



# The Presidency of John Adams (American Presidency (Univ of Kansas Hardcover))

*Ralph Adams Brown*

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The administration of John Adams was a period of rapid change, internal discord, and the continual threat of war. Few of the nation's chief executives have been subjected to such immediate and ever-present danger of foreign involvement and national destruction, to such bitter animosities and serious cleavages within their administrations, or to such constant need for decision making as was John Adams. In the face of such adversity Adams successfully pursued a policy of neutrality and conciliation and, in so doing, provided time for the country to grow strong and to prosper. Yet, despite the seriousness of the country's problems and the contributions of his administration, he is seldom designated as one of the great American presidents.

Of the many who helped create the nation and lead it through those first difficult years, Adams alone has come to be judged largely in terms of the descriptions and appraisals written by his personal enemies and political detractors. Over the years, historians have generally accepted and emphasized the weaknesses, faults, and mistakes his opponents ascribed to him. In this volume, however, Ralph Adams Brown presents a new evaluation of John Adams and of his four years in the presidency. The portrait drawn by Adams's enemies disappears and the second president emerges as a world citizen whose insight, judgment, and perseverance held the young nation together in a critical period.

This volume focuses closely on the most significant aspect of Adams's presidency, foreign affairs. As an emerging nation without economic stability or military might, the United States could have become hopelessly caught in the web of European intrigues and power struggles. Adams not only faced serious problems with France and Spain, but also had to be continually alert to the complexities of the nation's relationship with Great Britain. Brown examines the country's increasing concern with matters of defense, and traces Adams's successful efforts to evade foreign entanglements.

Unfortunately, many of Adams's important decisions and policies ran counter to the wishes of strong, ambitious, and verbal elements in his own political party. Describing the vicious personal attacks to which Adams was subjected, and the devious and disloyal maneuvers of his cabinet members, Brown traces Adams's difficulties with Timothy Pickering, James McHenry, Oliver Wolcott, Jr., Alexander Hamilton, and others. He documents Adams's steadfastness to his ideals and principles, despite the hostility, exaggerated accusations, and perfidy that surrounded him.

Based on more than five years of intensive research, much of in primary sources, Brown's study sheds new light on the many national problems between 1797 and 1801. Most important, it stands as a reassessment of Adams as a shrewd, sensitive, experienced diplomat; a man of fiery beliefs tempered by superior insight and judgment; a man who, despite his love of freedom and his enthusiasm for the the American Revolution, feared war and mob violence; a man favored broad social reforms and change of government by due process; a man who contributed to the development of the presidency by working diligently to maintain the independence and integrity of the executive office.

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