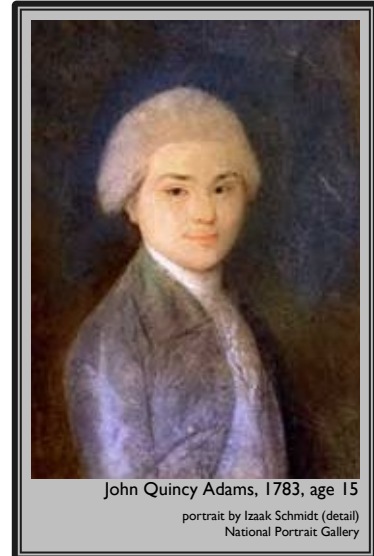


“make you a good Man and a useful Citizen”

Correspondence of JOHN ADAMS and JOHN QUINCY ADAMS, 1774-1793



When John Quincy Adams was seven years old, his father, John Adams, left their Massachusetts home to serve as a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Little did they know that the Adams family would rarely live together again as John Adams served a long civic career in America and Europe. These selections from the father-son letters reveal the dual nature of John Adams's role as “Founding Father,” striving to groom his young son and the young nation for their mutual future. The goal of education, wrote Adams to his teenaged son, is “to make you a good Man and a useful Citizen. This will ever be the Sum total of the Advice of your affectionate Father.” John Quincy went on to serve his country as an ambassador, U.S. Representative, U.S. Senator, and as the sixth president of the United States. How did John Adams guide John Quincy toward a lifetime career as a citizen leader?



JOHN ADAMS
10/30/1735 – 7/4/1826

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS
7/11/1767 – 2/23/1848

1774

age 38

Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania

Delegate
to First
Continental
Congress

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

Sir

I have been trying ever since you went away to learn to write you a Letter. I shall make poor work of it, but Sir Mamma says you will accept my endeavours and that my Duty to you may be expressed in poor writing as well as good.

I hope I grow a better Boy and that you will have no occasion to be ashamed of me when you return. Mr. Thaxter says I learn my Books well — he is a very good Master [teacher]. I read my Books to Mamma. We all long to see you; I am Sir your Dutiful Son,

John Quincy Adams

October 13, 1774

age 7

Braintree,
Massachusetts

John Quincy lived with his mother Abigail and four siblings on the family farm near Boston.

1776

Declaration of Independence □ Revolutionary War

age 40

Philadelphia

Delegate
to Second
Continental
Congress

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

My dear Son . . .

I rejoice with you that our Friends are once more in Possession of the Town of Boston, and am glad to hear that so little damage is done to our House.

I hope you and your Sister and Brothers will take proper Notice of these great Events, and remember under whose wise and kind Providence they are all conducted. Not a Sparrow falls, nor a Hair is lost, but by the

April 18, 1776

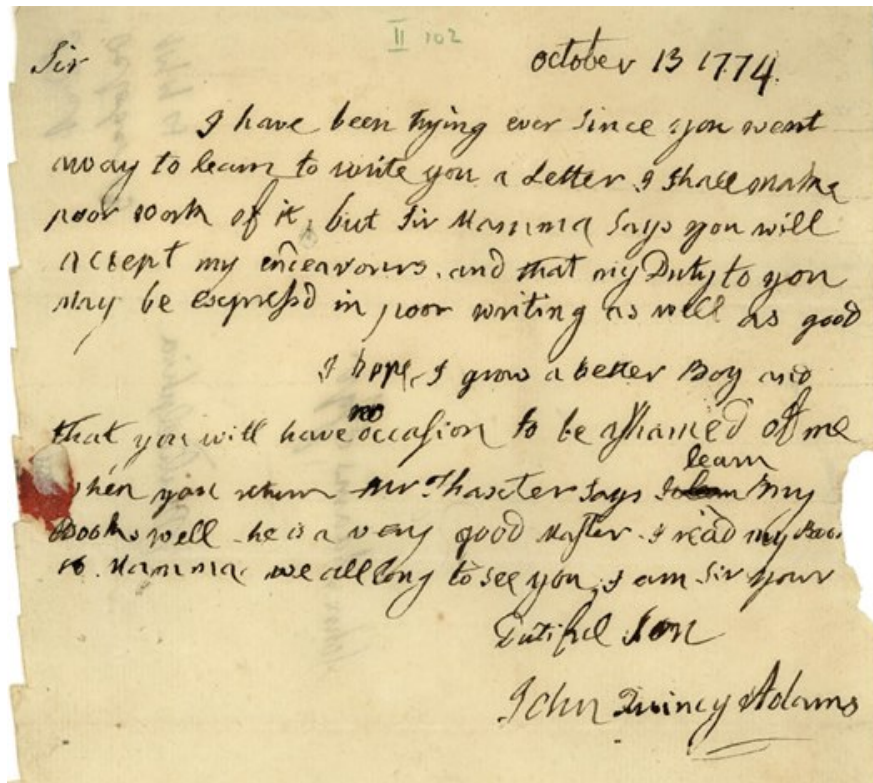
age 8

Braintree,
Massachusetts

In March, the British had evacuated Boston after an eleven-month siege by the Continental Army.

Direction of infinite Wisdom. Much less are Cities conquered and evacuated. I hope that you will all remember, how many Losses, Dangers, and Inconveniences, have been borne by your Parents, and the Inhabitants of Boston in general for the Sake of preserving Freedom for you, and yours—and I hope you will all follow the virtuous Example if, in any future Time, your Countrys Liberties should be in Danger, and suffer every human Evil, rather than Give them up.—My Love to your Mamma, your Sister and Brothers, and all the Family. . . .

John Adams



Massachusetts Historical Society

John Quincy Adams, letter to John Adams, October 13, 1774

1777

Revolutionary War

age 41

Philadelphia

Delegate to
Second
Continental
Congress

"3d volume
of Smollett":
Tobias
Smollett,
A Complete
History of
England,
16 vols.,
1758–1765

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

Dear Sir

I Love to recieve Letters very well much better than I love to write them, I make but a poor figure at Composition my head is much too fickle, my Thoughts are running after birds eggs play and trifles, till I get vexd with my Self, Mamma has a troublesome task to keep me Steady, and I own I am ashamed of myself. I Have but Just entered the 3d volume of Smollett tho I had designed [planned] to have got it Half through by this time. I have determined this week to be more diligent as Mr. Thaxter will be absent at Court, and I cannot persue my other Studies I have Set myself a Stent, and determine to read the 3d volume Half out, If I can but keep my resolution I will write again at the end of the week, and give a better account of myself. I wish sir you would give me Some instructions with regard to my time and

June 2, 1777

age 9

Braintree,
Massachusetts

"Mr. Thaxter
will be absent
at Court":
John Thaxter,
Jr., was a law
clerk in John
Adams's Boston
law office who
tutored John
Quincy Adams
after John
Adams's
departure.

advise me how to proportion [schedule] my Studies and my Play, in writing and I will keep them by me and endeavour to follow them I am dear Sir with a present determination of growing better yours,

John Quincy Adams

PS Sir if you will be So good as to favour [provide] me with a Blank book I will transcribe the most remarkable occurrences I mett with in my reading which will Serve to fix them upon my mind.

age 41
Philadelphia

**Delegate to
Second
Continental
Congress**

"If it should be the Design of Providence": John and Abigail's second daughter was stillborn two weeks earlier (on John Quincy's tenth birthday).

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

July 27, 1777

My dear Son

If it should be the Design of Providence that you should live to grow up, you will naturally feel a Curiosity to learn the History of the Causes which have produced the late Revolution of our Government. No Study in which you can engage will be more worthy of you.

It will become you to make yourself Master of all the considerable Characters, which have figured upon the Stage of civil, political or military Life. This you ought to do with the Utmost Candour, Benevolence and Impartiality, and if you should now and then meet with an Incident, which shall throw some Light upon your Fathers Character, I charge you to consider it with an Attention only to Truth.

It will also be an entertaining and instructive Amusement, to compare our American Revolution with others that Resemble it. The whole Period of English History, from the Accession of James the first, to the Accession of William the third, will deserve your most critical Attention. . . .

But above all others, I would recommend to your study, the History of the Flemish Confederacy, by which the seven united Provinces of the Netherlands, emancipated themselves from the Domination of Spain. . . .

You will wonder, my dear son, at my writing to you at your tender Age, such dry Things as these: but if you keep this Letter you will in some future Period, thank your Father for writing it. I am my dear son, with the Utmost Affection to your Sister and Brothers as well as to you, your Father,

John Adams

age 10
**Braintree,
Massachusetts**

"make yourself Master of":
i.e., inform yourself well; become expert

age 41
Philadelphia

**Delegate to
Second
Continental
Congress**

One month after Adams sent this letter, the British captured Philadelphia, and Congress moved to nearby Yorktown.

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

August 11, 1777

My dear Son

As the War in which your Country is engaged will probably hereafter attract your Attention, more than it does at this Time, and as the future Circumstances of your Country, may require other Wars, as well as Councils and Negotiations, similar to those which are now in Agitation, I wish to turn your Thoughts early to such Studies, as will afford you the most solid Instruction and Improvement for the Part which may be allotted you to act on the Stage of Life.

There is no History, perhaps, better adapted to this usefull Purpose than that of Thucidides, an Author, of whom I hope you will make yourself perfect Master, in original Language, which is Greek, the most perfect of all human Languages. In order to understand him fully in his own Tongue, you must however take Advantage, of every Help you can procure and particularly of Translations of him into your own Mother Tongue [English]. . . .

I am with much Affection your Father,

John Adams

age 10
**Braintree,
Massachusetts**

Thucydides:
Greek historian,
5th c. B.C.E.,
whose *History of the Peloponnesian War* was
a core text in
18th-c. education



1780 Revolutionary War

<p>age 44</p> <p>Paris, France</p> <p>U.S. minister to negotiate treaties of peace and commerce with Great Britain</p> <p>Adams had sailed to Europe with "Johnny" in 1778 and again in late 1779 (also with son Charles).</p>	<p><i>John Quincy Adams to John Adams</i></p> <p>[March 16, 1780]</p> <p>My Work for a day.</p> <p>Make Latin, Explain Cicero Erasmus Appendix Peirce Phaedrus. Learn greek Racines greek Grammar</p> <p><i>As a young boy can not apply himself to all those Things and keep a remembrance of them all I should desire that you would let me know what of those I must begin upon at first. I am your Dutiful Son,</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>John Quincy Adams</i></p>	<p>age 12</p> <p>near Paris</p> <p>student</p> <p>Cicero: Roman orator</p> <p>Erasmus: medieval Dutch philosopher</p> <p>Phaedrus: Greek philosopher</p> <p>racines: roots (Fr.)</p>
<p>age 44</p> <p>Paris</p> <p>U.S. minister to negotiate treaties of peace and commerce with Great Britain</p> <p>Since the U.S. and Britain were at war, peace talks were not held in either country.</p>	<p><i>John Adams to John Quincy Adams</i></p> <p>March 17, 1780</p> <p>My dear Son</p> <p>I have received your Letter, giving an Account of your Studies for a day. You should have dated your Letter.</p> <p>... I hope your Master will soon put you into the Greek Testament, because the most perfect Models of fine Writing in history, Oratory and Poetry are to be found in the Greek Language. ... Writing and Drawing are but Amusements and may serve as Relaxations from your studies.</p> <p>As to Geography, Geometry and Fractions I hope your Master will not insist upon your spending much Time upon them at present; ... my Wish at present is that your principal Attention should be directed to the Latin and Greek Tongues, leaving the other studies to be hereafter attained, in your own Country.</p> <p>I am, my dear Child, your affectionate Father,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Adams</p> <p>P.S. The next Time you write to me, I hope you will take more care to write well. Cant you keep a steadier Hand?</p>	<p>age 12</p> <p>near Paris</p> <p>student</p>

1781

American Victory in Revolutionary War [October]

age 45

Amsterdam

U.S. commissioner to the Netherlands to negotiate loans and a commerce treaty

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

May 18, 1781

age 13

Leiden, The Netherlands

student

John Quincy and Charles had travelled with their father to the Netherlands in 1780, studying with a tutor near Amsterdam.

My dear Son . . .

Please to inform me in your next, when the Vacation begins. It is my Design [plan] that you shall come and spend a Part of the Vacation with me. . . .

You go on, I presume, with your latin Exercises: and I wish to hear of your beginning upon Sallust who is one of the most polished and perfect of the Roman Historians, every Period of whom . . . is worth Studying. . . .

You will ever remember that all the End of study is to make you a good Man and a useful Citizen.—This will ever be the Sum total of the Advice of your affectionate Father,

John Adams

age 45

Amsterdam

U.S. commissioner to the Netherlands to negotiate loans and a commerce treaty

N.S.: New Style: new dating system (Gregorian calendar)

16/27: Aug. 16 and 27 in the old and new calendars

Courland was a province of Latvia, then part of the Russian empire.

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

[1 Sept. 1781 N.S.]

age 14

St. Petersburg, Russia

secretary to the U.S. minister to Russia

John Quincy spent over a year as secretary and French interpreter for Francis Dana, U.S. minister to Russia (which used French as its diplomatic language).

Honour'd Sir

We arrived here on Monday the 16/27 instant [of this month] having left Amsterdam the N.S. [New Style] 7th of July And rode the greatest part of the way day and night. The distance is about 2400 English Miles.

The first place of any consequence we stopp'd at was Berlin the capital of the king of Prussia's Dominions; this is a very pretty town, much more so than Paris, or London as Mr. Dana says; but it will be still more so if the present King's plan is adopted by his successor, for wherever there is a row of low, small houses he sends the owners out of them, pulls them down and has large, elegant houses built in the same place and then sends the owners in again. But notwithstanding this, he is not beloved in Berlin, and every body says publicly what he pleases against the king; but as long as they do not go any farther than words, he don't take any notice of it but says that as long as they give him all he asks, they may say what they will. . . .

. . . All the Farmers [in Courland] are in the most abject [miserable] slavery, they are bought and sold like so many beasts, and are sometimes even chang'd for dogs or horses. Their masters have even the right of life and death over them, and if they kill one of them they are only obliged to pay a trifling [small] fine; they may buy themselves but their masters in general take care not to let them grow rich enough for that; . . .

I am your dutiful Son,

John Q. Adams

age 46

Amsterdam

U.S. commissioner to the Netherlands to negotiate loans and a commerce treaty

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

December 14, 1781

age 14

St. Petersburg, Russia

secretary to the U.S. minister to Russia

Adams is referring to John Quincy's letter of Sept. 1.

My dear Son

Your Letter of 21 Aug. O.S. [1 Sept. 1781 N.S.] the first I have received, reached me only two or three days ago.

I am pleased to see, your hand Writing improve, as well as your Judgment ripen, as you travel. . . .

Make it a Rule, my dear Son, To loose no Time. There is not a moral Precept, of clearer Obligation, or of greater Import. Make it the grand Maxim of your Life, and it cannot fail to be happy, and usefull to the World. . . .

Write me often. Let me know the State of Education and Letters [literature] in St. Petersburg. Pray do you hear any Thing of a Passage by Land, from Russia to America? What Discoveries have been made?

1783

Peace Treaty Signed by U.S. and Great Britain [September]

age 47

Paris, France

Member of commission to negotiate final peace treaty with Great Britain

"They talk": Britain was also negotiating separate peace treaties with the U.S. allies—France, Spain, and the Netherlands.

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

February 1, 1783

age 15

Gutenberg (Germany)

John Quincy left Russia in October 1782 and travelled through Sweden, Denmark, and Germany, arriving in the Netherlands in April 1783.

Honoured Sir

I arrived here a few days ago, and expect to be at the Hague by the latter end of this month where I shall wait for your orders, in case I don't find you there; . . . I have had a very agreeable Journey, for the Season of the year. I believe there is no people in Europe so civil and hospitable to Strangers as the Swedes. The name of stranger is enough for them to do one all the services in their power. They are in general good friends to America, but seem to be a little afraid for their mines; however they are very well disposed for carrying on Commerce, with America; . . . They talk a great deal here about peace. 'Tis said to be very near; but a great many people think the contrary, on account of the amazing armaments of the belligerent powers [warring nations]. But nothing is certain as yet I believe. . . .

J Q. Adams

age 47

Paris, France

Member of commission to negotiate final peace treaty with Great Britain

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

February 18, 1783

age 15

en route from Russia to The Hague, The Netherlands

My dear Son

You cannot imagine, the Anxiety I have felt on your Account, nor the Pleasure just received from your Letter of Feb. 1. I had heard nothing of you Since the Beginning of December when you was in Stockholm [Sweden], and then only by the public Papers.

When you arrive at the Hague, you may take your Choice, either to remain there and follow your Studies under the Direction of Mr. Dumas or go to Leyden to your former Tutor. I believe however for a few days, you had better Stay at the Hague where I expect Soon to have the Pleasure of Seeing you, as I Shall return there, forthwith upon the Signature of the definitive Treaty of Peace. . . .

I am With the tenderest Affection, your Father

John Adams

age 47

Paris, France

Member of commission to negotiate final peace treaty with Great Britain



1783

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

May 14, 1783

age 15

The Hague, The Netherlands

My dear Child . . .

I See your Travells have been expensive, as I expected they would be: but I hope your Improvements have been worth the Money. Have you kept a regular Journal? If you have not, you will be likely to forget most of the Observations you have made. If you have omitted this Usefull Exercise, let me advise you to recommence it, immediately. Let it be your Amusement, to minute [record] every day, whatever you may have seen or heard worth Notice. One contracts a Fondness of Writing by Use. We learn to write readily, and what is of more importance We think, and improve our Judgments, by committing our Thoughts to Paper. . . .

A regular Distribution of your Time, is of great Importance. You must measure out your Hours, for Study, Meals, Amusements, Exercise and Sleep, and suffer [allow] nothing to divert you, . . .

But above all Things, my son, take Care of your Behaviour and preserve the Character you have acquired, for Prudence and Solidity. Remember your tender Years [young age] and treat all the World with Modesty, Decency and Respect. . . .



1783

A year later, Abigail and their daughter Abigail 2d sailed to England, soon joined by John and John Quincy. They lived in Paris

Be as frugal as possible, in your Expences. . . .

Every Body gives me a very flattering Character [description of behavior] of your Sister, and I am well pleased with what I hear of you: The principal Satisfaction I can expect in Life, in future will be in your good Behaviour and that of my other Children. My Hopes from all of you are very agreeable. God grant, I may not be disappointed.

Your affectionate Father

John Adams

until Adams's appointment in 1785 as minister to Great Britain.

1785

Young Republic under the Articles of Confederation

age 49

London,
England

U.S. minister to
Great Britain

In Feb. 1785, Adams had been appointed the first U.S. minister [ambassador] to Great Britain.

"The States have not yet": under the Articles of Confederation, Congress could not regulate trade among the states.

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

Dear Sir

. . . *Our [transatlantic] Passage, though it was not a stormy one, was very tedious. Of eight weeks, that we were at Sea, we had at least four of such calm weather as not to proceed more than 8 or 10 leagues a day. . . .*

The Politicians here, wait with great impatience to hear from you. Matters seem to be at a Crisis. The British instead of delivering up the Posts, have lately sent there a reinforcement of troops. I have heard from merchants here, that the fur trade from which we are thus precluded [barred from], by an open breach [violation] of the Treaty of Peace, is worth annually 50,000 pounds Sterling. This may be overrated; but the reluctance the British ~~show~~ to leave the Posts, is sufficient proof that it is an important object. It is supposed that your next Letters, will give information on the Subject, and let us know what is to be depended upon [expected].

. . . *The States have not yet given to Congress the power of regulating their trade: but it is almost universally considered here, a necessary measure. The President of Congress is however much against it. He has written you by this opportunity, and perhaps he has given you his opinion upon the subject.*

You doubtless know before this, that Mr. [James] Bowdoin, was elected governor of Massachusetts, at the last election, in the place of Mr. [John] Hancock, who was chosen Member of Congress for the next Session. The parties shew some rancour and acrimony at the Time, but since the Election, every thing has subsided, and the present governor is very popular. . . .

After reading this Letter, you will perhaps think I had better be at my Studies, and give you an account of their progress, than say so much upon politics. But while I am in this place I hear of nothing but politics. When I get home I shall trouble my head very little about them. . . .

I am your dutiful Son.

J. Q. Adams

age 18

New York

In May 1785, John Quincy returned to the U.S., visiting New York City before entering college.

"The British instead": the British had not given up several military posts in the Great Lakes region, as required in the 1783 peace treaty.

age 49

London,
England

U.S. minister to
Great Britain

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

My dear Son . . .

We have as yet no News of your Arrival in America, but We hope to learn it by the first ship.

We are comfortably Situated here, and have all enjoyed very good Health hitherto in England. But Home is Home. You are Surrounded by People who neither hate you nor fear you.

I have no other Idea of an happy Life: Than Health and Competence, with a

August 31, 1785

age 18

New York

visitor
before
entering
college

clear Conscience and among People who esteem and love you. All these you may and will have, I hope. The Conscience Health and Competence I may have here. I may even be esteemed: but never can be beloved, as you may easily suppose.

Write me as often as you can: let me know how you like your Situation: and if you want any Books from hence. Charles I take it for granted is at Colledge, and Thomas is I hope well. I wish he was with me, but this cannot be. I dont know how to do, without one of my sons at least with me. But am obliged to deny myself this Pleasure.

My Respects wherever they are due. Your affectionate Father

John Adams

1786

age 50

London,
England

U.S. minister to
Great Britain

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

April 2, 1786

age 18

Cambridge,
Massachusetts

student at
Harvard
College

Honoured Sir

After having suffered [allowed] so long an interval of Time to pass, since I wrote you last, it is absolutely necessary, for my own justification, to give you, an account of my Studies, since my return home, . . .

. . . There are many great advantages derived, from being a member of this Society [college]; but I have already seen many, things which, I think might be altered for the better. One is, that there is not sufficient Communication between the Classes: they appear to form four distinct orders of beings, and seldom associate together. I have already become acquainted, with every one of my own Class; and I do not, know four Persons in any one of the other Classes. Another is, that the Tutors, are so very young, they are often chosen among batchelors [those with bachelor's degrees], that have not been out of College, more than two years, . . . However take it all in all, I am strongly confirmed, in your Opinion, that this University is upon a much better plan, than any I have seen in Europe. . . .

With my Duty to Mamma, and Love to Sister, I remain, your affectionate Son.

J.Q. Adams

age 50

London,
England

U.S. minister to
Great Britain

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

May 26, 1786

age 18

Cambridge,
Massachusetts

student at
Harvard
College

My dear son

Give me leave [allow me] to congratulate you on your Admission into the Seat of the Muses, our dear Alma Mater [Harvard], where I hope you will find a Pleasure and Improvements equal to your Expectations. You are now among Magistrates and Ministers, Legislators and Heroes, Ambassadors and Generals, I mean among Persons who will live to Act in all these Characters [positions]. If you pursue your Studies and preserve your Health you will have as good a Chance as most of them, and I hope you will take Care to do nothing now which you will in any future Period have reason to recollect with shame or Pain.

I dont expect you to Spend much of your time in Writing to me: Yet a short Letter, now and then will be indispensable, to let me know how you do, what you want and how you like. . . .

Inform yourself of the Books possessed by private Schollars and of the Studies they pursue. This you will find a valuable source of Knowledge. But I must Subscribe [sign] myself, your affectionate Father

John Adams

Alma Mater:
"nourishing
mother," i.e.,
the college from
which one has
graduated

John Adams
graduated
from Harvard
in 1755, and
John Quincy
in 1787.

1790

<p>age 54 New York Vice President of the United States</p> <p>In March 1789, George Washington and John Adams had been inaugurated president and vice president of the United States.</p>	<p>John Adams to John Quincy Adams</p> <p>Dear sir . . .</p> <p>If you meddle with political subjects, let me Advise you to never loose sight of Decorum [proper respectful behavior]. Assume a Dignity above all Personal Reflections: and avoid as much as possible a Party Spirit. The true Interest and honour of your Country should be your only Object. And may you be a Terror to those evil Doers, to whom Truth and Falshood are equally but sport, honour but a Phantom, and their own insignificant importance their only objects. The hands of two many such Creatures appear in some of the Boston Newspapers. . . .</p> <p>I am with the tenderest Affection / your Father</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Adams.</p>	<p>[before 8] September 1790</p> <p>age 23 Boston lawyer</p> <p>John Quincy studied law for three years with a practicing attorney and in 1790 set up his own law practice in Boston.</p>
<p>age 54 New York Vice President of the United States</p> <p><i>"I wrote you before today": Adams wrote two letters to John Quincy on this day.</i></p> <p><i>"their Correspondencies": i.e., the former Loyalists' networks in the U.S., Britain, Canada, and the Caribbean</i></p>	<p>John Adams to John Quincy Adams</p> <p>Dear John</p> <p>I wrote you before to day: but I forgot to say Several Things.—Have you ever attended a Town Meeting? You may there learn the Ways of Men, and penetrate Several Characters [political types/roles] which otherwise You would not know. There are Several Objects of Enquiry, which I would point out to your consideration without making any noise or parade about them.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The State of Parties in Religion, Government[,] Manners, Fashions. 2. The Leading Characters in Church and State. 3. The Machines [mechanisms], Arts and Channels, by which Intelligence [news] and Reports are circulated through the Town. 4. The Makers and Spreaders of Characters. 5. The State of the various Tradesmen and Mechanicks, their Views designs [goals/plans] and Projects 6. The State, Hopes, Views, Plans, Passions, and Sentiments of the old Tories, and their Correspondencies abroad and at home in their own State and in other States. 7. Ditto of the old Whigs of 1764 and 1774. 8. Ditto of the Neutrals. 9. Ditto of those who have Sprung up Since the Revolution. 10. The Characters [leaders] of all the Clergymen, of all denominations Physicians, surgeons Apothecaries [pharmacists], Lawyers, and Merchants of Eminence [influential businessmen] & shopkeepers. 11. The Foreigners in or out of offices, French English, Dutch &c 12. The Various Combinations of all these. 13. The State of Diversions Amusements, Spectacles. &c 14. The various Clubbs, [member] Lists of all which you should obtain. 15. The Buffoons, the Merry Andrews [public clowns], the story tellers the song Singers, the Mimicks. <p>These are all Wheels Springs Cogs, or Pins, Some of them dirty ones which compose the Machine and make it go.</p> <p>. . . Write me as often as possible. dont shew my Letters. Yours</p> <p style="text-align: right;">J. A.</p>	<p>September 13, 1790</p> <p>age 23 Boston lawyer</p> <p><i>"Makers and Spreaders of Characters": e.g., political mentors, power brokers, pundits, opinion makers</i></p> <p><i>"old Tories": i.e., former Loyalists, (supporters of Britain during the Revolution)</i></p> <p><i>"old Whigs": i.e., anti-British Patriots in the Revolution, especially those who led the opposition to the Stamp Act of 1764 and the Coercive Acts of 1774</i></p>
<p>age 54 New York Vice President of the United States</p>	<p>John Adams to John Quincy Adams</p> <p>My dear Son . . .</p> <p>The Town of Boston is at present unhappily divided into political Parties, and neither Party I presume has tried Experiments enough upon you to</p>	<p>October 4, 1790</p> <p>age 23 Boston lawyer</p>

discover to which Side you belong. You might very easily induce either Side to make much of you, by becoming a zealot for it: but my Advice to you is Nil Admirari Nil contemni. Admire neither Party—despize neither Party. Treat both Sides with Civility and respect but be the Devotee of neither. Be always on the side of Truth Justice Honour Virtue and public Spirit. . . .

I long to see you in your office: but the Care of a troublesome Removal to Philadelphia, will prevent me till next year.

Your Letters give me so much pleasure as well as Information that I wish you to write as often as you can to / your Affectionate

John Adams.

age 54
New York
Vice President
of the United
States

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

October 19, 1790

age 23
Boston
lawyer

Dear Sir. . . .

I have attended Town-meeting, Sir, and it was upon the occasion of the choice of Representative for the district. I was indeed not a little diverted at the scene, and derived I believe some little Instruction as well as Entertainment from it. Three fourths of the Votes in this Town were indeed for Mr. Ames, and this perhaps may enable you to form an opinion respecting the popularity of the general Government in this State. . . . The real fact is that the new Government is very rapidly acquiring a broad and solid foundation of popularity.—It possesses in my opinion the confidence of the people in this State to a more eminent degree than any other Government upon Earth can boast of: and it appears to me to have already acquired a stability, as astonishing as the revolution it has produced in the face of our affairs.

The effects of that revolution are already felt in a very high degree in this part of the Country. Our Commerce is increasing and extending; our manufactures multiplying very rapidly, our agriculture flourishing; industry has resumed the place which it had resigned for some time to idleness and luxury; and is seldom without employ. I am informed that the mechanics of almost every description in this Town are at present more constantly busy than they have been at any period since the Revolution. . . . The farmer, The tradesmen, the mechanic and the merchant, are all mutually so dependant upon one another for their prosperity, that I really know not whether most to pity the ignorance or to lament the absurdity of the partial politicians, who are constantly erecting an imaginary wall of separation between them. . . .

J. Q. Adams.

Mr. Ames:
Fisher Ames
defeated Samuel
Adams, the Anti-
Federalist candi-
date, as repre-
sentative from
the First District
of Massachu-
setts in the
U.S. House of
Representatives.

"that revolution":
i.e., the first
federal govern-
ment under the
new Constitu-
tion, led by
Washington
and Adams

1792

age 57
Philadelphia
Vice President
of the United
States

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

December 9, 1792

age 25
Boston
lawyer

My dear Son . . .

There is a general Interest taken in my Reelection in such a number of States as affects me. The Utmost Efforts of my Ennemies have undoubtedly been exerted, and what success they may have had in Virginia and the States to the southward of it, is uncertain. New York it is expected will show their vain Spite against New England. It is not Antifederalism against Federalism, nor Democracy against Aristocracy. This is all Pretext. It is N York vs N. England.

I am affectionately your Father

John Adams

On December 5,
the electoral
college had
re-elected
Washington
and Adams as
president and
vice president.

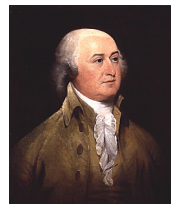
["It is
New York
vs. New
England."]

age 57

Philadelphia

Vice President
of the United
States

"The Event of
the election":
the re-election of
Washington and
Adams by the
electoral college
on December 5



1793

John Quincy Adams to John Adams

December 16, 1792

My dear Sir. . . .

. . . There has been upon my mind a strong sentiment of delicacy, which has kept me silent in the midst of all the scurrility of which you have been the object. The charges which private malice and public faction have employed as instruments [tools/weapons] against you have been so despicable in themselves that common sense and Common Honesty, must have felt some degradation in descending to the refutation of them. I have thought that where they could have any possible effect, sober reason and plain truth could not counteract it, because the minds affected must be too blind or too wicked, to feel the operation of just Sentiments. The Event of the election as far as we know it has corroborated my opinion. As to the general measures of the federal government, when I have seen them attacked artfully and insidiously, as has frequently been the case, I have often thought of defending them; but as often have concluded that my assistance, could not be necessary, and could be but feeble. The Government I supposed needed it not, and as to my own advancement, I could really see nothing in public life, but what it was my object to avoid. I have been really apprehensive of becoming politically known, before I could establish a professional reputation. I knew that my independence and consequently my happiness in life depended upon this, and I have sincerely wished rather to remain in the shade than to appear as a politician without any character [solid reputation] as a Lawyer.—These Sentiments have still great weight in my mind, . . .

I have run into great prolixity [wordiness] already, and will therefore only add that I am as ever, your affectionate Son.

J. Q. Adams.

John Adams to John Quincy Adams

December 26, 1792

My dear Son

I rec^d [received] by the last post your favour [letter] of the 16. The Votes from New Hampshire to Maryland inclusively have been unanimous excepting the factious Voice of New York, . . .

Your Observations on the Scurrility disgorged at me, as well as on the insidious Attacks on the general Government, are just [accurate] to a certain degree. but not wholly so. The Newspapers guide and lead and form the public opinion. Gutta cavat lapidem, non vi sed sæpe cadendo. a continual dropping will wear a stone. We shall never have a fair Chance for a good Government untill it is made a rule to let nothing pass unanswered.

Reasoning must be answered by reasoning: Wit by Wit, Humour by Humour: Satyr by Satyr: Burlesque by Burlesque and even Buffoonery by Buffoonery. The stupidity of Multitudes of good Friends of their Country and its Government is astonishing. They are carried away with every Wind of Doctrine and every political Lye [lie]: but the Docility [readiness/submissiveness] with which they receive an answer when it is put into their Mouths is the only resource We have left.—hundreds even of the Officers of Government, Stand aghast like Children not knowing what to think nor what to Say, untill another Gazette [newspaper] furnishes them with Matter.

Franklin was pursued by an Opposition all his Lifetime. He was sometimes rejected at Elections by the Citizens of Philadelphia. He generally answered and sometimes very bitterly the Pieces against him. But He and his F[riends] made it a rule all his Life to let no Paragraph [go] unanswered. . . .

J. A.

age 25

Boston

lawyer

scurrility:
abusive,
malicious
criticism

"There has been . . . just Sentiments": i.e., "wishing to be polite, I have not commented on the malicious criticism aimed at you by your critics. Responding to such vile attacks would be descending to their level, and reason won't change their closed minds anyway."

age 25

Boston

lawyer



1796

scurrility:
abusive,
malicious
criticism

"Gutta cavat lapidem . . .":
A drop hollows out the stone not by force, but by falling many times.
[Latin proverb]

satyr: satire

1793

<p>age 58 Philadelphia Vice President of the United States</p> <p>England and France had gone to war in spring 1793, each nation capturing U.S. merchant ships that traded with the other nation.</p>	<p>John Adams to John Quincy Adams</p> <p>Dear Sir</p> <p>Congress have rec^d [received] from the President all the Negotiations with France and England as well as those with the Indians. On Monday We expect those with Spain and all the Intelligence rec^d respecting the Algerines. The whole forming a System of Information which Shews our dear Country to be in a critical Situation. So critical that the most sanguine [optimistic] are constrained to pauze and consider. . . .</p> <p>Congress must take a cool Survey of our Situation and do nothing from Passion. . . .</p> <p>For myself, my Race is almost run. You have a long Career before you, and I am happy to observe that you have not accommodated your opinions nor Sentiments to the momentary Fashions of the present times, but have Searched for Principles which will be more durable. I am affectionately</p> <p style="text-align: center;">J. A.</p>	<p>December 14, 1793</p> <p>age 26 Boston lawyer</p> <p><i>Algerines:</i> North African pirates along the Barbary Coast who had captured eleven U.S. merchant ships and held their crews hostage.</p>
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- In 1794, John Quincy Adams was appointed U.S. minister to the Netherlands by Pres. Washington. He later served as minister to Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain.
- In 1796, John Adams was elected the second president of the United States (1797-1801). He retired from public office after being defeated for a second term by Thomas Jefferson.
- In 1824, John Quincy Adams was elected the sixth president of the United States (1825-1829). Before his presidency, he served as a U.S. Senator from Massachusetts and as Secretary of State under Pres. Monroe. After his presidency, he served in the U.S. Congress as a representative from Massachusetts from 1831 until his death in 1848.

To read the existing father-son correspondence from 1774 to 1793, go to [Founders Online](#) from the National Archives. In the search line, enter <Correspondent: "Adams, John" AND Correspondent: "Adams, John Quincy"> to access 121 letters (66 from father to son and 55 from son to father). The editors' footnotes are included.

Consult the timelines of John Adams's life and career from the [Massachusetts Historical Society](#) and [American Experience](#). For more correspondence of young John Quincy Adams with his parents and siblings, see [One President's Adolescence](#) from the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Text of Adams letters courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, in [The Adams Family Papers](#) (MHS) and in [Founders Online](#) (National Archives).

Images (in chronological order):

- John Quincy Adams, letter to John Adams, October 13, 1774 (detail; blank area cropped out). Massachusetts Historical Society. Permission request submitted.
- John Singleton Copley, portrait of John Adams, oil on canvas, 1783 (detail and full image). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Harvard University Portrait Collection, Bequest of Ward Nicholas Boylston to Harvard College, 1828, H74. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reproduced by permission.
- Isaac Schmidt, portrait of John Quincy Adams, pastel on vellum, July 1783. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, NPG 91.3 / Art Resource, NY. Reproduced by permission.
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