The Election of 1800: Cliffhanger!

Presidential candidates Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr were deadlocked in the House of Representatives with no majority for either. For seven days, as they maneuvered and schemed, the fate of the young republic hung in the ballots.

Questions for Analysis:

1. What does “partisanship” mean? loyalty to a political party and their point of view; unwilling to compromise and work with another political party

2. How do the two parties differ in their foreign policy concerning Great Britain and France? Federalists were horrified by the violence of the French Revolution, they supported close ties with Britain – the Ultra faction in particular. Democratic-Republicans supported France, believed Britain would want to return America to colonies if possible.

3. Who are the “Ultras”? What actions do they take that angers Jefferson? The Ultras were the controlling members of the Federalist Party and Congress. They were pro-Britain and had passed the Alien and Sedition Acts to the anger of the Dem-Repubs and Jefferson.

4. In 1800 there were 138 members in the Electoral College, which meant that 139 were needed to win the presidency. Remember: each member got 2 votes back then!

5. If the candidates tied or no one won a majority, the House of Representatives would decide who would become president. Is this still true today? Yes

6. List 3 words that describe Federalist beliefs: answers will vary

7. Who were the 3 men running on the Federalist ticket? The Federalist candidates were John Adams, Charles Pickney, and John Jay.

8. Which one was the most qualified to serve? Why? The most qualified to serve was John Adams. He was the sitting president and had been vice-president for 8 years under Washington.

9. List 3 words that describe Republican beliefs: answers will vary

10. Who were the 2 men running on the Republican ticket? The Republican candidates were Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr.

11. Who was best qualified to serve? Why? The most qualified to serve was Thomas Jefferson. He was the sitting vice-president and had been years of foreign policy experience as Secretary of State and Ambassador to France.

12. Describe campaigning in the year 1800. Although candidates did not travel and join in directly in campaigning it had many similarities to today. There were attacks on each side in the newspapers [media] and manipulation of the state electoral process to favor one party over another.

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13. How did elected officials in each party compete for Electoral College votes? Elected officials worked as local representatives of each of the candidates in the party. Some states changed their laws to affect the electoral outcome in their state.

14. How did the press treat the candidates? What were some of the criticisms? Were they justified? Adams was portrayed as a monarchist, vain, a poor judge of character and senile. Jefferson was painted as a coward and out of touch with the American people because of the luxury of Monticello.

15. Which 3 states had the highest population in 1800? Virginia (21), Massachusetts (16), and New York (12) based on electoral votes allocated to each.

16. Which 2 states had the smallest population in 1800? Delaware (3) and Tennessee (3) based on electoral votes allocated to each.

17. Where was the Federalist Party the strongest? The Northeastern states Where was the Republican Party the strongest? The Southern states

18. Why did the House of Representatives have to select the winner of the election? Who did they have to decide between? Jefferson and Burr each received 73 electoral votes and therefore there was no clear victor. In the result of a tie, the Constitution requires the House of Representatives to vote from the top candidates.

19. How did the 3/5 Clause affect the outcome of the election? It increased the population and thus the electoral votes of the Southern states. This provided the larger number of votes for the Republican candidates and forced Adams out of contention for re-election.

20. In the House, each state got 1 vote for president so that 9 were needed for a victory.

21. The House voted 35 times and still could not decide on a winner. Why was this seen as a "constitutional crisis"? If no decision could be reached before March of 1801 then Adams term would end without a replacement. Many states threatened to secede if this was the result as the House was to select between the two Republican candidates.

22. Who finally changed his vote? Why? James Bayard of Delaware agreed to change his vote and this would give the Delaware vote to Jefferson. Jefferson had agreed to keep the National Bank if the election went to him.

23. Who won the election? Jefferson won the election and became president. Burr became his vice-president.

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24. Why does Jefferson later call this episode “the revolution of 1800” when there was no violence? Revolution means to bring about change. It was seen as a change in the political leadership and the effectiveness of the Constitution to allow this type of change to happen without violence.

25. The 12th amendment changed the wording of the Electoral College so that in future elections, each party would nominate one candidate for president. Why was this amendment ratified? It was passed to try and prevent a tie from occurring in future elections. With a presidential and vice-presidential candidate specified then the votes would be split only by party and not within a party as well.