



Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800 (Pivotal Moments in American History)

John Ferling

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It was a contest of titans: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, two heroes of the Revolutionary era, once intimate friends, now icy antagonists locked in a fierce battle for the future of the United States. The election of 1800 was a thunderous clash of a campaign that climaxed in a deadlock in the Electoral College and led to a crisis in which the young republic teetered on the edge of collapse.

Adams vs. Jefferson is the gripping account of a turning point in American history, a dramatic struggle between two parties with profoundly different visions of how the nation should be governed. The Federalists, led by Adams, were conservatives who favored a strong central government. The Republicans, led by Jefferson, were more egalitarian and believed that the Federalists had betrayed the Revolution of 1776 and were backsliding toward monarchy. The campaign itself was a barroom brawl every bit as ruthless as any modern contest, with mud-slinging, scare tactics, and backstabbing. The low point came when Alexander Hamilton printed a devastating attack on Adams, the head of his own party, in "fifty-four pages of unrelenting vilification." The stalemate in the Electoral College dragged on through dozens of ballots. Tensions ran so high that the Republicans threatened civil war if the Federalists denied Jefferson the presidency. Finally a secret deal that changed a single vote gave Jefferson the White House. A devastated Adams left Washington before dawn on Inauguration Day, too embittered even to shake his rival's hand.

With magisterial command, Ferling brings to life both the outsize personalities and the hotly contested political questions at stake. He shows not just why this moment was a milestone in U.S. history, but how strongly the issues--and the passions--of 1800 resonate with our own time.

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