

# Presidential Profile: John Quincy Adams

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Portrait of John Quincy Adams George Peter Alexander Healy/White House Historical Association

John Quincy Adams was the first president of the United States who was the son of a former president. In many ways, he was very similar to his much-admired father. They shared many points of view.

## Student Of The World

Adams was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, in 1767. He watched the Revolutionary War's Battle of Bunker Hill from the top of a hill above his family's farm. As secretary to his father in Europe, he showed his talent for speaking foreign languages. After graduating from Harvard College, he became a lawyer. At age 26, he was appointed minister to the Netherlands, where he represented the United States.

Later he worked as a minister to Germany. In 1803, he was elected to the U.S. Senate. Six years later President James Madison appointed him minister to Russia.

Adams served under President James Monroe as one of America's great secretaries of state. In that job, he helped the United States get along with other countries. Adams worked out with England where the border would be between the United States and Canada. England ruled Canada and the Pacific Northwest at the time.

He arranged the treaty with Spain that allowed the growing United States to have the Florida territories. Along with the president, he formulated the Monroe Doctrine. This statement took a strong stand against European nations colonizing any more lands in North or South America.

## **A Tight Race For President**

In the early 1800s, it was usual that the secretary of state would be the next president. Therefore, Adams was considered by many to be the right choice for the job. Yet times were changing in America. In 1824, the public wanted a president who was the popular choice of the nation.

The Republican Party was the main political party at the time. However, smaller groups were forming within the Republican Party. Each put forward its own candidate to run for president. Adams was the candidate of the North. He ran against General Andrew Jackson, William H. Crawford and Henry Clay.

In this election, no one person had a much larger number of electoral votes than the others. The election was decided among the top three men by a vote of lawmakers in the House of Representatives. Adams was chosen, although many who favored Jackson were angry.

## **Big Plans For Transportation, Science,**

Adams knew some members of Congress were angry with him. Still, he proposed many big ideas for the country in his first speech to the nation. He proposed that the country be linked by a network of highways and canals. In 1828, he broke ground for the 185-mile Chesapeake & Ohio Canal. The canal went from Washington, D.C., to Cumberland, Maryland. It was used to transport coal from the Allegheny Mountains.

Adams also urged the United States to be a leader in developing the arts and sciences. He proposed establishing a national university, and have the government pay for scientific explorations. He wanted to build an observatory where scientists could study the solar system. Some lawmakers opposed Adams' big plans. They said such projects went beyond what the Constitution allowed.

## Adams Fights To The End For Civil Rights

Adams ran for president again in 1828 against Andrew Jackson. Supporters of Jackson were still angry with Adams. They charged Adams with wrongdoing and stealing from the public. Adams was hurt by the charges. After he lost the election, he returned to Massachusetts. He expected to spend the rest of his life enjoying his farm and his books. Unexpectedly, in 1830, he was elected to the House of Representatives. He worked there for the rest of his life as a powerful leader, fighting to uphold civil rights.

In 1836, Southern congressmen passed a rule that said the House would automatically stop any new laws against slavery. The Southerners wanted to prevent any talk at all of ending of slavery. Adams tirelessly fought this rule for eight years and finally put an end to it.

In 1848, Adams had a stroke and collapsed on the floor of the House. He was carried to the Speaker's Room, where he died two days later. He was 81 years old. John Quincy Adams was buried near his father, mother and wife in Massachusetts.

*Adapted from the Presidents of the United States of America, 18th edition, published by the White House Historical Association, 2009.*

**Quiz**

- 1 Which selection from the article BEST supports the idea that America was growing in power during this time period?
- (A) Along with the president, he formulated the Monroe Doctrine. This statement took a strong stand against European nations colonizing any more lands in North or South America.
  - (B) In the early 1800s, it was usual that the secretary of state would be the next president. Therefore, Adams was considered by many to be the right choice for the job. Yet times were changing in America.
  - (C) The Republican Party was the main political party at the time. However, smaller groups were forming within the Republican Party. Each put forward its own candidate to run for president.
  - (D) In this election, no one person had a much larger number of electoral votes than the others. The election was decided among the top three men by a vote of lawmakers in the House of Representatives.
- 2 Select the paragraph from the section "Adams Fights To The End For Civil Rights" that BEST explains how Adams became known as a defender of civil rights.
- 3 Which sentence from the article is MOST important to include in its summary?
- (A) In many ways, he was very similar to his much-admired father.
  - (B) Adams was born in Braintree, Massachusetts, in 1767.
  - (C) He watched the Revolutionary War's Battle of Bunker Hill from the top of a hill above his family's farm.
  - (D) Adams served under President James Monroe as one of America's great secretaries of state.

- 4 How does the information in the section "Big Plans For Transportation, Science" support a MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) It gives specific details about Adams' proposed policies and ideas as president.
  - (B) It explains why lawmakers in Congress became angry with Adams during his presidency.
  - (C) It describes the greatest challenges that Adams faced during his time as president of the United States.
  - (D) It details why the country needed improvements in transportation and science during Adams' presidency.