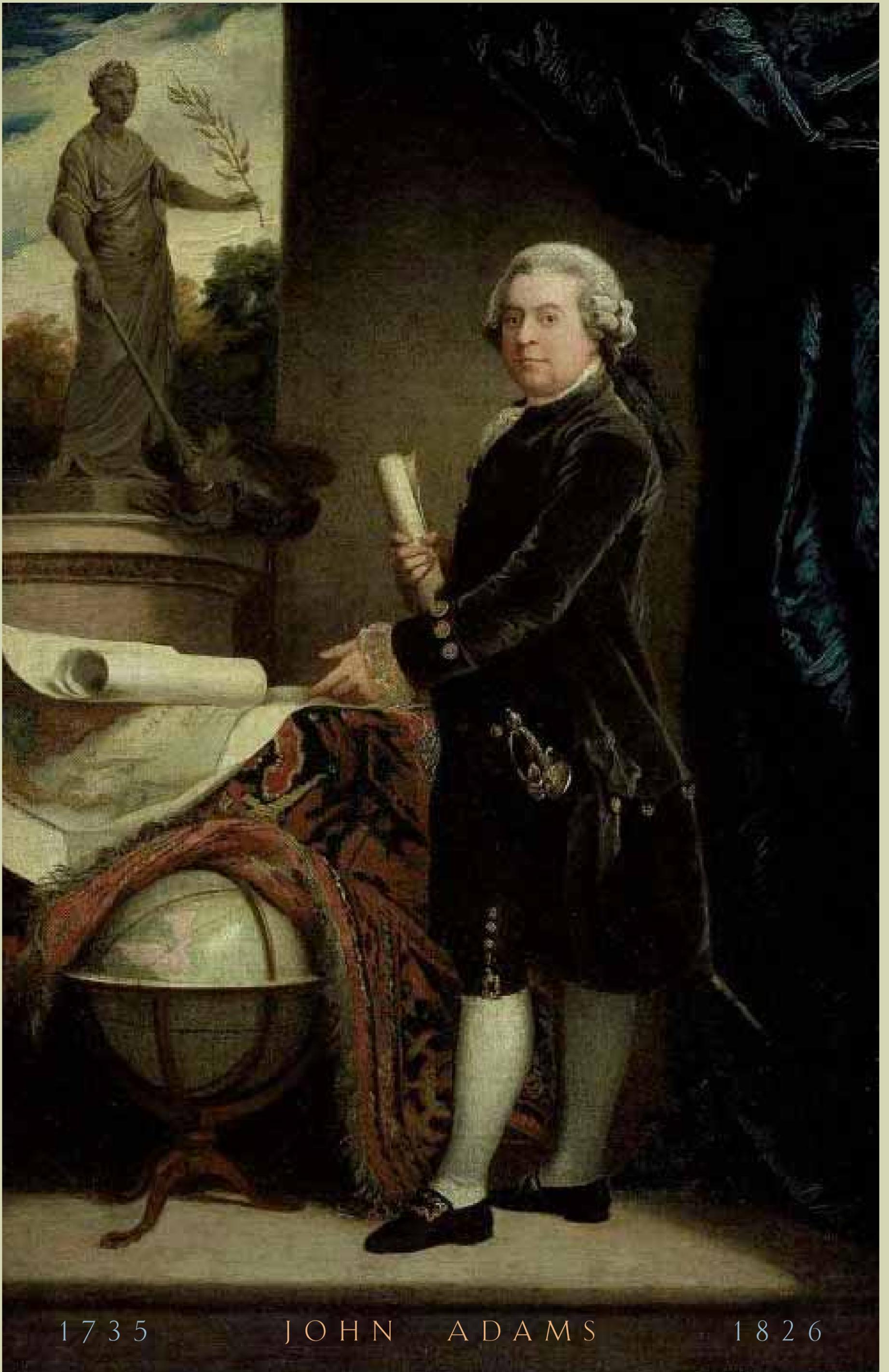
JOHN ADAMS PROVIDED THE REASONED ARGUMENTS FOR THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. STRONG MINDED AND IRASCIBLE, LAWYER ADAMS WROTE THE DEFINING ESSAYS AGAINST BRITISH TAXATION OF THE

colonists and, in fact, against direct rule from Parliament. He led the fight for independence in the Continental Congress and then took charge of supplying the new U.S. military. Meanwhile he wrote the model language for new state constitutions. The revolutionary generation entrusted him with many important positions: negotiator for peace with Britain, then the nation's first minister to Britain, first vice president, its second president. Adams acted on principle, some-



times against the popular will. Before the Revolution, he defended the British soldiers who had been provoked into firing fatally at rioting colonists in what was called the Boston Massacre. A principled stand contributed to his defeat for re-election as president in 1800: He accepted political ruin by negotiating peace with France over a naval conflict rather than launching his country into war.

Left: Adams sitting between Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in 1776 drafting the Declaration of Independence. Opposite: John Adams, 1783 portrait by John Singleton Copley (oil on canvas 93.687 inches by 57.875 inches, from Harvard University Collections).



1735

JOHN ADAMS

1826

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Th Jefferson

THOMAS JEFFERSON

1743-1826

THOMAS JEFFERSON CRAFTED THE ELOQUENT WORDS THAT DROVE THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION. AS DRAFTER OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, HE POURED SCORN ON THE MOTHER COUNTRY AND RAISED

ideals for the new nation in language that stirs passions to this day. Besides serving as governor of Virginia, ambassador to France, first U.S. secretary of state, second vice-president, and the nation's third president,

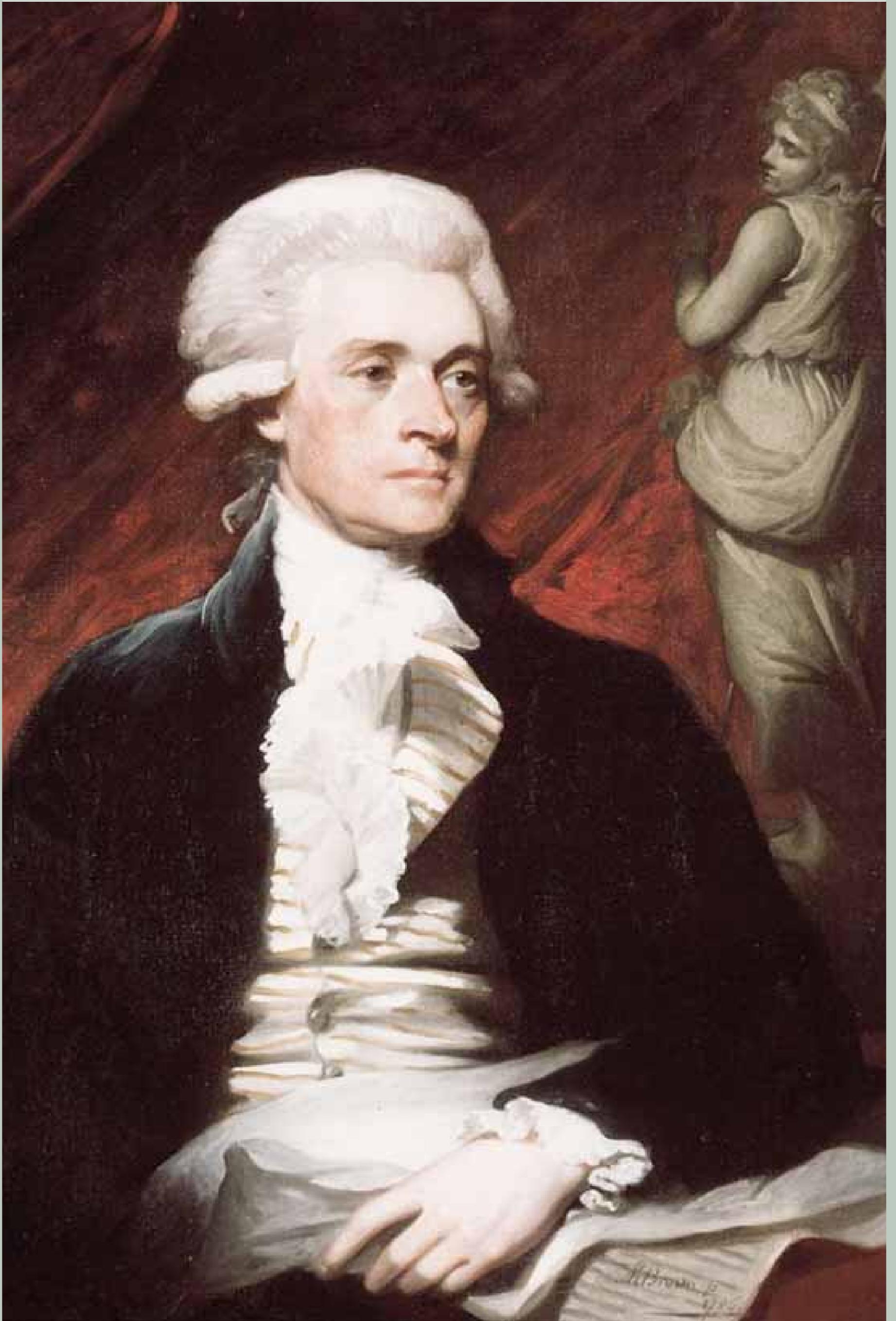


Thomas Jefferson was a planter, lawyer, architect, inventor, naturalist, and philosopher. Pursuing his vision for the United States as a democracy of small farmers, he argued for abolition of feudal inheritance laws and for broad

education of children. Jefferson was a man of contradictions, though: The powerful pleader for independence and equality owned slaves all his life. A believer in the strict interpretation of the new Constitution, Jefferson as president arranged, without clear authority, for the U.S. purchase from France of the Louisiana Territory.

Left: Monticello, the estate house Jefferson designed for himself atop a hill near Charlottesville, Virginia. Opposite: Portrait of Thomas Jefferson in 1786 when he was serving as U.S. minister to France, by Mather Brown.





1743 THOMAS JEFFERSON 1826

*Real liberty is
neither found in
despotism or the
extremes of democracy,
but in moderate
governments.*

A Hamilton

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

1755-1804

ALEXANDER HAMILTON BROUGHT A FOUNDATION OF FINANCIAL STABILITY TO THE NEW NATION. HE ENVISIONED THE UNITED STATES BECOMING A MIGHTY INDUSTRIAL FORCE WITH A STRONG MILITARY

like Britain. A Revolutionary War hero and principal author of the Federalist Papers, Hamilton was named first U.S. Treasury secretary when George Washington became president.



Hamilton boldly proposed that the federal government assume the wartime debts of the former colonies and pay them in full, establish a central bank, and nurture infant industries with protective tariffs. His policies gave wealthy investors confidence to purchase bonds from the new

government, assuring that a strong central government would rise over the state governments.

Hamilton's argument for a flexible interpretation of the Constitution giving government implied powers usually has prevailed. Ambitious and outspoken, Hamilton made many enemies; one of them, Vice President Aaron Burr, killed him in a duel.

Left: Hamilton as Treasury secretary, second from right, standing next to President Washington. Opposite: 1865 painting of Alexander Hamilton by Daniel Huntington based on an earlier portrait painted by John Trumbull.





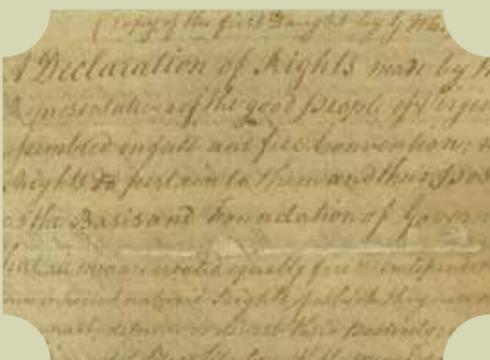
1755 ALEXANDER HAMILTON 1804

That freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty and can never be restrained but by despotic governments.

G. Mason
GEORGE MASON
1725-1792

GEORGE MASON IS CALLED “FATHER OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS,” YET REMAINS LITTLE KNOWN TODAY. ONE OF THE DOMINANT POLITICAL FIGURES OF REVOLUTIONARY VIRGINIA, IN 1776 MASON

drafted Virginia’s Declaration of Rights, which contained



radical ideas for the time: All power is derived from the people. All men are free and have certain

inherent rights. Among these rights are freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and the right to a trial by jury. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution both reflect many of his ideas, even his language. Yet Mason refused to sign

and vigorously opposed ratification of the Constitution, in part because it lacked a bill of rights, in part because it allowed continuation of the slave trade, even though Mason was a life-long slaveholder. That the first Congress adopted 10 amendments to the Constitution—the Bill of Rights—owes much to Mason’s persistence.

Left: Mason’s draft of Virginia’s Declaration of Rights. Opposite: 20th century copy of painting of George Mason based on an 1811 painting by Dominic Boudet, which was based in turn on a 1750 portrait by John Hesselius.



1725

GEORGE MASON

1792

They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.

Benj. Franklin

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

1706-1790

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN ROSE FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS TO BECOME ONE OF THE MOST CELEBRATED OF AMERICA'S FOUNDING FATHERS. A MAN OF BOUNDLESS CURIOSITY AND DRIVE, FRANKLIN



became a successful author, printer, and publisher, best known for the homespun wisdom of his *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Drawn to science, Franklin gave us the lightning rod and bifocal eyeglasses. An advocate of civic improvement in his adopted home city of Philadelphia, he helped found a library, a volunteer fire company, an academy (later the

University of Pennsylvania), and a hospital. As a statesman, Franklin helped draft both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and negotiated a vital wartime alliance with France. A champion in the cause of American independence, he spent his final years working to abolish slavery.

☞ *Left: "Two Great Americans," the title of this reproduction of an early 20th century painting portraying Franklin and George Washington. Opposite: Franklin portrait by David Martin, c. 1772.*





1706 BENJAMIN FRANKLIN 1790