

# Correspondence of Alexander Hamilton

## Before and After the Election of 1800

SOURCE: [The Works of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. X](#), G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904



### HAMILTON TO JOHN ADAMS

New York, Aug. 1, 1800.

Sir:

It has been repeatedly mentioned to me that you have on different occasions asserted the existence of a British faction in this country, embracing a number of leading or influential characters of the federal party... and that you have sometimes named me, at others plainly alluded to me, as one of this description of persons... I must, sir, take it for granted that you cannot have made such assertions or insinuations without being willing to avow them... I therefore trust that you will not deem it improper, that I apply directly to yourself, to ascertain from you... whether the information I have received is correct or not, and if correct, what are the grounds upon which you have founded the suggestion.

### HAMILTON TO OLIVER WOLCOTT

New York, Sept. 26, 1800.

Dear Sir:

As I hinted to you some time since, I have drafted a letter which it is my wish to send to influential individuals in the New England States. I hope from it two advantages—the promoting of Mr. Pinckney's election and the vindication of ourselves.

You may depend upon it, a very serious impression has been made on the public mind, by the partisans of Mr. Adams, to our disadvantage; that the facts hitherto known have very partially impaired the confidence of the body of the Federalists in Mr. Adams, who, for want of information, are disposed to regard his opponents as factious men. If this cannot be counteracted, our characters are the sacrifice. To do it, facts must be stated with some authentic stamp. Decorum may not permit going into the newspapers, but the letter may be addressed to so many respectable men of influence as may give its contents general circulation.

### HAMILTON TO JOHN ADAMS

New York, Oct. 1, 1800.

Sir:

The time which has elapsed since my letter of the 1st Aug. was delivered to you precludes the further expectation of an answer....

### FROM THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

*Some provisions have since been superseded by the Twelfth Amendment.*

*The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by Ballot for two persons... The Person having the greatest Number of Votes shall be the President, if such Number be a Majority... and if there be more than one who have such Majority, and have an equal Number of Votes, then the House of Representatives shall immediately chuse by Ballot one of them for President; and if no Person have a Majority, then from the five highest on the List the said House shall in like Manner [chuse](#) the President. But in [chusing](#) the President, the Votes shall be taken by States, the Representation from each State having one Vote.*

### ELECTORAL COLLEGE RESULTS

Presidential Candidate	Party	State	Votes
Thomas Jefferson	[Jeffersonian] Republican	VA	73
Aaron Burr	[Jeffersonian] Republican	NY	73
John Adams	Federalist	MA	65
Charles Cotesworth Pinckney	Federalist	SC	64
John Jay	Federalist	NY	1

## HAMILTON TO OLIVER WOLCOTT

New York, Dec. 16, 1800.

It is now, my dear sir, ascertained that Jefferson or Burr will be President, and it seems probable that they will come with equal votes to the House of Representatives. It is also circulated here that, in this event, the Federalists in Congress, or some of them, talk of preferring Burr. I trust New England, at least, will not so far lose its head as to fall into this snare. There is no doubt but that, upon every virtuous and prudent calculation, Jefferson is to be preferred. He is by far not so dangerous a man; and he has pretensions to character.

As to *Burr*, there is nothing in his favor. His private character is not defended by his most partial friends. He is bankrupt beyond redemption, except by the plunder of his country. His public principles have no other spring or aim than his own aggrandizement. If he can, he will certainly disturb our institutions, to secure to himself *permanent power*, and with it *wealth*.

## HAMILTON TO OLIVER WOLCOTT

December 17, 1800.

... There is no circumstance which has occurred in the course of our political affairs that has given me so much pain as the idea that Mr. Burr might be elevated to the Presidency by the means of the Federalists. I am of opinion that this party has hitherto solid claims of merit with the public, and so long as it does nothing to forfeit its title to confidence, I shall continue to hope that our misfortunes are temporary, and that the party will ere long emerge from its depression. But if it shall act a foolish or unworthy part in any capital instance, I shall then despair.

Such, without doubt, will be the part it will act, if it shall seriously attempt to support Mr. Burr, in opposition to Mr. Jefferson. If it fails, as, after all, is not improbable, it will have riveted the animosity of that person; will have destroyed or weakened the motives to moderation which he must at present feel, and it will expose them to the disgrace of a defeat, in an attempt to elevate to the first place of the government one of the worst men in the community.

If it succeeds, it will have done nothing more nor less than place in that station a man who will possess the boldness and daring necessary to give success to the Jacobin<sup>1</sup> system, instead of one who, for want of that quality, will be less fitted to promote it.

Let it not be imagined that Mr. Burr can be won to the federal views. It is a vain hope... His ambition will not be content with those objects which virtuous men of either party will allot to it... he will be restrained by no moral scruple...

If Jefferson is President, the whole responsibility of bad measures will rest with the Anti-federalists. If Burr is made so by the Federalists, the whole responsibility will rest with them. The other party will say to the people [“We intended him only for Vice-President; here he might have done very well, or been at least harmless. But the Federalists, to disappoint us, and a majority of you, took advantage of a momentary superiority to put him in the first place. He is therefore their President, and they must answer for all the evils of his bad conduct.”] And the people will believe them...

Adieu to the Federal Troy, if they once introduce this Grecian horse into their citadel.

Trust me, my dear friend, you cannot render a greater service to your country than to resist this project. Far better will it be to endeavor to obtain from Jefferson assurances on some cardinal points:

- 1st. The preservation of the actual fiscal system.
- 2d. Adherence to the neutral plan.
- 3d. The preservation and gradual increase of the navy.
- 4th. The continuance of our friends in the offices they fill, except in the great departments, in which he ought to be left free.

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<sup>1</sup> French radicals who were in power during the Reign of Terror (1793-1794), the bloodiest and most chaotic period of the French Revolution – Hamilton refrains from using the term, *Republican*, to refer to his political adversaries.