

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 such additions, called "constitutional amendments," were written largely 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. Also, France had helped America during the American Revolution.
3. Others believed that America should be on the side of America's "mother country," England. Americans still had the most in common with England, and it also had the most powerful navy, thus it was the most powerful possible enemy.
4. George Washington announced in 1793 that America would be neutral. He believed that it would be a mistake for the United States to become "entangled" in European Wars, because this would endanger the rights of Americans.
5. 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. Since American ships heading to England were still being attacked by the French, he authorized them to fight an "undeclared war" to defend themselves.
4. Adams realized that in a world of powerful European aggressors, America would need a strong navy.
5. He ordered six powerful frigates for this navy, including the *USS Constitution*.
6. These ships proved very important in the "undeclared war" against France and in conflicts to come.
7. 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 decided the time was not right to take over Louisiana, and he needed more money to be able to conquer Europe first, so decided to sell Louisiana to the United States.
5. This “Louisiana Purchase” nearly doubled the size of the country.

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. He chose the latter, even though he knew the price would be terrible. To him it was more important to show that America would stand up for itself, even against the world's most powerful country.
5. In the war, a British fleet sailed up Chesapeake Bay and up the Potomac river to Washington, where it burned the new American capital to the ground.
6. It also tried to destroy Baltimore, but it was protected by Ft. McHenry, which withstood a night-long bombardment.
7. 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.
8. The war ended in 1815, when Napoleon was defeated in Europe and Britain no longer needed to press sailors into its navy.

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

A. The New Threat

1. In 1815, Napoleon was defeated. Britain and France stopped fighting each other and attacking Americans, however there was a new threat to America.
2. Napoleon had been defeated by Britain with the help of three countries (Russia, Prussia, and Austria) which formed a “Holy Alliance.”
3. The rulers of these countries believed in “divine right”—the idea that God wanted kings to rule people.
4. While Napoleon had controlled Europe, European colonies in America, such as Mexico and Brazil, had taken the opportunity to become independent.
5. The Holy Alliance intended to reconquer these territories and force them to bow to their “holy” rulers: the kings of Spain and Portugal.

B. The Monroe Doctrine

1. President Monroe believed that if the European powers reconquered these territories, their wars would threaten Americans' safety, and that they might eventually choose to attack America, since it was a republic that rejected the idea of kings.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The Holy Alliance was shocked by this announcement, however they learned that Great Britain supported the idea. Since they could not defeat the United States and Great Britain, they gave up their plans.