JOHN QUINCY ADAMS AND NATIONAL EXPANSION
No one labored longer or more successfully to extend the continental limits of the U.S.

JQA made the U.S. a geographic giant.

Three phases of his political career.
- Diplomat
- Congressman
- President
EDUCATION AND PREPARATION

- Grew up with the nation.
- American Revolution (7 years old)
- Accompanied father on diplomatic mission to France (10 years old)
- Spent time in Europe assisting his father and studying at universities in Germany, Russia, Sweden, England, Holland, and France (10-17 years old)
- Earned law degree at Harvard (1785), admitted to the bar.
- U.S. minister to the Netherlands under Washington
- U.S. minister to Prussia under Adams
- MA state senator (1802)
- U.S. Senator (1803)
- Disgusted with with the factionalism and sectionalism of the Federalist party
- Grew to dislike political parties for putting their interests ahead of those of the nation.
Masterful, but not always popular

- Chief negotiator of Treaty of Ghent (1814), which ended the nearly disastrous War of 1812
- U.S. minister to Britain (1815)
- Secretary of State under Monroe (1817)
- Sealed the Rush-Bagot Agreement (1817), which limited American and British warships on the Great Lakes and initiated more than a century of peaceful border relations between Canada and the U.S.
- Garnered American fishing privileges in the rich Grand Banks
ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS

- Convention of 1818 established the 49th parallel as the northern boundary of the Louisiana Purchase and protected American claims to the Pacific Northwest by providing for joint occupation of Oregon Territory.

- Convinced Tsar Alexander of Russia to relinquish claims to Alaska and set a friendship allowing for the outright purchase of Alaska and the removal of Russia from the Western Hemisphere.

- Adams-Onis Treaty (1819) made FL part of the Union and strengthened American claims to the Pacific Coast by defining the border with Spain all the way to the Pacific, thus paving the way for American expansion into the Far West.
Instrumental in convincing Latin American governments to rebel against Spain and become democratic republics, which made U.S. sphere of economic and political influence more powerful in its hemisphere.

True mastermind behind the “Monroe” Doctrine and the non-colonization principle.

Monroe actually used Adams’s doctrine word for word and without credit.

Adams believed America was destined to possess the entire continent.
In 1803 Senator Adams boldly became the only Federalist senator to vote in favor of the treaty completing the Louisiana Purchase.

Senator Adams also broke with party ranks to support Jefferson’s policies of peaceable coercion.

Federalists drove him out of the party and forced his resignation as senator in 1808.

As Secretary of State, Adams defended Jackson’s attacks on Spanish Florida.

Adams was perhaps the most apolitical president.

Promoted the American System

Congressman Adams defied the “gag rule” on antislavery petitions as a violation of freedom of speech.

Adams defended the Amistad mutineers on the basis of natural rights doctrines and international law.
SECOND ADAMS IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Controversial election of 1824: thrown into House because none of the 4 candidates received the required majority of electoral votes (Jackson received the most popular and electoral votes).

Clay supported Adams, believing he would most certainly support Clay’s American System. When Adams made Clay his secretary of state, Jackson’s supporters charged that a “corrupt bargain” had been made.

Adams was perhaps the best prepared and most learned president in history.
President Adams promoted a vigorous national government, a national university, federally funded internal improvements, and a strong military. His annual message was highly unpopular yet prophetic.

As historian Richard Hofstadter writes, “His first annual message to Congress was one of the most wholly impolitic documents in the history of government.”

Adams warned the nation not to become complacent and stagnant: “Were we to slumber in indolence or fold up our arms and proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not be to cast away the Bounties of Providence and doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority?”

National Republicans feared the expansion of presidential power. Democrats feared debts, monopolies, and centralized control, believing that government planning led to political favoritism. Ironically Jackson would bring just that with the “spoils system.”

Adams miscalculated in his assumption that “unswerving integrity would suffice in place of popularity.” Adams, as John Patrick Diggins shows, was the last of “a generation of gentry-class leaders who wouldn’t stoop to cater to the masses in order to retain power. So he lost it.”
Jacksonians blocked Adams’s initiatives, and Adams had few accomplishments as president. Adams failed to win a popular majority, which often times determines presidential success or failure. His extensive program for national development failed, in part, because of rising feelings of sectionalism and distrust of the federal government. Successful presidents must cater to the party and be willing to compromise to be successful. Adams’s strength, his political independence and nationalism, was also his weakness as president, a failure to compromise his political position and principles. John Patrick Diggins explains, “[Adams] favored conviction over compromise and preferred discipline to convenience. A rare president.” Adams assumed that integrity would supplant popularity. He refused to cater to the masses to remain in power.
ELECTION OF 1828

- Brutally partisan. Scholar vs. frontier hero. National Republicans charged Jackson with adultery. Democrats charged Adams with being a monarchist and aristocrat, and with having procured a servant woman for the emperor of Russia and installing a billiard table in the White House at public expense.

- Jackson won with ease, carrying the South, the West, working-class artisans, and backwoods farmers.

- Victory for democracy over intellectuals and elites

- Adams disliked political parties because he believed that they pursued their own interests at the expense of the national interest.
Adams accomplished far more before and after his presidency as as a diplomat and congressman fighting against the gag rule and arguing about slavery.

- Opposed the annexation of Texas in 1836
- Stubbornly insisted on raking up the deadly divisive issue of the extension of slavery every time frontiersmen sought to establish a territorial government.
- Adams led Whig opposition to the Mexican War because he believed it was a conspiracy on the part of the slaveocracy to expand slavery.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

