The election of 1800 was not a polite political duel. There was much verbal mud-slinging as well as intra- and inter-party blows and backstabbing. Alexander Hamilton’s disputes with John Adams weakened the Federalist Party from within, while reactions to the administration’s policies battered it from without. As a result of these conflicts and the Republican Party’s attractive promises, Thomas Jefferson was elected to be the third president of the United States. The inauguration was conducted on 4 March in the new capital of the country, Washington, DC, and, with the president figuratively honoring the people and states by whose power he served, at the new home of the Congress, the Capitol.

During the contest of opinion through which we have passed the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely and to speak and to write what they think; but this being now decided by the voice of the nation, announced according to the rules of the Constitution, all will, of course, arrange themselves under the will of the law, and unite in common efforts for the common good. All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us, then, fellow-citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are but dreary things. And let us reflect that, having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. . . . And every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it. I know, indeed, that some honest men fear that a republican government can not be strong, that this Government is not strong enough; but would the honest patriot, in the full tide of successful experiment, abandon a government which has so far kept us free and firm on the theoretic and visionary fear that this Government, the world’s best hope, may by possibility want energy to preserve itself? I trust not. I believe this, on the contrary, the strongest Government on earth. I believe it the only one where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern. Sometimes it is said that man can not be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him? Let history answer this question.

About to enter, fellow-citizens, on the exercise of duties which comprehend everything dear and valuable to you, it is proper you should understand what I deem the essential principles of our Government, and consequently those which ought to shape its Administration. I will compress them within the narrowest compass they will bear, stating the general principle, but not all its limitations. Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none; the support of the State governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against antirepublican tendencies; the preservation of the General Government in its whole constitutional vigor, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home and safety abroad; a jealous care of the right of election by the people—a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of revolution where peaceable remedies are unprovided; absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority,
principle of republics, from which is no
but to force, the vital principle and im-
parent of despotism: a well-disciplined
our best reliance in peace and for the first
ics of war, till regulars may relieve them;
premacy of the civil over the military au-
economy in the public expense, that labor
lightly burdened; the honest payment of
deficits and sacred preservation of the pub-
courage; the defense of agriculture, and of
ence as its handmaid; the diffusion of in-
ation and arraignment of all abuses at the bar
peoples right: freedom of religion; freedom
press, and freedom of person under the pro-
ion of the habeas corpus, and trial by juries
arrowly selected. These principles form the
nonion which has gone before us and
our steps through an age of revolution and
formation. The wisdom of our sages and blood
heroes have been devoted to their attain-
They should be the creed of our political
the text of civic instruction, the touchstone
which to try the services of those we trust; and
and we wander from them in moments of error
or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and
ain the road which alone leads to peace, lib-
and safety.
I have learnt to expect that it will rarely
the lot of imperfect man to retire from this
with the reputation and the favor which
him into it. Without pretensions to that high
confidence you reposed in our first and greatest
revolutionary character. . . . I ask so much con-
ience only as may give firmness and effect to the
legal administration of your affairs. I shall often
wrong through defect of judgment. When
right, I shall often be thought wrong by those
whose positions will not command a view of the
whole ground. I ask your indulgence for my own
errors, which will never be intentional, and your
support against the errors of others, who may con-
demn what they would not if seen in all its parts.
The approbation implied by your suffrage is a
great consolation to me for the past, and my fu-
ture solicitude will be to retain the good opinion
of those who have bestowed it in advance, to con-
ciliate that of others by doing them all the good
in my power, and to be instrumental to the hap-
piness and freedom of all.

Review Questions

1. Did Jefferson speak of continuity or change?
2. How did he define the president's powers and
   relationship with the legislative branch?
3. How did he define the federal government's
   power and responsibilities?
4. Did he speak of or imply a belief in American
   exceptionalism?
5. Were the sentiments expressed in this address
   in agreement with his earlier opinions (see
   chapters 7 and 8)?

Thinking Questions

* What themes come through? Are they
  prevalent today?

* How is this a commentary on the inevitability
  of political parties?