AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1792

George Washington vs John Adams

A 105-minute lesson on the 1792 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 264 total
WINNER George Washington (Independent) · 132 EV	RUNNER-UP John Adams (Federalist) · 77 EV
KEY ISSUE Maintaining national unity amid rising partisan divisions	TURNOUT 6.3%

CONTENTS

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2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
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1792: George Washington vs John Adams

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural features of the 1792 political situation that would have made an organized partisan opposition likely regardless of Hamilton's and Jefferson's personal antagonism. For each, identify the specific 1789-1792 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1792 election is the institutional pivot of the early Republic. It produced two simultaneous outcomes that defined the next twenty-five years of American politics: George Washington won unanimously for the second time, and the partisan opposition that would become the Democratic-Republican Party emerged in electoral form for the first time in the vice presidential contest. The structural conditions were five. First, the Bill of Rights had been ratified December 1791. This resolved the Anti-Federalist demand for explicit individual-rights guarantees and removed one of the two main grounds for principled opposition to the federal Constitution as such. Anti-Federalists could no longer rally on the missing-Bill-of-Rights critique; they had to reorganize their politics around concrete policy disputes. Second, Hamilton's 1790-1792 financial program had crystallized into a coherent set of commitments: federal assumption of state Revolutionary War debts, the First Bank of the United States, the whiskey excise, and the 1791 Report on Manufactures. These commitments were the policy substrate that made organized partisan opposition coherent. Third, the 1789 French Revolution had begun and the 1792 declaration of the French Republic (and the September Massacres in Paris) had made France a polarizing issue in American politics. Federalists tended to favor British conciliation; Democratic-Republicans tended to celebrate French revolutionary republicanism. Fourth, the 1791-92 partisan press (the National Gazette and the Gazette of the United States) had created the communicative infrastructure for coordinated partisan attack. Fifth, the Madison-Jefferson alliance had organized opposition inside the Washington administration. Madison in the House and Jefferson in the Cabinet were drafting opposition strategy together by the spring of 1792. Washington had grown weary. He asked Madison in May 1792 to help draft a farewell address explaining his planned retirement. Madison did so; the draft (later revised by Hamilton and used in 1796) circulated among Cabinet officers. Both Hamilton

and Jefferson asked Washington to stay. Each man's reasoning was structurally the same: without Washington as the country's neutralizing figure, the other faction would capture the federal government. The dual plea is striking because Hamilton and Jefferson, by mid-1792, were no longer on speaking terms inside the Cabinet. Washington agreed reluctantly. His Second Inaugural - 135 words, the shortest in U.S. history - signaled both his reluctance and his determination to keep the presidency modest in scope.

The presidential ballot was uncontested. All 132 electors named Washington on their first ballot. He won unanimously for the second time. The vice presidential contest was the first partisan election in American history. Federalist-leaning electors gave their second ballot to incumbent Vice President John Adams (77 votes). Democratic-Republican electors gave their second ballot to former Anti-Federalist Governor George Clinton of New York (50 votes). Jefferson received 4 votes from Southern electors looking ahead to 1796; Burr received 1. Adams was re-elected decisively but the partisan structure of the result was unmistakable.

The geographic pattern previewed the alignment that would dominate American politics through 1820. New England (Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island) voted overwhelmingly for Adams. The South (Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia) leaned toward Clinton, though Washington's personal popularity kept four Southern states fully in his column on the first ballot. The middle states - New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania - split. Clinton's home state of New York gave him 12 of his 50 votes; the structural importance of New York to both coalitions was visible already.

The 1792 outcome had three durable consequences. First, the Bank of the United States, the federal financial system, and the whiskey excise survived the 1792-93 transition and became permanent. Second, Washington's decision to attempt a second term postponed the partisan crisis four years, but did not resolve it; the 1796 election would be openly partisan from start to finish. Third, the 1792 VP race confirmed that the two-ballot rule could produce partisan results even when the top spot was uncontested. The combination of partisan coordination and the two-ballot rule would produce the 1796 Adams-Jefferson split-party administration and the 1800 Jefferson-Burr tie - both of which would force the constitutional reform of the Twelfth Amendment in 1804.

20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.

5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

First Party System

The period roughly 1791-1824 in which Federalists competed against Democratic-Republicans. Most historians treat the 1792 VP race as the system's first electoral expression, even though formal party organizations did not yet exist. The system ended with the Era of Good Feelings (1817-1825).

Report on Manufactures

Hamilton's December 1791 proposal for federal promotion of American manufacturing through tariffs, infrastructure investment, and bounties. Articulated the first coherent American industrial policy. Rejected by Congress but established the substantive Federalist economic agenda.

Two-ballot rule

The original Constitution required each elector to cast two ballots without distinguishing president from vice president. Worked in 1789 and 1792 (Washington uncontested); produced split-party result in 1796 and tie in 1800; replaced by the Twelfth Amendment (1804).

Madison-Jefferson alliance

The collaboration between James Madison (House) and Thomas Jefferson (Cabinet) that organized opposition to Hamilton's agenda from inside the Washington administration. Began with the 1791 Bank debate; consolidated in the 1791-92 New York-Vermont tour during which Madison and Jefferson recruited Clinton and others.

Report on the Bank

Hamilton's December 1790 proposal for a federal national bank. Sparked the first major constitutional debate between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. The Bank of the United States, chartered February 1791, was the policy core around which Federalist-Democratic-Republican partisanship organized.

Strict construction

The legal doctrine that the federal government can exercise only those powers explicitly granted by the Constitution. Jefferson's position in the 1791 Bank debate; the core Democratic-Republican constitutional commitment. Contrasted with Hamilton's loose-construction doctrine of implied powers.

National Gazette

The partisan newspaper Madison and Jefferson commissioned in 1791 to provide a Democratic-Republican alternative to the Federalist Gazette of the United States. Edited by poet Philip Freneau. The 1791-92 partisan press infrastructure is one of the institutional preconditions of the First Party System.

Whiskey excise

The first federal direct tax on a U.S. product, levied on distilled spirits in March 1791 to help pay Revolutionary War debt. Western Pennsylvania discontent erupted in the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion. Symbol of the new federal government's reach into ordinary citizens' lives.

Second Inaugural Address

GEORGE WASHINGTON, MARCH 4, 1793

The shortest inaugural address in U.S. history - 135 words. Washington delivered it before a joint session of Congress in Philadelphia. The brevity reflected his reluctance to set further precedent for grandiose ceremony and his weariness with public service. He had spent the months between November 1792 and March 1793 trying to mediate Hamilton-Jefferson disputes inside his Cabinet.

> *"I am again called upon by the voice of my country to execute the functions of its Chief Magistrate. When the occasion proper for it shall arrive, I shall endeavor to express the high sense I entertain of this distinguished honor, and of the confidence which has been reposed in me by the people of united America. Previous to the execution of any official act of the President the Constitution requires an oath of office. This oath I am now about to take, and in your presence: That if it shall be found during my administration of the Government I have in any instance violated willingly or knowingly the injunctions thereof, I may (besides incurring constitutional punishment) be subject to the upbraidings of all who are now witnesses of the present solemn ceremony."*

Washington, "Second Inaugural Address" (Philadelphia, PA, March 4, 1793). Public domain.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

Second Inaugural Address

GEORGE WASHINGTON, MARCH 4, 1793

"I am again called upon by the voice of my country to execute the functions of its Chief Magistrate. When the occasion proper for it shall arrive, I shall endeavor to express the high sense I entertain of this distinguished honor, and of the confidence which has been reposed in me by the people of united America. Previous to the execution of any official act of the President the Constitution requires an oath of office. This oath I am now about to take, and in your presence: That if it shall be found during my administration of the Government I have in any instance violated willingly or knowingly the injunctions thereof, I may (besides incurring constitutional punishment) be subject to the upbraidings of all who are now witnesses of the present solemn ceremony."

Washington, "Second Inaugural Address" (Philadelphia, PA, March 4, 1793). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Letter to George Washington (urging acceptance of a second term)

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MAY 23, 1792

"The confidence of the whole union is centered in you. Your being at the helm, will be more than an answer to every argument which can be used to alarm and lead the people in any quarter into violence or secession. North and South will hang together, if they have you to hang on; and, if the first corrective of a numerous representation should fail in its effect, your presence will give time for trying others not inconsistent with the union and peace of the states. I am perfectly aware of the oppression under which your present office lays your mind, and of the ardour with which you pant for retirement to domestic life. But there is sometimes an eminence of character on which society have such peculiar claims as to control the predilection of the individual for a particular walk of happiness."

Jefferson, "Letter to George Washington" (Philadelphia, PA, May 23, 1792). Public domain.

The 1792 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Washington's Second Inaugural) that frames his acceptance of a second term as response to public call. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Jefferson's 1792 letter) that argues the Union itself depends on Washington's continued presence. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address Washington's second-term decision but make different kinds of claims about it. Identify the specific claim each source makes.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B was written in May 1792 by Washington's leading internal political opponent. What does the fact that Jefferson made the argument tell you about the structural fragility of the early Republic?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B says "North and South will hang together, if they have you to hang on." Identify two specific 1791-1792 developments that had created North-South tension and that Jefferson would have had in mind.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

How many words is Washington's 1793 Second Inaugural - the shortest in U.S. history?

( ) A. 135
( ) B. 283
( ) C. 527
( ) D. 1,041

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which 1791 federal tax sparked western Pennsylvania discontent that erupted into the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion?

( ) A. Land tax
( ) B. Whiskey excise
( ) C. Tariff Act
( ) D. Stamp Act

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: did the early Republic's survival depend more on Washington personally or on his institutions? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Jefferson's May 1792 letter to Washington (Source B) argues that the Union depends structurally on Washington's personal presence in office, even from the perspective of his own ideological opponents. Washington's 1793 Second Inaugural (Source A) accepts that argument but signals through extreme brevity that the office should remain modest. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1789-1796 period, evaluate the extent to which the early Republic's survival depended on Washington personally rather than on the constitutional institutions he was administering. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the Washington-personally-vs-institutions axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Bank of the United States, the Whiskey excise, the Bill of Rights ratification, the French Revolution, the Madison-Jefferson alliance. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent - personal vs. institutional - rather than treating them as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept: "I am again called upon by the voice of my country to execute the functions of its Chief Magistrate." The framing positions acceptance as response to public summons rather than personal ambition.

The phrase deliberately mirrors his 1789 inaugural opening. The reluctance-to-serve posture was central to Washington's republican credibility in both 1789 and 1793.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "The confidence of the whole union is centered in you", "North and South will hang together, if they have you to hang on", "your being at the helm, will be more than an answer to every argument which can be used to alarm". The "hang together" phrase is the most quoted.

The argument from sectional adhesion is one of the most-cited articulations of Washington's unique structural role. AP students should recognize it as both an analytical claim about the Republic and a strategic political plea.

QUESTION 3

Source A claims that Washington accepts the second term as a duty in response to public call - the classical republican framing. Source B claims that Washington's continued presence is structurally necessary to keep the Union together regardless of his own preferences. The first framing positions Washington as a virtuous individual choosing service; the second positions him as an institutional necessity beyond his individual choice. The two claims together show how thinly the line between personal authority and institutional structure ran in 1792.

AP students should be able to distinguish the rhetorical-framing claim from the structural-necessity claim. Both can be true simultaneously, but they imply different things about the early Republic's stability.

QUESTION 4

Jefferson was the leader of the emerging partisan opposition to Hamilton. If he had been confident that the constitutional institutions could survive a contested election - or that his own faction could win one in 1792 - he would not have asked Washington to stay. The fact that he did, despite having every partisan reason to want the contested election the second term postponed, tells you that even the leading opposition figure believed the early Republic structurally depended on Washington personally. The structural fragility was real and was understood as real by participants at all levels.

The structural-fragility argument is one of the most-developed analytical claims in early Republic historiography. AP students should be able to articulate both the claim and the evidence Jefferson provides for it.

QUESTION 5

Accept any two of: (1) Hamilton's 1790 federal assumption of state Revolutionary War debts (which the Southern states perceived as a transfer from agrarian taxpayers to Northern bondholders). (2) The 1791 Bank of the United States (which the South perceived as a Northern commercial institution). (3) The 1791 whiskey excise (which fell disproportionately on Southern and trans-Appalachian farmers). (4) The 1790 Compromise locating the federal capital on the Potomac (designed to give the South an institutional check on Northern commercial interests). (5) The 1792 second declaration of the French Republic (which divided Federalists and Democratic-Republicans on geographic lines).

The sectional tensions of the early Republic were largely economic and ideological, not yet racial-political. Slavery would not become the dominant sectional issue until the 1820s. AP students should know the early-Republic sectional menu.

QUESTION 6

135.

Washington's 1793 Second Inaugural is 135 words. Every subsequent inaugural has been substantially longer. The 4 brief lines are deliberate - they refuse to set further ceremonial precedent.

QUESTION 7

Whiskey excise.

The March 1791 federal excise on distilled spirits sparked western Pennsylvania discontent that erupted in the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion - the first major test of federal taxing authority. Washington led the militia response personally.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the personal-vs-institutional axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source. Award credit for any defensible thesis that meets these three conditions.

The thesis sketch is preparatory. The LEQ rubric on the next page evaluates the full essay.