AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1804

Thomas Jefferson vs Charles C. Pinckney

A 105-minute lesson on the 1804 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 176 total
WINNER Thomas Jefferson (Democratic-Republican) · 162 EV	RUNNER-UP Charles C. Pinckney (Federalist) · 14 EV
KEY ISSUE Louisiana Purchase and westward expansion; declining Federalist influence	TURNOUT 23.8%

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2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
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1804: Thomas Jefferson vs Charles C. Pinckney

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 conditions in U.S. politics by 1804 that would have produced a Democratic-Republican landslide regardless of the specific Federalist candidate or Jefferson's specific accomplishments. For each, identify the specific 1789-1804 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1804 election was the fourth U.S. presidential election and the first held under the Twelfth Amendment, ratified June 15, 1804. The amendment was a direct constitutional response to the 1796 split-party result (Adams president, Jefferson vice president from opposing parties) and the 1800 Jefferson-Burr tie. By requiring separate ballots for president and vice president, the amendment ended the original two-ballot rule and adapted the Constitution to the reality of organized partisan competition. The 1804 election was therefore both a referendum on Jefferson's first term and the inaugural test of a constitutional design that explicitly acknowledged party government as a permanent feature of American politics. Jefferson's first term had been politically successful across almost every metric Federalists used to evaluate presidents. He had cut the federal whiskey excise (March 1802), reduced the national debt from $83 million to $57 million, repealed the Alien and Sedition Acts and pardoned Democratic-Republican editors who had been jailed under them, shrunk the federal civilian workforce, and made the Louisiana Purchase from France in May 1803 for $15 million. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States, added the future heartland states from Louisiana to the Dakotas, and gave the U.S. control of the Mississippi River and the port of New Orleans. The Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806), the Tripoli campaign (1801-1805), the Ohio statehood admission (March 1803), and the successful U.S. Supreme Court establishment of judicial review in Marbury v. Madison (February 1803) all rounded out a first term of remarkable institutional and territorial accomplishment. The Federalist nominee was Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina, 58 years old, a Constitutional Convention delegate and Revolutionary War officer. The Federalist Party was in deep structural trouble. The 1800 election had cost it the presidency, Congress, and most state offices. The 1801-1803 Republican repeals of Federalist legislation had dismantled most of its policy agenda. Alexander Hamilton, the party's organizing genius, had been killed in a duel by Vice President Aaron Burr

on July 11, 1804 - four months before the election - leaving the party without its key strategist. The Federalist response to the Louisiana Purchase had been incoherent: some Federalists supported the deal as too good to refuse; others (the Essex Junto in New England) opposed it as an unconstitutional shift of political power toward the agrarian South and West, even considering secession. The Federalist Party in 1804 had no clear constitutional doctrine, no clear policy platform, and no organizing machinery.

The Democratic-Republican organization, by contrast, had matured into a national party. State-level organizations in Pennsylvania (under Albert Gallatin), New York (under DeWitt Clinton and George Clinton), Virginia (under Jefferson and Madison), and the Carolinas had built local electoral machines that could mobilize voters at scale. The Twelfth Amendment's separate-ballot procedure allowed Jefferson to select Governor George Clinton of New York as his vice presidential running mate, replacing Burr. The Clinton selection was strategic: it locked down New York for the Democratic-Republicans and signaled distance from Burr after the Hamilton duel.

The electoral count was 162 Jefferson to 14 Pinckney - one of the largest electoral landslides in U.S. history at 92 percent of the Electoral College. Jefferson carried every state except Connecticut (9 EV), Delaware (3 EV), and two of Maryland's 11 electors. He won 72.8 percent of the popular vote where it was measured. The Federalist Party would never win another presidential election. Their last credible national campaign was Rufus King's 1816 loss to James Monroe.

The 1804 result also marked the structural ascendancy of Virginia within the Democratic-Republican coalition. Jefferson (Virginia) had succeeded Adams (Massachusetts) in 1801. Madison (Virginia) would succeed Jefferson in 1809. Monroe (Virginia) would succeed Madison in 1817. The 1801-1825 Virginia Dynasty governed for 24 of 25 years - the longest single-state presidential run in U.S. history.

Historians treat 1804 as the consolidation of the Democratic-Republican coalition that 1800 had elected. The First Party System would survive in formal terms until 1824, but the competitive party-vs-party dynamic that had defined 1796 and 1800 was effectively dead by 1804. The Federalists existed mainly as a regional New England rump. The Era of Good Feelings (1817-1825) would be one-party government in everything but name. The 1804 landslide is the precise inflection point.

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

Twelfth Amendment
Ratified June 15, 1804. Required electors to cast separate ballots for president and vice president, ending the original two-ballot rule. The first U.S. constitutional amendment written to address specific recent electoral failures (1796 and 1800).

Marbury v. Madison
The February 24, 1803 Supreme Court decision establishing judicial review. Chief Justice Marshall ruled that the Court could declare federal statutes unconstitutional, making the federal judiciary a coequal branch of government. The decision's political context was the lame-duck Federalist judicial appointments Jefferson's administration was refusing to commission.

Burr-Hamilton duel
The July 11, 1804 duel in Weehawken, New Jersey, in which Vice President Aaron Burr mortally wounded Alexander Hamilton. Burr was indicted for murder in New York and New Jersey but never tried. The duel destroyed the Federalist Party's organizing leadership four months before the 1804 election.

Era of Good Feelings
The 1817-1825 period of one-party Democratic-Republican government following the Federalist collapse. Despite the name, the period was politically contested - the Era ended with the 1824 four-way election that produced the Adams-Jackson realignment.

Strict construction
The legal doctrine that the federal government can exercise only those powers explicitly granted by the Constitution. Jefferson's pre-1803 position; he had to set it aside to justify the Louisiana Purchase under the treaty-making power.

Louisiana Purchase
The May 1803 federal acquisition of 828,000 square miles from France for $15 million. Doubled the size of the United States. Negotiated by Robert Livingston and James Monroe in Paris. Authorized by Jefferson under the treaty-making power despite his strict-construction reservations.

Essex Junto
The 1803-04 New England Federalist faction (centered in Massachusetts's Essex County) that considered secession in response to the Louisiana Purchase. Believed the Purchase would permanently shift political power to the agrarian South and West. Contacted Burr in 1804 about a possible Northeast confederation.

Virginia Dynasty
The 1801-1825 succession of Virginia-born Democratic-Republican presidents: Jefferson (1801-09), Madison (1809-17), Monroe (1817-25). Each was selected by a congressional caucus dominated by the Madison-Monroe-Gallatin succession network. The longest single-state presidential run in U.S. history.

Embargo Act
The 1807 federal law prohibiting U.S. ships from foreign trade in response to British and French interference with American shipping during the Napoleonic Wars. Deeply unpopular in New England commercial areas; partial cause of the Federalist mini-recovery in 1808.

Second Inaugural Address

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MARCH 4, 1805

Jefferson took the oath at the new Capitol in Washington, DC. The Second Inaugural was much shorter than the famous 1801 inaugural. Jefferson used the occasion to reflect on his first-term record - particularly the Louisiana Purchase - and to acknowledge the partisan attacks his opponents had directed at him. The "federative principle" passage was a direct response to the Essex Junto's secession plotting.

> *"On the question of war or peace, or of the necessary remedies for the safety of our country, we may differ in opinion. But there is one moral law which is binding upon all - that is, the law of self-preservation. The acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some, from a candid apprehension that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union. But who can limit the extent to which the federative principle may operate effectively? The larger our association, the less will it be shaken by local passions."*

Jefferson, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1805). 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

THOMAS JEFFERSON, MARCH 4, 1805

“On the question of war or peace, or of the necessary remedies for the safety of our country, we may differ in opinion. But there is one moral law which is binding upon all - that is, the law of self-preservation. The acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some, from a candid apprehension that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union. But who can limit the extent to which the federative principle may operate effectively? The larger our association, the less will it be shaken by local passions.”

Jefferson, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 4, 1805). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Letter to John Breckinridge (justifying the Louisiana Purchase)

THOMAS JEFFERSON, AUGUST 12, 1803

“The General Government in negotiating with foreign nations, has so done. The Constitution has made no provision for our holding foreign territory, still less for incorporating foreign nations into our Union. The executive in seizing the fugitive occurrence which so much advances the good of their country, have done an act beyond the Constitution. The Legislature in casting behind them metaphysical subtleties, and risking themselves like faithful servants, must ratify and pay for it, and throw themselves on their country for doing for them unauthorized, what we know they would have done for themselves had they been in a situation to do it.”

Jefferson, "Letter to John Breckinridge" (Monticello, VA, August 12, 1803). Public domain.

The 1804 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 (Jefferson's Second Inaugural) that defends the Louisiana Purchase against Federalist objections. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Jefferson's 1803 Breckinridge letter) where Jefferson explicitly acknowledges the Purchase exceeded constitutional authority. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address the constitutional status of the Louisiana Purchase, but they make different claims about it. Identify the specific claim each source makes.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B was written before Source A (August 1803 versus March 1805). What does the temporal ordering tell you about how Jefferson's public framing of the Purchase evolved from private justification to public defense?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B says the Legislature must "ratify and pay for" what the executive has done "beyond the Constitution." Identify one specific 1803-1804 development that bears on this argument about executive-legislative relations.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Which 1803 Supreme Court decision established the principle of judicial review?

( ) A. McCulloch v. Maryland
( ) B. Marbury v. Madison
( ) C. Gibbons v. Ogden
( ) D. Dartmouth College v. Woodward

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

The 1803-04 New England Federalist faction that considered secession in response to the Louisiana Purchase was the:

( ) A. Hartford Convention
( ) B. Essex Junto
( ) C. Old Federalists
( ) D. Hamilton circle

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the Louisiana Purchase a transformation of constitutionalism, a contingent exception, or a strategic political achievement? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Jefferson's August 1803 letter to Breckinridge (Source B) explicitly acknowledges that the Louisiana Purchase exceeded the strict-construction constitutional theory he had champi-oned against Hamilton in the 1790s. Jefferson's 1805 Second Inaugural (Source A) reframes the same Purchase as a vindication of the federative principle. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1789-1825 period, evaluate the extent to which the Louisiana Purchase represented a structural transformation of American constitutionalism (the practical end of strict construction), a contingent exception that strict construction survived as a principle, or a strategic political achievement whose constitutional irregularity was the price of expansion. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the transformation-vs-exception-vs-price axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of Marbury v. Madison, the Essex Junto, the Twelfth Amendment, the Embargo Act, the 1816 Federalist collapse. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "the larger our association, the less will it be shaken by local passions", "who can limit the extent to which the federative principle may operate effectively", "the acquisition of Louisiana has been disapproved by some, from a candid apprehension that the enlargement of our territory would endanger its union". The "federative principle" phrase is the cleanest articulation.

Jefferson's 1805 framing - the federative principle - became the standard pro-expansion rhetorical device for the next century. AP students should recognize it as a coherent constitutional theory of empire.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "The executive in seizing the fugitive occurrence which so much advances the good of their country, have done an act beyond the Constitution", "The Constitution has made no provision for our holding foreign territory", "The Legislature ... must ratify and pay for it, and throw themselves on their country for doing ... unauthorized, what we know they would have done for themselves". The first phrase is the most explicit acknowledgment.

Jefferson's explicit acknowledgment that the Purchase exceeded constitutional authority is one of the most-cited passages in early American constitutional history.

QUESTION 3

Source A claims the Purchase fits a coherent federative-principle constitutional theory that explains why territorial expansion strengthens rather than weakens the Union. Source B acknowledges that the Purchase was an extra-constitutional act justified by practical necessity rather than by constitutional theory. The two framings are politically incompatible: the first defends the Purchase as constitutional, the second concedes it was not.

The discrepancy between Jefferson's public and private framings of the Purchase is one of the most-studied tensions in early American politics. AP students should be able to identify the discrepancy as deliberate.

QUESTION 4

The temporal ordering shows Jefferson's public framing of the Purchase evolved from private acknowledgment of constitutional irregularity (August 1803) to public defense as a coherent federative-principle theory (March 1805). The 18-month gap covered the Senate ratification of the treaty (October 1803), the December 1803 Twelfth Amendment proposal, the July 1804 Hamilton duel, the November 1804 landslide election, and the consolidation of Democratic-Republican congressional control. By March 1805 Jefferson could frame the Purchase as a constitutional success rather than an extra-constitutional gamble because the political stakes were no longer in doubt. The evolution is a textbook case of how political success can recast constitutional irregularity as constitutional theory.

The political-success-recasts-constitutional-irregularity dynamic is a structurally important feature of early American constitutionalism. AP students should be able to articulate it.

QUESTION 5

The Senate ratification of the Louisiana Purchase treaty on October 20, 1803 (24-7 vote). The Senate vote operationalized Jefferson's argument: the Legislature did ratify what the executive had done beyond the Constitution. The episode established a precedent that subsequent presidents would invoke to justify expansive executive action: do the act first, present it to Congress as a fait accompli, rely on practical political consequences to overwhelm constitutional objections.

The Louisiana Purchase ratification is the founding precedent for executive-power expansion in American history. AP students should recognize the structural significance.

QUESTION 6

Marbury v. Madison.

The February 24, 1803 decision by Chief Justice John Marshall established judicial review. The Court ruled it could declare federal statutes unconstitutional, making the federal judiciary a coequal branch of government. The political context was Federalist lame-duck judicial appointments that Jefferson's administration was refusing to commission.

QUESTION 7

Essex Junto.

The Essex Junto was a faction of New England Federalists, centered in Massachusetts's Essex County, that opposed the Louisiana Purchase and considered secession to form a Northeast confederation. They contacted Vice President Aaron Burr in 1804 about a possible alliance.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the transformation-vs-exception-vs-price 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 evaluates the full essay.