

America under its Founding Presidents (1789-1825)

I. George Washington (Two Terms: 1789-1797)

A. The Bill of Rights

1. Anti-federalists like Patrick Henry had argued that a federal government would eventually attack people's rights, so the Federalists had agreed to create a special set of additional laws to insure that the power of the government would be limited.
2. The first ten additions, called "constitutional amendments," were written by James Madison, the "Father of the Constitution." They are known as the "Bill of Rights."
3. The first amendment says that the government cannot interfere with people's religious beliefs, their freedom of speech, or their right to protest the government's actions.
4. The second and third amendments say that the people may "bear arms" and that the government may not force them to keep soldiers in their homes.
5. The fourth amendment says that the government may not invade or seize people's property, except in very limited cases with the special permission of a judge.

B. Neutrality for Independence

1. In 1789, the French Revolution began in Europe, and this caused a war between France and the other European countries, including Britain.
2. Many Americans believed the United States should support France, because it was trying to create a republic. Others believed that America should be on the side of America's "mother country," England.
3. George Washington announced in 1793 that America would be neutral. He believed becoming "entangled" in European Wars would endanger the rights of Americans.
4. In his farewell address George Washington gave his final word of advice to America: *"The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible."*

II. John Adams (One Term: 1797-1801)

A. The Undeclared War and the Birth of the Navy

1. The French Revolution failed. It led to the rise of a new monarch, Napoleon.
2. France refused to agree to a treaty to protect American ships during the ongoing wars of the French Revolution and then the Napoleonic wars, but president John Adams refused to declare war on France, knowing how dangerous this would be.
3. He told Americans to fight an "undeclared war" to defend themselves, and ordered the construction of an American navy.
4. John Adams was so proud of avoiding a full war with France, that he later declared that he would be satisfied to have that accomplishment written on his tombstone!

III. Thomas Jefferson (Two Terms: 1801-1809)

A. The Barbary War (1801-1805)

1. Now that American ships were no longer colonial ships protected by the British navy, they were also attacked by pirates from the "Barbary States" of North Africa.
2. Captured American sailors would be sold into slavery in Africa.
3. Thomas Jefferson had not wanted the young America to spend a lot of money on building a navy, but he now saw how important it was.

4. He sent America's frigates to fight the pirates, and forced them to agree to a peace and return captured sailors.

B. Louisiana Purchase (1803)

1. The new French ruler Napoleon would soon declare himself “Emperor of the French,” and he hoped to conquer all Europe—and then the world!
2. Up to this point, the territory west of the Mississippi river was controlled by Spain, but Napoleon forced Spain to give him this “Louisiana Territory.”
3. President Jefferson realized that France might try to control the Mississippi River, which could lead to a war. He sent an ambassador to warn Napoleon that if this happened, America would make an alliance with Great Britain.
4. Napoleon agreed to sell Louisiana to the United States in the “Louisiana Purchase.”

IV. James Madison (Two Terms: 1809-1817)

A. The War of 1812

1. In its war against Napoleon, England was constantly threatened by invasion. Napoleon had the world's strongest *army* just across the narrow English Channel.
2. Because the navy was so important to Britain's survival, the British government practiced a policy of “impressments.” It would kidnaped sailors and “press” them into service in the navy.
3. Any British citizen who had emigrated from Britain to America was still considered to be British, and thus could be “*pressed*” into the British Navy.
4. President Madison had two choices: 1) let Britain kidnap Americans at will, or 2) declare war on Britain.
5. During the war a British fleet sailed to the new capital of Washington and burned it to the ground. It also tried to destroy Baltimore, but it was protected by Ft. McHenry, which withstood a night-long bombardment.
6. A prisoner on board a British ship, Francis Scott Key, was so inspired by the sight of the American flag that he wrote a poem entitled “The Star-Spangled Banner,” which became America's national anthem.
7. The war ended in 1815, when Napoleon was defeated in Europe.

V. James Monroe (Two Terms: 1817-1825)

A. The Monroe Doctrine

1. Napoleon had been defeated by Britain with the help of three countries (Russia, Prussia, and Austria) which formed a “Holy Alliance.”
2. The rulers of these countries believed in “divine right”—the idea that God wanted kings to rule people.
3. While Napoleon had controlled Europe, European colonies in America, such as Mexico and Brazil, had become independent, and the “Holy Alliance” wanted to re-conquer them.
4. Monroe decided to warn the leaders of Europe not to attack the newly independent countries of America. His warning is known as the “Monroe Doctrine” of 1823.
5. In it, he explained three basic ideas:
 - a) The Americas were no longer open to new colonization.
 - b) The United States was not interested in meddling in European affairs.
 - c) European countries should stay out of the Americas, or the United States might fight them, out of self-defense.
6. The Holy Alliance was shocked by this, but gave up its plans.