

Great Ironies of American History: July 4, 1826

July 4, 1826, was a day full of celebrations, parades, and enthusiastic speeches. After all, it was America's 50th birthday! Fifty years before, on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was published and read. Thomas Jefferson was the document's primary author and John Adams was part of the famed Committee of Five, which advised Jefferson.

Adams and Jefferson played prominently in American history. Adams was America's second president and Jefferson was its third. The two had a complicated relationship. While they both helped shape the new nation, their political beliefs diverged. Adams believed that the United States would thrive with a strong central government and Jefferson believed that power belonged with the states. Jefferson believed in the French Revolution and Adams did not. Over time, the relationship between the two founding fathers soured further, resulting in both parties engaging in attempts to smear the other in public before the election of 1800. When Jefferson won the election, Adams returned to Massachusetts to live in virtual seclusion with Abigail, his wife. Following Jefferson's presidency, he retired to his estate named Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In 1809, the famous doctor Benjamin Rush urged both Jefferson and Adams to rekindle their friendship. Adams made the first overture and wrote Jefferson a letter on January 1, 1812. Over the next 14 years, the pair wrote 158 letters to each other. The letters discussed their different political views, theories on government, history, the state of the nation, and even the growing threat of slavery to the future of the new nation.

On July 3, 1826, just a day before the 50th birthday of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson fell into a coma after suffering from a long, intestinal illness. He died on July 4th. Meanwhile John Adams, who was nearing his 91st birthday, collapsed in his reading chair on July 4th. He lapsed in and out of consciousness for the next few hours before succumbing. His last words were said to be "Jefferson lives." Little did he know that he had outlived Jefferson by several hours. Both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on the same exact day – July 4, 1826. It just so happened that the day marked America's 50th birthday.

- 1. Which of the following best describes why the event was so ironic?**
- A. Because John Adams was the 2nd president and Thomas Jefferson was the 3rd
 - B. Because both John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on the same day – which happened to be the 50th anniversary of a document they both helped write
 - C. Because Thomas Jefferson were friends, then became enemies, then became friends again at the end of their lives
 - D. Because John Adams thought that Thomas Jefferson outlived him, when in fact, he outlived Jefferson

- 2. How did the political views of Jefferson and Adams diverge?**
- A. Because Adams believed in a strong central government and that the French Revolution was a positive event
 - B. Because Jefferson believed in a strong central government and that the French Revolution was a positive event
 - C. Because Adams believed in a strong central government and Jefferson believed power should remain with the the states
 - D. Because Adams believed in the French Revolution and Jefferson did not believe in the French Revolution

- 3. What does “seclusion” mean as used in the following sentence?**

When Jefferson won the election, Adams returned to Massachusetts to live in virtual seclusion with Abigail, his wife.

- A. With relatives
- B. Alone
- C. Silence
- D. Hiding

- 4. Which of the following is NOT true?**
- A. Thomas Jefferson lived in Virginia
 - B. John Adams lived in Massachusetts
 - C. Thomas Jefferson was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence
 - D. The relationship between Jefferson and Adams soured after Adams won the presidency in 1800

- 5. What is revealed in the third paragraph?**
- A. Adams’s attitudes on slavery
 - B. Discussion topics within the letters between the former presidents
 - C. The date in which the last letter was sent
 - D. Jefferson’s attitudes on the current state of government

6. What happened first?

- A. Jefferson lapsed into a coma
- B. Adams uttered "Jefferson Lives"
- C. America celebrated its 50th birthday
- D. The first day of July, 1826

7. Which of the following sentences best explains why the relationship between Jefferson and Adams likely became estranged?

- A. When Jefferson won the election, Adams returned to Massachusetts to live in virtual seclusion with Abigail, his wife.
- B. Adams made the first overture and wrote Jefferson a letter on January 1, 1812.
- C. Over time, the relationship between the two founding fathers soured further, resulting in both parties engaging in attempts to smear the other in public before the election of 1800.
- D. Following Jefferson's presidency, he retired to his estate called Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia.