University of Pardubice
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

Popular Culture as Historical Document: The Portrayal of American History in the John Adams Miniseries

Viktor Holiš

Bachelor Thesis
2024

Univerzita Pardubice
Fakulta filozofická
Akademický rok: 2022/2023

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

Jméno a příjmení:	**Viktor Holiš**
Osobní číslo:	**H21227**
Studijní program:	**B0231A090018 Anglický jazyk**
Specializace:	**Anglický jazyk pro odbornou praxi**
Téma práce:	**Populární kultura jako historický dokument: zobrazení americké historie v televizní minisérii John Adams**
Zadávající katedra:	**Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky**

Zásady pro vypracování

Bakalářská práce se bude zabývat prezentací a interpretací osobnosti Johna Adamse a jeho role při utváření americké demokracie v televizní minisérii *John Adams* (Tom Hopper, 2008). V teoretické části autor představí stěžejní pojmy a události (např. Intolarable Acts, Sons of Liberty, Alien and Seduction Act, Jay Treaty apod.) související s utvářením Spojených států amerických (od Americké revoluce přes revoluci roku 1800 až po Adamsovu smrt v roce 1826). Rovněž zmapuje rozdílné přístupy a narativy v debatě o podobě americké Ústavy mezi federalisty a demokratickými republikány (elite theory, republican theory, majority tyranny, aristocratic tyrany). V praktické části pak autor práce ověří, do jaké míry je zobrazení Adamse v televizní minisérii věrohodné a historicky opodstatněné, případně se pokusí zhodnotit, jakou má funkci ve vztahu k divákovi (informativní, didaktická, mytologická funkce).

Rozsah pracovní zprávy:
Rozsah grafických prací:
Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**
Jazyk zpracování: **Angličtina**

Seznam doporučené literatury:

Paul, Heike. "American Independence and the Myth of the Founding Fathers." In *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*, 197–256. Transcript Verlag, 2014. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxsdq.8.
Runciman, David. "Power and Hypocrisy in US Politics." *RSA Journal* 154, no. 5534 (2008): 32–37. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41380553.
Mayville, Luke. "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite." *Polity* 47, no. 1 (2015): 5–32. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24540274.
Farrell, James M. "New England's Cicero: John Adams and the Rhetoric of Conspiracy." *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 104 (1992): 55–72. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25081048.
Leff, Benjamin J. J. "Popular Culture as Historical Text: Using Mass Media to Teach American History." *The History Teacher* 50, no. 2 (2017): 227–54. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44504480.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Michal Kleprlík, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Datum zadání bakalářské práce: **2. dubna 2023**
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce: **30. března 2024**

doc. Mgr. Jiří Kubeš, Ph.D. v.r.
děkan

Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D. v.r.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2023

Prohlašuji:

Práci s názvem Populární kultura jako historický dokument: zobrazení americké historie v televizní minisérii John Adams jsem vypracoval samostatně. Veškeré literární prameny a informace, které jsem v práci využil, jsou uvedeny v seznamu použité literatury.

Byl jsem seznámen s tím, že se na moji práci vztahují práva a povinnosti vyplývající ze zákona č. 121/2000 Sb., o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, zejména se skutečností, že Univerzita Pardubice má právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití této práce jako školního díla podle § 60 odst. 1 autorského zákona, a s tím, že pokud dojde k užití této práce mnou nebo bude poskytnuta licence o užití jinému subjektu, je Univerzita Pardubice oprávněna ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložila, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše.

Beru na vědomí, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb., o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších předpisů, a směrnicí Univerzity Pardubice č. 7/2019 Pravidla pro odevzdávání, zveřejňování a formální úpravu závěrečných prací, ve znění pozdějších dodatků, bude práce zveřejněna prostřednictvím Digitální knihovny Univerzity Pardubice.

V Pardubicích dne 17. 6. 2024 Viktor Holiš

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Mgr. Michal Kleprlík, Ph.D. for his guidance and help. Secondly, I want to thank my closest friends.

ANNOTATION

This Bachelor Thesis focuses on the depiction of American history in a TV miniseries John Adams. The theoretical parts of this thesis focus on defining terms and concepts, such as The Founding Fathers, Federalist and Democratic-Republic parties, and how popular culture takes part in teaching history. The practical part of this thesis then works with the concepts defined in the theoretical part and analyses the depiction of John Adams and other representatives portrayed in the miniseries.

KEYWORDS

John Adams, The Founding Fathers, The Federalist Party, The Democratic-Republican Party, Hollywood historian

NÁZEV

Populární kultura jako historický dokument: zobrazení americké historie v televizní minisérii John Adams

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na zobrazení amerických dějin v televizní minisérii John Adams. Teoretická část této práce se zaměřuje na vymezení pojmů a konceptů, jako jsou Otci zakladatelé, Federalisté a Demokratičtí Republikáni a jak populární kultura přispívá ve vyučování historie. Praktická část této práce pak pracuje s pojmy definovanými v teoretické části a analyzuje zobrazení Johna Adamse a dalších představitelů zobrazených v minisérii.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

John Adams, Otci zakladatelé, Federalistická strana, strana Demokratických Republikánů, Hollywoodský historik

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the John Adams miniseries. It is a historical drama directed by Tom Hooper and produced by Playtone. It premiered on HBO in 2008. The series is based on David McCullough's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography *John Adams*. The screenplay was written by Kirk Ellis, and the series stars Paul Giamatti as John Adams. The miniseries spans the life of John Adams, focusing on his role in the American Revolution, his diplomatic efforts in Europe, his presidency, and his later years.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first two chapters are theoretical, and the following two are practical. The theoretical chapters define concepts relevant to the discussed topic, and the practical chapters work with those concepts. The thesis differs slightly from its proposal because during the writing of this thesis, it was considered that some topics would be more beneficial to it.

The first chapter aims to analyse the clash between two American political parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans. It explains the different opinions of each political party and its leaders, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. It deals with the political concepts of these men. Moreover, it examines the dispute over which part of the nation shall lead it, the few or the many. Furthermore, it depicts the opinions of John Adams, who was more independent-minded, and his views wavered between the two sides. The idea of aristocracy and how the individual Founding Fathers viewed it is also presented.

The second chapter defines and discusses the differences between academic historians and Hollywood historians. Whereas scholars aim to create unbiased and accurate interpretations, filmmakers tend to emphasize drama and emotions in their work, aiming to attract large audiences. Moreover, they sometimes alter historical facts to achieve this. Furthermore, this chapter explores the debate over whether filmmakers can be considered historians. Several works of authors are presented, commenting on this topic to reach a conclusion. At last, it addresses the potential educational value of films and the criticism they face for historical inaccuracies and fictionalization.

The third chapter follows the events introduced in the first chapter and tries to observe these events in the series and comment on them using the concepts introduced in the theoretical part. It examines the ideological and political clashes shown in the miniseries between the political parties and John Adams. Moreover, it comments on the Founding Fathers depicted in the miniseries and examines their opinions. Furthermore, it

deals with the war between Great Britain and France and shows what sides the Founding Fathers chose to pick. John Adams and his stance on the war as the president is also examined.

The fourth and last chapter examines how John Adams is depicted in the miniseries. It follows a number of events where one can draw a conclusion about the character of John Adams. It tries to decide whether the depiction of John Adams is positive or negative and whether he is portrayed as a prophet or a fool. Moreover, it is evidenced by paraphrasing several moments from the miniseries. Furthermore, it shows examples of the work of filmmakers, who often change the reality to make the scenes more interesting to watch. It also shows several historical inaccuracies to highlight how Hollywood historians influence stories, using dramatical effects, romantic relationships and more.

1. FOUNDING IDEOLOGIES: ELITISM AND DEMOCRACY IN EARLY AMERICA

In the Founding Era of the United States of America, the period from the writing of the Declaration of Independence through George Washington's inauguration as the country's first president, two major political parties emerged, differing in their views of the ideal form of society and government.

The Founding Fathers, including George Washington, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, are considered to have contributed to the founding of the United States the most. According to White, they were proponents of elitism, in other words, people who believed that society should be led by an elite, the richest or best-educated people. Therefore, they wanted to minimise the public's role in selecting their representatives. Additionally, the Founding Fathers were afraid of political parties. Some of them claimed that they would not benefit educated citizens. Madison was of the opinion that political parties were not a suitable instrument for expressing public opinion. He argued that people are too emotional and make decisions with zeal, which mostly ends in chaos. Most agreed with Madison and his views and despised political parties, presuming that they would lead to excessive political disputes. Particularly critical was Washington, who considered these political agitators to be manipulating the public for their own benefit.[1] John Adams proclaimed: "There is nothing I dread so much as a division of the Republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader and converting measures in opposition to each other."[2]

After the ratification of the Constitution and George Washington's inauguration as the first President, a dispute that was both political and personal arose between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson later described their behaviour as acting "like two cocks."[3] Both these political elites shared certain values – freedom, individualism, and equality of opportunity, but they differed in opinions on how to apply them when formulating a government. Hamilton wished for a strong central government with a powerful president to safeguard national interests, while Jefferson favoured a decentralised approach with a focus on local civic engagement: "In every civil society,

---

[1] John Kenneth White, and Matthew R. Kerbel, "Hamilton vs. Jefferson: How Political Parties Began," in *American Political Parties: Why They Formed, How They Function, and Where They're Headed*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2022), 11–12.
[2] David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 422.
[3] William Nisbet Chambers, "Party Development and the American Mainstream," in *The American Party Systems*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers, and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 6.

there must be a supreme power, to which all members of that society are subject; for, otherwise, there could be no supremacy or subordination, that is no government at all,"[4] proclaimed Hamilton. This presents two contrasting visions of American governance termed "Hamiltonian nationalism" and "Jeffersonian localism." Hamilton believed in a strong central government led by an energetic president and viewed the United States as one family. On the contrary, Jefferson showed almost unconditional confidence in mediocre people.[5] He viewed farmers as essential to society and as God's chosen: "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people."[6]

The Federalist Party was founded in 1789 by the Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, with Hamilton leading the party. The majority of its members were well-educated, with predominant support in large cities in the Northeast. They were usually wealthy farmers, plantation owners, bankers, manufacturers, and merchants.[7] The term "federalist" was first used to describe the supporters of the Constitution in 1787.

Hamilton, Jay and Madison published 85 essays called *the Federalist Papers* between 1787 and 1788 in New York newspapers to persuade New York state voters to support the ratification of the Constitution. The authors of *the Federalist Papers* defended the emerging federal system and its key governmental structures. Moreover, they criticised the Articles of Confederation, the nation's first constitution, and pointed out its flaws. They argued that not only would the proposed Constitution strengthen the central government, but it would also protect individual liberties and prevent the pitfalls of the Articles.[8]

The Federalists were driven in their constitutional deliberations by the threat of unrestrained majorities and were concerned by the threat of the tyranny of the majority: "Give all power to the many," said Hamilton, "they will oppress the few. Give all power to the few they will oppress the many."[9] The Federalist framers viewed the many as most in need of constitutional constraint.

---

[4] Gerald Stouzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970), 16.
[5] White et al., "Hamilton vs. Jefferson: How Political Parties Began," 21.
[6] Ted Morgan, *FDR: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 38.
[7] "America's First Political Parties," Students of History, accessed December 13, 2023, https://www.studentsofhistory.com/federalists-republicans.
[8] Garry Wills, *Explaining America: The Federalist* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), Prologue, 15–16.
[9] The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, Vol. 1., ed. Max Farrand (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 288.

In *the Federalist Papers No. 10*, one of America's most highly praised political writings, James Madison expressed his attitude towards the Constitution and the fear of majority tyranny. Madison believed that a society divided into factions with different interests could be a threat to the public good. Additionally, once a faction becomes a majority, it can use its power to enforce any laws that benefit it at the expense of minorities: "In republican Government, the majority, however composed, ultimately gives the law."[10] In *the Federalist Papers*, he expressed his opinion on the matter as follows: "The influence of factious leaders may kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the other States."[11] This passage suggests that the diversity of the United States, with its many different states and regions, can help to prevent majority tyranny by making it difficult for any one faction to gain enough support to take over the entire country.

Moreover, James Madison proposed counter-majoritarian features of the Constitution, such as federalism or the presidential veto. He also recommended an enlargement of the sphere of politics, arguing that a larger society would be less likely to unite around a common interest that could threaten the public good.[12] Madison genuinely wanted to prevent any single group from becoming too powerful: "It may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose."[13] This excerpt indicates that a constitutional system of representation can help prevent the tyranny of the majority by ensuring that laws are passed in the best interests of the people, even if the majority may not agree with them.

The following passage suggests that the constitutional system of representation balances between the need to have representatives who know the citizens' desires and the necessity to have those who are also capable of seeing the bigger picture and being able to make decisions that are in the best interests of the country as a whole:

> By enlarging too much the number of electors, you render the representatives too little acquainted with all their local circumstances and lesser interests; as by

[10] James Madison, *Writings* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 75–80.
[11] James Madison, Federalist No.10, in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York: New American Library, 1961) 5.
[12] Luke Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," *Polity* 47, no. 1 (2015): 11. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24540274.
[13] Madison, "Federalist No.10," 4.

reducing it too much, you render him unduly attached to these, and too little fit to comprehend and pursue great and national objects.[14]

Opposing those opinions and views, a new political party emerged in 1792, led by another Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson. Shortly after the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, the Democratic-Republican Party was founded as an opposition to the Federalist Party. The name Republicans accentuated their attitude that the states should be the guiding force in decision-making. The party found support mainly among farmers, planters, and the working class, who mostly came from the Southern states. The party and its supporters disagreed fiercely with Hamilton's interpretation of the Constitution and believed it gave too much power to the federal government and infringed upon the rights of individual states.[15]

There are only a few names as much associated with American democracy as that of Thomas Jefferson. He was, without question, one of the most influential figures in the making of American history and its democracy. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson presents the cornerstone of his political ideology. Within this document, he advocates for the principles of human equality, natural and inalienable rights of man, securing these rights as the primary cause of government, and of the right and duty of revolution when undermined.[16]

After an in-depth examination of Jefferson's conception of inalienable rights, one encounters his firm opposition to the notion that individuals give up any of their natural rights by entering society. Instead, Jefferson argues that we do not lose these rights within social structures, but rather enhance them.[17] He says that while the state has a role to affirm and maintain our rights, it should refrain from interfering with them. Related to this argument, Jefferson argues that defining the appropriate scope of state intervention becomes feasible. Since no individual has a natural right to interfere with the rights of others, it is the duty of the law to limit such intrusions. Moreover, every individual is obligated to contribute to the general welfare, and therefore it becomes the duty of the law to ensure its enforcement. Thus, individuals under governmental power do not lose

[14] Madison, "Federalist No.10," 4.
[15] "Democratic-Republican Party," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed February 15, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Democratic-Republican-Party.
[16] C. E. Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson," *Political Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1902): 25. https://doi.org/10.2307/2140379.
[17] Thomas Jefferson, and Paul L. Ford, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892–1899), X, 32.

their natural rights but, on the contrary, receive their guarantee.[18] For Jefferson, the government was an institution that served for the good of the governed.[19] Moreover, unlike the Federalists, he expressed his aversion to energetic government because it is always oppressive.[20] On one occasion, he expressed the opinion whether the first state of man without government, as he claimed, would not be most desirable if society were not too large.[21]

The next topic to discuss is Jefferson's opinion about aristocracy. Though he is widely recognised as a great defender of human equality, judging from his famous statement, "All men are created equal,"[22] it is well known that he was a slave owner, which hardly goes hand in hand with equality of all. However, it should be noted that Jefferson was against negro slavery and protested against it on multiple occasions.

Apart from this, according to Mayville, it is not hard to show that Jefferson did not believe in the total equality of men. He distinguished between natural aristocracy and artificial aristocracy among the people. One is based on morality and talent, the other on wealth and birth. He considered natural aristocracy as the „most precious gift of nature," and of great use for educating and governing a society.[23] He expressed his opinion as follows: "That form of government is the best, which provides the most effectively for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government."[24] On the other hand, he considered artificial aristocracy as dangerous and malicious, and that it should never receive legal recognition; "The artificial aristocracy is a mischievous ingredient in government, and provision should be made to prevent it's [sic] ascendancy."[25] Moreover, Jefferson believed that the public, not institutions nor elites, should distinguish between "pseudo aristocracy" and "genuine aristocracy."[26]

Jefferson did believe in aristocracy, but only in the sense that the most capable should rule and that the selection of aristoi should be made by the people, not based on descent or wealth. He wanted aristocratic rulers to be chosen democratically. However, Jefferson's concept of democracy was different from today's democracy. In his view, a republic is "a government by the [its] citizens in mass, acting directly and personally,

[18] Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson," 26.
[19] Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson," 27.
[20] Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, IV, 479.
[21] Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, IV, 362.
[22] From Declaration of Independence
[23] Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," 16–17.
[24] Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, IX, 425.
[25] Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, IX, 425.
[26] Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, IX, 427.

according to rules established by the majority."[27] The most important principles within a democracy, according to Jefferson, would be: "equal and exact justice," majority rule, preservation of freedom of the press and more.[28]

Further evidence of Jefferson's conception of democracy is provided by an examination of what he once called the "two hooks." It was a system of education and a system of local government. Acutely aware of the need for popular intelligence as the basis for successful government, Jefferson was a strong advocate for spreading knowledge among the public. He was a strong believer in the capability of the majority.[29]

Jefferson divided people into two classes; "those who fear and distrust the people and those who identify themselves with the people, have confidence in them, consider them as the most honest and safe, although not always the most wise, depositories of public interests."[30] He argued that people of first class nature are fundamentally incapable of governing themselves and need to be governed by authorities that are independent of their will. The second class, however, according to Jefferson, puts their trust in the ability of the people's self-government. He also argued that man is a rational creature and has an instinctive sense of justice and that he is capable of choosing his own leaders.[31]

Another Founding Father, John Adams, was a prominent figure in American history, known for his contributions to the founding of the United States. He was a lawyer and statesman who played a key role in the American Revolution and the early years of the new nation.[32]

While Hamilton and Madison argued that in republican America the majority clearly prevailed, Adams believed that the elite, characterised by wealth, birth, and beauty, would retain overwhelming power. Moreover, while the Federalists aimed to provide security from the threat of the tyranny of the majority, Adams was especially concerned about aristocratic tyranny – particularly the tendency of a few elites to undermine both "popular representation and efficient government."[33]

---

[27] Jefferson et al., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, X, 28.
[28] Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson," 33.
[29] Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson," 35.
[30] Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Being His Autobiography, Correspondence, Reports, Messages, Addresses, and Other Writings, Official and Private* (New York: H. A. Washington), VII, 376.
[31] Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson," 37–38.
[32] "John Adams," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified February 17, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Adams-president-of-United-States.
[33] Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," 8.

According to Mayville, Adams' perspective differed remarkably from his Federalist peers in two key aspects: "his measure of the relative power wielded by the oligarchic elite vis-à-vis the majority, and his assessment of the danger posed to republican institutions by the oligarchic elite."[34]

Adams, who was not present during the period of constitutional framing and discussions, disagreed with the Federalist framers in estimating the few. In this aspect, Adams held views similar to those of those who criticised the new Constitution. Adams consistently emphasised that the distinctions present in American society give the privileged enormous social and political power. According to him, individuals who possessed not only talent but also wealth, noble birth, and beauty had more influence over those who were less fortunate. Furthermore, he feared the threat the fortunate may pose to the Republican government.[35]

In Bradley Thompson's *John Adams & the Spirit of Liberty*, the author argues that Adams was, as a matter of fact, not an aristocrat, but a republican, and that his most prominent writings fall within the republican thought of the founding era. Mayville agrees with Thompson about Adams not being an aristocrat in the sense of devotion to aristocratic privilege. However, according to Mayville, Adams was an aristocrat "to his own definition."[36] Also, unlike Federalists, who considered „overbearing majorities" as the root of social conflict, Adams centred his attention on „the designs of intriguing aristocratic minorities."[37]

Mayville shares Thompson's opinion that Adams was not a supporter of monarchy or aristocracy. He argues, however, that Adams does not embody the typical Federalist as portrayed by Thompson. While Adams shared the Federalists' aim of managing conflicts between the few and the many, he differed from individuals like Hamilton and Madison by identifying the few rather than the many as the greatest threat to the Republican government. This distinction is significant. When compared to other Federalists, Adams stands out for his beliefs about social power and his concerns about oligarchy in the United States. Unlike many of his peers, Adams did not assume that power resided primarily with the majority. Instead, he recognised that power tended to

[34] Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," 9.
[35] Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," 14.
[36] Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," 18.
[37] C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 258–266.

accumulate through advantages in education, attractiveness, family lineage, and particularly wealth, even in "the absence of formal aristocratic privileges."[38]

Moreover, in his letters to John Taylor of Caroline, Adams disagreed with the opinion of many "Jeffersonians," including Taylor, that education could ultimately eliminate all forms of aristocratic influence in the course of time. Taylor expressed his opinion as follows:

> The aristocracy of superior abilities will be regulated by the extent of the space between knowledge and ignorance; as the space contracts or widens, it will be diminished or increased; and if aristocracy may be thus diminished, it follows that it may be thus destroyed.[39]

Upon which Adams responded:

> What is the amount of this argument? Ignorance may be destroyed and knowledge increased *ad infinitum*[40]. And do you expect that all men are to become omniscient? Are your hopes founded upon an expectation that knowledge will one day be equally divided? If the time will never come when all men will have equal knowledge, it seems to follow, that some will know more than others; and that those who know most will have more influence than those who know least, or than those who know half way between the two extremes; and consequently will be aristocrats.[41]

In correspondence with Adams, Jefferson suggested that the power of wealth, family, and other qualities of fortune could be eradicated by educating citizens to honour only the truly wise and honest. Adams, on the other hand, debated that education served as a source of aristocratic influence. As an example, he used Harvard University and the number of students that had studied there. Subsequently, he asked:

> Are not these aristocrats? or, in other words, have they not had more influence than any equal number of uneducated men? In fact, these men governed the

---

[38] Mayville, "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite," 7.
[39] John Taylor, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Fredericksburg, VA.: Green and Cady, 1814), 12.
[40] again and again in the same way; forever
[41] John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations, by his Grandson Charles Francis Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1856), Vol. 6. 333.

> province from its first settlement; these men have governed, and still govern, the state. These men, in schools, academies, colleges, and universities; these men, in the shape of ministers, lawyers, and physicians; these men, in academies of arts and sciences, in agricultural societies, in historical societies, in medical societies and in antiquarian societies, in banking institutions and in Washington benevolent societies, govern the state.[42]

Although John Adams later became a member of the Federalist Party, his opinions often positioned him between the Federalists and Jeffersonians, reflecting his independent political views. Adams feared aristocratic tyranny more than the tyranny of the majority, seeing the elite as a greater threat to republican government. Nevertheless, he disagreed with the Democratic-Republicans, who believed education could eliminate aristocratic influence. Adams argued that disparities in knowledge and education would always create new forms of aristocracy. His divergent views, which separated him from both parties, caused him considerable difficulties in his day, but in modern history, he is considered one of the most important politicians in the history of the United States, precisely because of his independent opinions.

[42] Adams, *The Works of John Adams,* Vol. 6. 333–334.

2. ACADEMIC HISTORIAN VS. HOLLYWOOD HISTORIAN: HOW FILMS CONTRIBUTE TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PAST

Academic historians are scholars who specialise in studying, interpreting, and writing about history. They typically work in universities, research institutions, or museums. They aim to provide unbiased and historically accurate interpretations of events and facts. Also, they collect evidence from archives, articles, books, photographs and other forms of primary and secondary sources. Moreover, they publish their research in peer-reviewed journals, academic presses, textbooks and so on. Many academic historians are educators, meaning that they usually teach undergraduate and graduate courses and supervise theses and dissertations.[43] These historians should also consider the differences between the present and the past and avoid interpreting past events using contemporary values and ideas. Their texts are usually aimed at a specific academic audience, but they can also appeal to a broader public.[44]

On the other hand, Hollywood historians, or filmmakers, aim to make an enticing story, based at least partly on true events. Their object is to attract an audience, as large as possible, with the use of drama and enriching the plot through a love story, sex, intense emotional moments, or a happy ending. Moreover, they incorporate a presentist perspective into their narrative, meaning that they blend modern–day attitudes with historical storytelling. However, their main goal is to generate revenue to cover the production costs and possibly profit.[45]

To continue, there has been a dispute between these two groups over whether filmmakers are capable of presenting history with the same accuracy and usefulness as academics and if they can be considered historians. In *History on Film/Film on History*, the author, historian Robert Rosenstone, claims that in the 1980s and early 1990s, many historians regarded films about history with a simplistic view, without considering its potential, the same way he used to. Specifically, they criticised films for their inaccuracies of historical events and simply did not take into account filmmakers' specific way of storytelling.[46] The author states that it took him over ten years to realise that filmmakers can be considered historians, although their methods of researching and

[43] "What is a Historian and How Do You Become One?," Norwich University, accessed May 14, 2024, https://online.norwich.edu/online/about/resource-library/what-historian-and-how-do-you-become-one.
[44] Peter J. Beck, *Presenting History: Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173.
[45] Peter J. Beck, *Presenting History: Past and Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 173.
[46] Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 7.

working with the past must differ from the ones used in traditional written history.[47] Moreover, dramatic films differ from traditional history, which merely emphasizes certain aspects of the past, such as people or events, by inventing or making up new facts and features that are then presented as significant and important to the story.[48]

The author further deals with the director Oliver Stone and the critique that he received for some of his films, which were usually inspired by true events, but not exactly precise in historical accuracy. Rosenstone gives an example of the clash between academics and filmmakers for Stone's misinterpretation of history; "how dare Stone, some critics say, call himself a 'historian' or 'cinematic historian', when he is nothing but a Hollywood filmmaker."[49] Furthermore, Robert Rosenstone defends the director and other filmmakers, claiming that he thinks of them as historians.[50] He defines the word "historian" as "someone who devotes a significant part of her or his working career to making meaning (in whatever medium) out of the past."[51] However, he is aware that when showing history in films, different methods are used compared to traditional historical writing. Films focus more on creating emotional bonds, making viewers feel like they are experiencing the events. Subsequently, he argues that, like traditional historians, filmmakers contribute to our understanding of history, but do so by emphasizing feelings.[52] Moreover, to prove that filmmakers can be considered historians, he uses an older definition of history, one that dates back to the nineteenth century. This view portrays history not only as an exact description of events that happened but as accepting the following:

> The notion that history is no more (and no less) than the attempt to recount, explain, and interpret the past, to give meaning to events, moments, movements, people, periods of time that have vanished.[53]

Thus, both filmmakers and academics aim to make sense of the past, although they use different methods to do so.

---

[47] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 8.
[48] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 9.
[49] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 130.
[50] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 131.
[51] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 136.
[52] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 137.
[53] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 150.

Robert Brent Toplin, a historian, in his *The Filmmaker as Historian,* shares Rosenstone's thoughts, claiming that film as a means of depicting history has become so popular that it makes sense to consider filmmakers historians. He noted that even though filmmakers have a different approach to dealing with history than academics, their films and documentaries usually offer useful insights into historical events.[54]

In *The Historian Encounters Film: A Historiography*, a journal article by Robert Toplin and Jason Eudy, the authors argue that although some academics criticise the work of filmmakers for historical inaccuracies or for blending together fantasy and reality, most take a less critical view of the issue. While acknowledging that Hollywood films tend to simplify details, manipulate facts and misrepresent historical records, they contend that numerous Hollywood movies deserve professional study. These academics appreciate films not only for their depiction of history, but also for the additional insights that have emerged from studying these films. Additionally, the authors say that many historians focus less on how filmmakers interpret history and pay more attention to how films comment on current issues, incorporating presentism into their narrative. They argue that artists frequently use historical settings to reflect on current "economic, social, and political problems."[55] In summary, the article argues that filmmakers can be considered historians because their work involves interpreting, representing and engaging with the past, although through different means and in different ways than traditional written history.

To summarize, the debate on whether filmmakers can be considered historians reveals that the issue is more complicated and comprehensive than just saying yes or no. The authors mentioned in this chapter argue that filmmakers interpret and give meaning to the past using different methods than academic historians. However, this does not detract from their ability to teach and pass it on. Ultimately, they advocate for recognising filmmakers as historians and argue that their work contributes to the understanding of the past.

This leads to another topic that is closely related to what has been discussed here, and that is whether films can teach history. According to Rosenstone, to fully understand how film depicts the past, one needs more than just words on a page. People need moving

---

[54] Robert B. Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988): 1210–1227. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1873536.
[55] Robert B. Toplin, and Jason Eudy, "The Historian Encounters Film: A Historiography," *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 4, (Summer 2002): 9. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163542.

images, sound, and music. He claims that words alone are limiting and cannot capture the full experience of film.[56] Additionally, he argues that the written history and history depicted in the film share two key similarities: both refer to real events, moments, and motions from the past, and both contain elements of the fictional and the unreal, shaped by conventions people have created over time to discuss and interpret our past. He claims that:

> To accept film, especially the dramatic feature film, as being able to convey a kind of serious history (with a capital H) runs against just about everything we have learned since our earliest days in school.[57]

To continue, Robert Rosenstone says that "blockbuster history films, mini-series, documentaries, docudramas" are constantly becoming more and more important for our relationship with the past and comprehending history. Excluding them from our exploration of history means ignoring an important way through which many people learn about the past.[58]

Moreover, in his book, the author states that it is not his intention to undermine the important contributions of traditional written history. He recognises the progress that history has made over the centuries, especially the innovative research methods developed in the last 50 years.[59] These advancements have enabled a much more comprehensive understanding of humanity that previous generations of historians could not have imagined. As a result of such efforts, it is possible nowadays to see the perspectives of those who did not have the right to express their opinions, such as women, slaves, workers and more. Moreover, we are now able not only to hear their opinions but to see them too. This challenges the long–time belief that an accurate history can only be conveyed through the written word.[60] In addition, Rosenstone believes that words and images interpret the world differently. A film can never do what a book can, however, a book cannot fully capture what a film does. Therefore, history depicted through these two distinct media must be evaluated with the use of different standards.[61]

---

[56] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 1.
[57] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 2.
[58] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 4.
[59] The book is from the year 2024.
[60] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 6.
[61] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 7.

Benjamin Leff, in his *Popular Culture as Historical Text: Using Mass Media to Teach American History,* holds a similar view of the capability of teaching history through film as Rosenstone. He claims that historians should not view sources like "films, music, TV, periodicals or fashion"[62] as an accurate reflection of how people lived during a specific historical period but as "texts" created from specific perspectives for particular purposes.[63]

Since popular culture is produced for and enjoyed by a large audience, it often reflects the common cultural understandings of its time. Therefore, "popular films, TV shows, music, fashion trends, and sports events" do not solely function as entertainment; they are also valuable tools for studying history because they help to understand how people used to view the world.[64]

Contrary to these views is Richard Bernstein, a war historian, who in *Can Movies Teach History?* expresses concern about popular culture teaching history. He points out that Hollywood's portrayal of history is far from the truth. While filmmakers may accurately depict costumes and settings, they often misinterpret the actual events. As an example, he highlights the movie Fat Man and Little Boy, which focuses on American efforts at Los Alamos to develop the first atomic bomb. He criticises the film for its inaccuracies and says that these untruths undermine its historical value. Moreover, he undermines the ability of filmmakers to act as historians:

> Movie makers and television producers have become our most powerful, though perhaps not our most careful, historians. It seems fair to say that more people are getting their history, or what they think is history, from the movies these days than from the standard history books. The phenomenon is probably unavoidable, yet, if the history as presented by the movies turns out to be a muddy blur of fantasy and fact, the consequences cannot be good.

Moreover, Bernstein criticises the use of fiction in historical films. He questions whether the addition of fictional elements to historical films is really necessary, in order to enhance the film's drama. He argues that sometimes real historical facts are more convincing and dramatic than any fictional version could be. Moreover, the author

---

[62] Benjamin J. J. Leff, "Popular Culture as Historical Text: Using Mass Media to Teach American History," *The History Teacher* 50, no. 2 (February 2017): 227.
[63] Leff, "Popular Culture as Historical Text," 228–229.
[64] Leff, "Popular Culture as Historical Text," 230.

suggests that filmmakers do not need to change or exaggerate these facts in order to make compelling and powerful films. Instead, they should believe that the actual events are interesting enough to engage the audience.

He concludes with the opinion that when filmmakers change known facts, whether they mean to or not, to create a dramatic or commercial effect, they move from poetic truth to historical falsification. Moreover, he claims that by presenting events that never happened as reality and preferring an attractive narrative to the truth, filmmakers compromise their art and historical credibility.[65]

[65] Richard Bernstein, "Can Movies Teach History?," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1989.

3. ADAMS, JEFFERSON, AND HAMILTON: IDEOLOGICAL BATTLES

The first mention of the fear of the few and the fear of the many is when John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Dr. Benjamin Franklin are in France as ambassadors, talking about an upcoming convention in Philadelphia concerning a binding constitution. Jefferson presumes that any constitutional document from Philadelphia will likely be as imbued with compromises as the Declaration of Independence. He says: "I am increasingly persuaded that the earth belongs exclusively to the living and that one generation has no more right to bind another to its laws and judgements than one independent nation has the right to command another."[66]

Essentially, Jefferson argues that each generation has the right to govern itself and make its own laws without being constrained or bound by the decisions of other generations, thus criticising the idea of creating a constitution. Adams seems perturbed by this opinion, arguing that the Constitution should, as those written for the individual states, "establish the stability and the long-term legality essential to the continuation of a civilised society."[67] Jefferson, looking unbothered by this, answers: "Yes, possibly. But I fear it could prove a breach in the integrity of our revolutionary ideals through which will pour the forces of reaction."[68] In other words, Jefferson agrees with Adams but also expresses concerns that the Constitution, if not carefully constructed, could undermine the revolutionary principles for which the Founding Fathers had fought. Subsequently, Adams looks anxiously at Dr. Franklin and utters: "Doctor, Mr. Jefferson's pet topic is not the artful arrangement of political power, but the cordoning off a space in which no power exists at all,"[69] and proceeds to call Jefferson "a walking contradiction." By referring to him as such, Adams implies that his advocating for a disempowered space, while involved in politics, is inherently inconsistent. Moreover, trying to persuade Jefferson, Adams supports his belief in the Constitution and asks: "And what is government ultimately but the putting into effect of the lessons which we have learned in dealing with the contradictions in our own characters?"[70] Jefferson replies: "You have a disconcerting lack of faith in your fellow man, Mr. A, and in yourself, if I may say."[71] Adams smiles and says to Jefferson that he, on the other hand, shows unwavering faith

[66] *John Adams*, dir. by Tom Hooper, (HBO Films, et al., 2008), 25:35–25:52.
[67] *John Adams*, Reunion, 26:02–26:11.
[68] *John Adams*, Reunion, 26:11–26:22.
[69] *John Adams*, Reunion, 26:23–26:34.
[70] *John Adams,* Reunion, 26:44–26:53.
[71] *John Adams,* Reunion, 26:54–27:00.

in mediocre people. This shows both the Founding Fathers' stances on the Constitution's creation and the division of power at that time. On one hand, Thomas Jefferson places his trust in the majority, whereas John Adams seems to be supportive of the governance of the few.

At the beginning of the episode *Unite or Die*, Adams, in the role of a vice president, addresses Congress with his proposal to designate the president. The scene delves into the depiction of monarchic titles that are introduced by Adams. He argues that the mere title "the president" is unworthy of his status because there are presidents of various roles, for example "presidents of fire companies and cricket clubs."[72] The members of Congress look at him as if he had gone mad and accuse him of wasting their time with such foolishness. Adams' argument, and presumably the reason for his actions, was: "The office of president must have no equal in the world."[73] When subsequently questioned if he had any suggestions for a title in mind, Adams listed several: "His Highness the President," "His Esteemed Majesty the President", or "His Excellency the Supreme Commander in Chief."[74] As a result, a congressman tells him that perhaps Adams has not had the chance to read the Constitution yet, which specifically says: "No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States."[75] In the following scene, where they take a vote on whether those titles will address the president, all congressman except one vigorously express their opposition to the proposals and laugh at him en masse[76]. Adams is portrayed as a fool, despised by all, rather than as a misunderstood prophet, although he certainly had no bad intentions. This was the beginning of Adams's not particularly successful period in the political sphere, as he was subsequently undesirable in Washington's cabinet.

It is depicted later in a scene, where the president directs Adams to leave the room after a meeting of Washington's closest, including Hamilton, Jefferson and Adams: "There are cabinet matters that I would like to discuss. If you would excuse us, Mr. Adams."[77] Adams seems flabbergasted at Washington's words, especially considering his position as the vice president. Additionally, when Adams leaves, he says "Mr. President" and nods his head as a sign of respect, upon which Washington utters: "Mr. President and

[72] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 0:20–0:23.
[73] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 0:43–0:48.
[74] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 1:08–1:25.
[75] Article I, Section 9, Clause 8 in the Constitution of the United States.
[76] All together
[77] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 11:53–12:00.

nothing more."[78] It is evident that Washington was uncomfortable with Adams' views about the monarchic titles, quite understandably, given that it had not been long since the United States gained independence from Great Britain.

Moreover, in the same scene, shortly before Washington sent Adams away, an essential clash between Hamilton and Jefferson had taken place about the functioning of the state and the scope of the government. Jefferson tells Hamilton that he has returned from "revolutionary France, where the streets are filled with the songs of liberty and brotherhood and the overthrow of our ancient tyrannies of Europe,"[79] and complains about the current events in the United States, where the only issues are "money and banks and authority." Moreover, he doubts the purpose of the Treasury Department. Hamilton argues that it is necessary to deal with such problems and suggests that Congress should assume all the debts accrued by the individual states during the war by establishing a national bank. The idea behind this move is to enhance the likelihood of other nations to lend the United States money, considering that the states would owe their debts to Congress and not to the individual states. Jefferson then expresses his concern about the increased power of the central government. What is more, he is concerned about the possible consequences of the accumulation of finances in the Northern states. He argues that if the federal government is predominantly located in the North, it would lead to corruption and an imbalance of wealth and influence to the detriment of the Southern states. Hamilton agrees with him to some degree, however, arguments with a citation from the Federalist Papers: "If men were angels, then no government would be necessary."[80] This dispute between them is exactly as Jefferson once described, that they are fighting like two cocks. Nevertheless, Adams is sitting in between them, turning his head each time one of the men speaks, and it seems like he would like to end the argument but does not know how. He then intervenes in their quarrel, trying to be impartial and says:

> There can be no question, our nation cannot bind together without powerful central government. But we must also accommodate the needs of our constituent states, both north and south. The power of one must check and balance the other.[81]

[78] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 12:23–12:25.
[79] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 8:40–8:50.
[80] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 10:51–11:00.
[81] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 11:02–11:22.

It is clear that Adams is trying to find a compromise between the two parties while simultaneously endeavouring not to antagonise either side. He had mixed opinions about the narratives of how to govern the state. Still, most importantly, he was generally opposed to political parties, as he stated in a conversation with Dr. Rush:

> I hear that we are called federalists now because we believe in a strong central government. And our opponents now style themselves Republicans because they believe in the sovereignty of the people. Ha! I dread a division of our Republic into parties, doctor.[82]

Yet, it is shown in the miniseries that he was more inclined to the rule of one or the few rather than the many. The miniseries mentions this topic but does not delve deeper into who "the few" are. Instead, it generally presents Adams' fear of mob rule and his preference for a stable government led by knowledgeable and capable individuals. Although it is not expanded upon in the miniseries, it is evident from the theoretical part of the thesis that Adams perceives "the few" as the educated upper class, especially from the northern states, who were well-versed in law and philosophy. Jefferson, on the other hand, supported the power of the people and strongly disagreed with the aggregation of power in a central government. They both exchange their opinions in a discussion about the president:

> JEFFERSON: He has too much power as I feared, and the congress has too little. He is a monarch in all but name.
> ADAMS: I am no believer in monarchy as such, as you well know. But I have seen the result of too many mobs to entrust them with the government, sir.[83]

The miniseries offers insight into the perspectives of these three Founding Fathers on issues such as the creation of a binding constitution, the role of government, and the distribution of power between states and the federal government. However, it provides rather a glimpse into the problem but does not dwell on it much. Nevertheless, it presents a similar topic which deals with the clash of the parties and John Adams, which is closely related to the division of support between the few and the many, and that is a conflict

[82] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 15:28–15:53.
[83] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 20:00–20:17.

involving the politics and diplomacy of the United States during the war between France and Great Britain.

In one scene, Hamilton and Jefferson walk out of a room after a meeting, arguing, and Washington looks distressed. Although the relationship between Adams and President Washington is strained because of the aforementioned disagreements, Adams awaits him in front of the room to tell him that he is going away due to the approaching yellow fever season and also because his daughter is getting married. Subsequently, Washington asks him if he would join him for lunch, as he is in need of "more reasonable company." He then tells him about the conflict in France, which puts the United States in a difficult position, as it is not possible for them to both trade with Great Britain and aid its enemy concurrently. Adams suggests him to consult this matter with the Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, and the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, though it seems that he knows these two cannot agree on anything, so he perhaps insinuates it was a mistake when Washington expelled him from his cabinet. Washington expresses his concerns as follows: "Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Hamilton can agree on nothing. I fear that we will be drawn into the perpetual European conflict."[84] Adams is aware of his chance to regain the President's trust, and as with the dispute between Jefferson and Hamilton over the ways of running the government, he seeks a compromise: "I would advise neutrality, sir. Avoid any hostilities or any show of support. America must be beholden to no one, neither England nor France."[85] Lastly, Adams tells the president that he plays a crucial role in balancing both sides and that chaos would ensue without him. This shows the ideological division between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, with one side supporting the British and the other the French. Moreover, Washington's invitation to Adams for lunch, where he sought "more reasonable company," suggests that Washington recognised Adams' experience and wisdom. Although their relationship has been marked by past disagreements, respect prevails between Adams and Washington. The series shows that despite their differences, both men are committed to the same goal: the stability and success of the United States. Furthermore, it portrays that Adams valued his country's independence and sovereignty more than partisan interests and his personal disagreements with the president.

[84] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 24:03–24:13.
[85] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 24:13–24:25.

Later, Hamilton and Adams are walking in the woods and talking about the upcoming elections of the new president. Hamilton tells Adams that if Washington would not candidate for the second term, he would be their party's first choice, because he is the kind of man who respects balance, which is precisely what they need. Moreover, he says about Jefferson that he "suffers from a womanish attachment to France,"[86] and that "There are those who say that Mr. Jefferson is more Frenchman than American."[87] Adams seems offended by Hamilton's words and defends his friend: "That is an unfair attack on an old and dear friend. Thomas is of a most unbiased constitution."[88] Also, he is sort of manipulating Adams, saying that regardless of Adams' lack of concern for the election's outcome, he trusts him to prioritise the advancement of good governance. Moreover, according to him, the Republicans have gained confidence due to the presence of a French envoy who is inciting anti-British sentiment. This shows that Hamilton is trying to ingratiate himself with Adams and turn him against Jefferson and his Republicans. Despite Hamilton's patriotism, one of America's core values, he is portrayed as a villain in the miniseries because he lacks self-reflection and prioritises political gain over ethical principles.

In the following scene, during a meeting with the ambassador, Washington insists that in the matters of the war between Great Britain and France, the United States must remain neutral, as it is in their best interest as an independent nation. The French ambassador is insolent to the president, threatening to enlist American citizens in a war against Great Britain. After that, Hamilton makes a sarcastic comment: "the famous French diplomacy,"[89] apparently to mock the French while at the same time picking on Jefferson.

Subsequently, when Adams discusses this situation with Jefferson, he advises that they must compromise and not take the side of either England or France and that he agrees with the president about "the course of strict impartiality." Jefferson, on the other hand, thinks that impartiality would benefit the British, exactly as Hamilton desires. Jefferson calls Adams blind and unable to see Hamilton's plan, arguing, "Mr. Hamilton would have us British in our economy, British in our forms of government. British, John, in all but name."[90] Moreover, he criticizes some parts of the Constitution, upon which Adams tells

[86] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 27:54–27:58.
[87] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 27:58–28:03.
[88] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 28:04–28:11.
[89] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 30:46–30:50.
[90] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 31:37–31:47.

him that the current government is essential to hold the republic together. Otherwise, it would have collapsed a long time ago. As a result of this dispute, Jefferson offers the president his resignation, which comes as a surprise to Adams, who wants him to remain in his position.

Later, Adams meets the president, who tells him that he could not persuade Jefferson to stay in office because apparently, he wants to spend the rest of his days away from public life and "return to his book and crops."[91] Sitting hidden behind a door, Hamilton then comments: "It's interesting though, is it not, how political plants grow in the shade of retirement?" – just as plants grow in the shade of trees, such individuals may operate away from the public eye, yet still have a significant impact on political events or decisions. Washington pays no attention to this and focuses on the problems concerning the war: "This war between France and England threatens to tear us asunder. We are poised on the edge of a precipice. We must not allow ourselves to be pushed over the brink."[92] He is concerned about the disagreements between the Republicans and the Federalists and, at the same time, about their affection for France and Great Britain. Additionally, Hamilton remarks that "Ambassador Genet's visit has stirred a hornet's nest. The British government now considers us a belligerent nation for the very fact of having received him."[93] It is clear that Hamilton is trying to do everything in his power to persuade others to be on Great Britain's side and incite them against France.

Then follows a scene depicting the Senate's debate over the ratification of the Jay Treaty. The treaty aimed to resolve several issues between the United States and Great Britain. The Federalists supported the treaty, whereas the Republicans strongly opposed it. Moreover, the treaty also faced opposition from the American public. Nevertheless, President George Washington feared the consequences of a possible war with Britain, so he sided with Hamilton and appointed Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay to negotiate with the British. Although unpopular among many, the treaty ensured neutrality to the United States.[94]

It shows two parties, one supporting France and the other supporting Great Britain, having a heated debate and shouting at each other. Adams emphasises the fact that there are fifteen votes for and fifteen against, and if they cannot reach an agreement,

---

[91] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 34:15–34:20.
[92] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 34:28–34:40.
[93] *John Adams*, Unite or Die, 34:48–34-54.
[94] "John Jay's Treaty, 1794–95," Office of the Historian, accessed March 19, 2023, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/jay-treaty.

he will have the casting vote. Adams is then shown voting for ratification of the Jay Treaty to secure peace and also to respect the president's wishes. However, in reality, there was no need for Adams to cast a vote, as the vote was twenty to ten.[95] Perhaps, it was the intention of the producer to indicate which side Adams was inclined to.

At the beginning of the episode *Unnecessary War*, after John Adams was elected president and Thomas Jefferson as his vice president, they address a problem regarding France, which captured over three hundred American trading vessels, which later resulted in the two-year undeclared naval war known as Quasi-War. Adams is shown to be deeply concerned about this information, upon which Jefferson tells him: "You made a devil's pact with the British, their sworn enemy. And ours, I'd thought."[96] indicating that it is a consequence of supporting the Jay Treaty. Adams fears a possible conflict with France and replies with:

> It may be difficult, Thomas, if not impossible, for me to maintain neutrality, but to be drawn into war with either France or England when our own confederation is still so fragile would be suicidal. It could bankrupt the nation, divide the people even further, lead God knows where.[97]

Moreover, Adams seeks to settle this dispute with France by sending a delegation to strengthen their position in negotiations with the French Government. Subsequently, he asks Jefferson to be the one to represent the United States, since he thinks of him as the man most qualified for such a mission, given his favourable relationship with France. However, he refuses the offer, which exasperates Adams: "Do you tell me this as my vice president or as the head of your party?"[98] Jefferson tells him that they both hold different views on the ideal government. Additionally, he clearly expresses his hatred of Adams' cabinet, which he inherited after Washington, because it is full of "Hamilton's men," who are "determined upon a course of war with France."[99] Adams objects to this, arguing that he is "equally determined to prevent such a course."[100] However, according to Jefferson, the real danger to their revolution does not come from Paris, but from Adams' cabinet itself. This exchange between Adams and Jefferson depicts their differing perspectives

[95] Office of the Historian, "John Jay's Treaty, 1794–95."
[96] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 0:25–0:32.
[97] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 0:34–0:52.
[98] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 1:34–1:38.
[99] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 2:14–2:18.
[100] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 2:19–2:22.

on foreign relations and internal governance. On the one hand, Adams is trying his utmost to keep the peace between the United States and France and at the same time neutrality with Great Britain. On the other hand, Jefferson criticises his relationship with the Federalists and warns him of the growing hostility of his cabinet towards France. It also shows how their opinions start to diverge progressively, and their friendship starts to crumble.

To continue, in another scene, Adams and Jefferson discuss a report from France written by Mr. Marshall, the head of an American envoy sent to France, where it states that the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, Charles Talleyrand, demands a large sum of money from America in exchange for guaranteed peace. Adams is enraged by this and takes it as an insult, saying that he is left with no choice but to start arming their merchant vessels and fortifying the harbours. Moreover, he seeks to establish an army with General Washington as the leader. Jefferson argues that Washington is too old for leading an army and will submit to Hamilton. Furthermore, he claims that it would result in a provocation of the utmost degree. Adams is enraged and shouts at Jefferson: "And what precisely is Monsieur Talleyrand's unbridled contempt but a provocation?!"[101] Jefferson stays calm and yet again blames Adams' administration, saying that war has been its policy from the beginning. The president replies: "If there is to be a war, Mr. Vice President, it will be France's doing and not mine."[102] While Adams tries his best to prevent the war with France, Jefferson continues to criticize him and accuse him of being a Federalist sympathiser. Moreover, it is apparent that their relationship is deteriorating rapidly.

It is shown, once again, that the leaders of political parties are more inclined to fight against each other instead of prioritizing the prosperity of their country and doing everything in its best interest. In this particular case, Jefferson, although considered one of the most prominent Founding Fathers, is shown favouring his political party and affection for France over rational problem-solving, including helping Adams avoid the war. This highlights how political leaders prioritised factionalism over the interests of their country. Nevertheless, John Adams is portrayed as a determined leader, who is not afraid to stand out from the crowd and defend his beliefs, even though others oppose him for it.

[101] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 17:20–17:25.
[102] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 17:34–17:40.

Later, the Alien and Sedition Acts are being discussed. These laws extended the residency requirement for United States citizenship from five to fourteen years, authorized the president to deport any non-citizen deemed to be a threat to national security, without any form of due process or judicial review and criminalized the publication or utterance of "false, scandalous, and malicious" statements against the government or its officials. The Congress controlled by the Federalists viewed the Democratic-Republicans led by Thomas Jefferson, who were strongly supported by the French living in the United States, and their criticism as a threat to national security; hence, they passed these laws.[103]

Adams fears that the mentioned laws could exacerbate the already tense situation with France. At lunch with Jefferson, they discuss these acts, with Jefferson being strictly against them, saying that they are just a manner to silence the opposition. They exchange their opinions as follows:

> ADAMS: Well, I am a party of one, Thomas, as you well know.
> JEFFERSON: Why blacken your fragile reputation by an assault on the freedoms for which we both fought? Do you intend to ship out the entire French population of the United States along with any other luckless soul who happens to voice a contrary opinion?
> ADAMS: Well, if that contrary opinion threatens to divide the nation at a time when we must stand united, then yes, I will do just that. I am interested with the nation's safety, Thomas. Now these war measures will protect us from insurrection and subversion.
> JEFFERSON: There is no war.
> ADAMS: And that is the principle behind these measures... the prevention of war.[104]

Subsequently, Jefferson maintains that silencing free speech will not keep the country safe and, what is more, that it is against the Constitution. Adams argues that it was the people's representatives, who demanded these acts and asks Jefferson if he suggests ignoring the people's voice. These two Founding Fathers yet again clash in their political views. In the following scene, Adams is sitting on a bed, staring into space and

---

[103] "Alien and Sedition Acts (1798)," National Archives, accessed March 20, 2023. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/alien-and-sedition-acts.
[104] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 24:52–25:47.

seems troubled about whether to sign the laws. His wife Abigail persuades him to sign them, saying that for once, the people are with him, whereupon he signs them.

This debate over the Alien and Sedition Acts captures the fundamental tension between security and civil liberties in the American government. Adams's emphasis on implementing these laws reflects a commitment to national unity and protection from presumed threats, even at the expense of personal freedoms. In contrast, Jefferson persistently defends the principles of free speech and constitutional rights and warns of the dangers of excessive government power and suppression of opposition.

In a scene depicting a discussion between Hamilton and President Adams about the war between France and Great Britain, Hamilton says that if the British win the conflict, the Bourbons[105] will most probably regain the French throne. Thus, engaging with the present illegitimate government might have detrimental consequences, potentially resulting in a costly conflict with Britain that they could not afford. Adams is curious about what would happen if the French won. Hamilton gives him quite an insane answer, proposing a strategy to counter France's quest for a universal empire by seizing territories such as Spanish Florida and Louisiana. In addition, he proposes the separation of South America from Spain to prevent France from accessing the riches of Mexico and Peru through this route. Adams cannot believe what he is hearing, accusing Hamilton that his actions would lead to the dissolution of the nation. Subsequently, he tells him that he has never in his entire life heard "a man speak more like a fool."[106] Moreover, the president says: "May I inform you as well, sir, that I am in possession of intelligence which confirms that we are as likely to find a French army on these shores as we are on the moon!"[107] This heated conversation shows how determined Hamilton was to go to war with France and, at the same time, the persistence of Adams, who is doing everything he can to prevent it.

To continue, when talking to his advisors, including Mr. Pickney, they keep pounding the idea of war into him, mainly because the citizens of the United States would allegedly welcome such a war with France, and the Federalists would almost certainly win the next election. Adams calls his advisers "subservient to Hamilton," who he says would prefer to rule Adams if he could. Subsequently, he gets upset and fires them from

[105] A royal dynasty that ruled France from the late Middle Ages until the French Revolution in the late 18th century
[106] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 36:12–36:18.
[107] *John Adams*, Unnecessary War, 36:32–36:42.

their positions. Throughout these scenes, Adams is depicted as a strong-willed leader, who is determined to stand his ground and protect what he believes are the best interests of the nation. What is perhaps even more admirable is the fact that the whole nation is against him, including the political party he is a part of, yet he still maintains his beliefs.

At the end of the episode, Adams learns that a treaty has been signed with France and seems delighted by this information. Although he made peace, he alienated both Hamilton and Jefferson and possibly the nation. However, he proudly stood by his convictions, making him one of the most important politicians in American history.

4. JOHN ADAMS: HISTORY IN FILM

This chapter examines how the Founding Father, John Adams, is depicted in the *John Adams* miniseries. Moreover, it explores how Hollywood historians interpret history in film and what they do to make the story more compelling.

The first crucial depiction of the Founding Father John Adams is shown in the opening episode *Join or Die*. It is crucial because it shows the viewer Adams' character and courage. The episode features the Boston Massacre, which is an event that occurred on March 5, 1770, where after a confrontation from hundreds of American colonists, British soldiers shot and killed five of them.

After the incident occurred, John Adams was asked if he could represent the accused British soldiers in court, as all other lawyers have refused them. Before accepting this request, he visits Captain Preston and his soldiers in prison to hear their side of the story, telling them that he could provide only strictly impartial representation. Despite the strong anti-British sentiment, Adams believes that everyone deserves a fair trial. This shows his courage, given that he is willing to stand against public opinion, knowing that virtually all his fellow citizens will condemn him for it.

In the following scene, the people of Boston are marching through the city in memory of the murdered. Adams' cousin Sam criticises him for representing the soldiers and claiming that he should pick the right side to be on, to which Adams replies: "I am for the law, cousin, is there another side? I intend to prove that this colony is governed by the law!"[108] This scene proves what has been stated earlier, that John Adams is committed to justice and does not care for the opinions of others.

To continue, a trial of the British soldiers takes place. Adams is depicted as a zealous lawyer who does care for the opinions of the crowd and tries to defend the soldiers to the best of his ability. Although it seems that every man in the courtroom would like the soldiers to be hanged, judging by their constant chanting, Adams provides a solid defence. The viewer can feel the tension in these scenes, which are very dramatic. This is perhaps the aim of the producer, who is trying to arouse such feelings in the viewer and thus dramatize the story, making it more interesting to watch. This is a method used by Hollywood historians, as mentioned earlier in the thesis, to create a more emotionally powerful story that engages the audience. Moreover, in the miniseries, all the soldiers were acquitted as innocent at sentencing. This is, however, not historically accurate, as

[108] *John Adams*, Join or Die, 17:03–17:25.

two of the soldiers were charged with manslaughter.[109] This shows how filmmakers tend to change historical facts to suit their purposes, in this case, in order to portray John Adams as a hero who was able to free them all.

Another scene depicts John Adams yet again as the defender of basic human rights and shows how independent-minded he is. The scene follows the events of the Boston Tea Party, where American colonists dumped chests of British-imported tea into the water in order to protest against the over-taxation. After a man tries to unload cargo from the British ship, the crowd, at the command of Adams' cousin Sam, riots and chants, to tar the man (this was a brutal form of public punishment where a person is stripped to the waist or completely naked, and then covered in wood tar, in this case heated, before being coated with feathers). Adams witnesses the act and describes it as inhumane, urging his cousin to put an end to it: "For the love of God, Sam! This is barbarism! Barbarism!,"[110] with tears in his eyes. Subsequently, he asks Sam: "Do you approve of this? Do you approve of brutal and illegal acts to enforce a political principle, Sam?"[111] Adams is portrayed as the only person out of hundreds of those gathered who is against this doing, showing that he is not the one to be influenced by the opinions and acts of the majority. In addition, the practices of Hollywood historians can again be observed here. As mentioned, this miniseries was based on a book by historian David McCullough. However, there is no mention of this incident in the book, only that John Adams, despite "his hatred for mob action was exuberant over the event."[112] Therefore, the filmmakers have tried to create drama and tension by using a fictional scene to evoke emotion in the viewer.

To continue, at the beginning of the second episode *Independence*, after John Adams decided to represent Massachusetts at the First Continental Congress, it can be observed at this convention how Adams expresses scepticism towards the views of some delegates. They propose that after the Boston Tea Party, the Americans should not escalate the situation further and suggest the following peaceable measures, with Adams and his cousin sarcastically commenting:

Speaker: To publish a statement of the aforesaid to the inhabitants of British America.

---

[109] https://www.masshist.org/features/massacre/trials
[110] *John Adams*, Join or Die, 50:05–50:15.
[111] *John Adams*, Join or Die, 51:35–51:45.
[112] McCullough, *John Adams, 67.*

> Adams: Who need no reminders.
>
> Speaker: Two, to enter into a non-importation, non-consumption and non-exportation agreement of British goods.
>
> Adams: Which no one will honour.
>
> Speaker: And three, to prepare a loyal address to his majesty.
>
> Sam (cousin) to John Adams: Which His Majesty will not read.[113]

John Adams then concludes the scene by stating that "the business of this congress has been to achieve nothing."[114]

Following the beforementioned scene, Adams is depicted working in the field with his son, digging through manure barehanded and fertilising the soil. This is one of many scenes shown in the miniseries where it is perhaps the intention of the director to show that John Adams was just a plain man.

Furthermore, the show portrays the events of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, which marked the beginning of armed conflict between Britain and the American colonies. These battles showed the willingness of the American colonists to fight for their rights and freedoms and launched the Revolutionary War. John Adams arrives at the battlefield a moment after the fight and seems devastated by the sight of dead fellow citizens. Subsequently, he tells his wife:

> If you had seen them, Abigail. An army of plain country boys... With no experience of professional soldiering. But their faces shining like the sun through a church window. We must support them... With guns and leadership and faith in what they do.[115]

His wife then advises him: "Say that, John. Say that to the Congress."[116] Adams responds; "If I have to stand and rail until my voice breaks and my legs collapse beneath me... This time congress will act."[117] This event is portrayed in the miniseries as the turning point that convinced Adams to actively enter politics and defend the interests of his country and fellow citizens.

---

[113] *John Adams*, Independence, 0:53–1:15.
[114] *John Adams*, Independence, 1:26–1:29.
[115] *John Adams*, Independence, 9:55–10:24.
[116] *John Adams*, Independence, 10:27–10:33.
[117] *John Adams*, Independence, 10:34–10:46.

To continue, at the Second Continental Congress, it is discussed how to approach the recent clash between colonists and British soldiers. Some delegates are in favour of peace negotiations with King Charles because they do not want to escalate the situation any further. John Adams, on the other hand, is against the men who demand a diplomatic solution and argues that war is inevitable:

> The time for negotiation is past. The actions of the British army at Lexington and Concord speak plainly enough. If we wish to regain our natural-born rights as Englishmen... Then we must fight for them.[118]

Although John Adams knew he would not have the support of the majority, he is portrayed as maintaining his beliefs and saying them proudly in front of the delegates.

Later in the episode, the idea of declaring independence arises. In this crucial scene, John Adams is depicted as being truly passionate about the idea of independence and defends it. Moreover, Adams proposes that they ally with France, since Great Britain is their common enemy. He also emphasizes that Britain cannot take them seriously until they become a sovereign state. In the following scene, where apparently Congress has been in session all day until dark, Adams is depicted as the main speaker, while the others are already tired, some even asleep. Yet he continues to assert his beliefs and views about the importance and necessity of declaring independence. The decision to declare independence is then postponed. Subsequently, it is then debated whether the Declaration of Independence should be signed. Adams gives a speech to the delegates about the importance of the decision that stands before them:

> Measures which will affect the lives of millions are now before us – and We must expect a great expense of blood to obtain them. But we must always remember that a free constitution of civil government cannot be purchased at too dear a rate, as there is nothing on this side of Jerusalem of greater importance to mankind.[119]

It is shown that Adams has faith in his country and its future. He tries to persuade congressmen to support him and others who are pro-independence, arguing that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the likes of which many countries have never had, to choose their own government: “How few of the human race have ever had an opportunity

[118] *John Adams*, Independence, 14:36–14:54.
[119] *John Adams*, Independence, 1:11:45–1:12:20.

of choosing a system of government for themselves and their children?"[120] After finishing his speech, all the men who share his opinions stand up, bang their sticks on the ground, pat him on the back and say "well done" collectively. Adams is portrayed here as a kind of prophet, showing the path the colonists should follow. His vision and determination inspire others, and they show their support. Moreover, it can again be observed how filmmakers can dramatize important historical moments. Just a moment before John Adams begins his speech, there is a dramatic silence, and one can see a flash of light and hear a thunder strike, as if he is guided by some higher power. One can only speculate how it actually happened; however, it shows the use of dramatization by Hollywood historians, who make such scenes memorable.

The next episode *Don´t Tread on Me,* starts with Adams going to France as a diplomat to gain France's support in America's conflict with Great Britain. Adams sets off on a boat voyage with his son. At sea, they encounter a British ship, which they engage. Adams wants to stay on the top deck of the ship, but the captain firmly sends him to his cabin. However, after a while, Adams decides to disobey the order, so he grabs his rifle and runs on deck to help in the fight. He is even depicted firing his rifle at the ship and helping the ship's crew. Moreover, after one of the soldiers on the ship has his leg accidentally crushed by a cannon that unexpectedly kicked after firing, Adams immediately runs to the soldier's aid and carries him to the ship's cabin to the doctor, whom he helps with the operation. This is another example of portraying John Adams as a plain man, with a sense of duty and willingness to the cause.

Later in the episode, the viewer can witness the diplomacy between Adams and the French. Moreover, contrary to the so far very positive portrayal of Adams as a prophet and exceptional politician, here he is presented rather differently. Adams arrives in France with a strong sense of urgency, eager to discuss politics and secure support for the American cause. However, he soon discovers that the French are not very fond of the art of politics and, moreover, do not often get involved in addressing serious topics, such as the war. When Adams meets Benjamin Franklin, who is also acting as a diplomat in France, he urges him to deal with political matters at once: "Our mission here requires expedition, doctor."[121] Franklin laughs at his face and tells Adams that politics are dealt with differently in France: "No, here in France, you must practice the art of accomplishing

[120] *John Adams*, Independence, 1:13:23–1:13:33.
[121] *John Adams*, Don't Tread on Me, 23:30–23:33.

much while appearing to accomplish little."[122] After hearing this, Adams looks annoyed and displeased. Moreover, when he says to Franklin he intends to secure an audience with French King Louis, the doctor laughs at him again: "You do not demand an audience at Versailles, Mr. Adams. One is invited."[123]

What follows is a remarkable scene, which depicts John Adams as an intelligent visionary and a gifted orator. At a dinner with many Frenchmen, including the future first French ambassador to America, Adams is asked if he has had the opportunity to attend the opera, to which he replies:

> No, I am afraid my occupation allows me little time for the finer arts. No, I must study politics and war, you see, so that my sons will have the liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons must study navigation, commerce and agriculture, so that their children will have the right to study painting, poetry and music.[124]

The entire table applauds him for saying such wise words, including Franklin nodding his head supportively. However, this was one of the very few moments during his diplomacy in France where he was admired or respected by the locals. The show further reveals his failures in negotiating with the French and also the gradual deterioration of his personal relationship with Benjamin Franklin. He is portrayed as unable to adapt to local customs and continues to insult the French, although perhaps unintentionally. Subsequently, he is recalled from France and sent to Holland to further support the American cause.

The episode *Reunion* then begins with a scene where John Adams is informed that the Dutch are willing to lend the United States two million dollars after Adams' negotiations. This was a pleasant change for him to achieve after the failures in France. Further in the episode, John Adams travels to Great Britain as the first United States Minister Plenipotentiary. In both Holland and Great Britain, Adams is portrayed as a capable diplomat.

When meeting the King, he looks rather nervous and uncomfortable, yet is very polite and says he feels honoured to be the first to stand in the presence of His Majesty in a diplomatic character. Furthermore, Adams hopes that he and the king will be able to

---

[122] *John Adams*, Don´t Tread on Me, 23:34–23:43.
[123] *John Adams*, Don´t Tread on Me, 23:54–23:59.
[124] *John Adams*, Don´t Tread on Me, 31:13–31:52.

find a way to mend relations not only between the United States and Great Britain, but also between people who have so much in common. King George responds with what looks to be surprising for Adams, as he seems to not have expected such an answer:

> The circumstances of this audience are so extraordinary. The language you have now held is so extremely proper and the feelings you have discovered so justly adapted to the occasion, that I not only receive with pleasure the assurance of the friendly disposition of the United States, but I am very glad that the choice has fallen on you to be their minister.[125]

Adams looks pleased and touched at the same time by the King's words. Adams' doing in Holland and Great Britain was quite different from his actions in France. There he was portrayed as a rushed politician who could not adapt. In addition to that, very unpopular. On the other hand, his subsequent diplomatic work proves that he was certainly not incompetent, and the miniseries suggests that the French and their manners are more likely to be at fault.

To conclude, John Adams is depicted as a courageous and independent-minded man who does not fear to express his opinion even at the risk of being disliked. Moreover, he is portrayed as a kind of prophet, as evidenced by his sophisticated speeches. His actions shown in the miniseries also prove his capabilities of being a great politician and a capable diplomat. In addition to this, one can also see the doings of Hollywood historians, or filmmakers. The story is often depicted differently than either the book or reality. There are scenes added to the miniseries that either did not actually happen or are far-fetched. Moreover, the filmmakers tend to dramatize the story and try to arouse emotions in the viewer. What is more, in this case, they also emphasised the love relationship between John Adams and his wife Abigail. For example, when John is in Paris, it is shown that his wife comes to visit him. This, however, never happened and is merely the work of historians trying to attract the audience with a romantic story.

[125] *John Adams*, Reunion, 38:10–38:45.

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis deals with the presentation and interpretation of John Adams and his role in shaping American democracy in the television miniseries *John Adams*. It also examines the different approaches and narratives in the debate over the form of the U.S. Constitution between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. Moreover, it compares the differences between academic and Hollywood historians and examines the depiction of John Adams in the miniseries.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the clash between two American political parties, the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans, over issues regarding the ideal form of government and the future direction of the United States. Additionally, it deals with the views of John Adams on these issues, but separately, since his opinions often positioned him between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. It explains that the Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, were supporters of the Constitution and believed in a strong central government. They viewed a powerful executive branch as essential for maintaining order and protecting individual liberties. Moreover, they feared the rule of the majority, as it would cause oppression, and supported the rule of the few. In contrast, Democratic-Republicans led by Thomas Jefferson advocated for a decentralized government and supported the rule of the majority, believing in ordinary citizens. John Adams, although later aligned with the Federalists, held unique views. Unlike many Federalists, Adams viewed the few, rather than the many, as the greatest threat to republican government. He believed that the elite few, characterized by wealth, birth, and beauty, would retain overwhelming power and could undermine efficient government.

The second chapter contrasts the academic historians and Hollywood historians in their approaches to presenting history. It describes that academic historians aim for unbiased, accurate interpretations and usually work in universities and research institutions and write academic articles and books. They emphasize the importance of context and avoid using contemporary values to interpret past events, in other words, presentism. On the other hand, Hollywood filmmakers prioritize adding drama to attract large audiences, often blending historical facts with modern perspectives and fictional elements. The chapter continues with the debate over whether filmmakers can be considered historians. The majority of authors mentioned in this chapter share the idea that filmmakers can be considered historians. However, one must take into account that these Hollywood historians use different methods of presenting history than scholars. The

authors claim that filmmakers make a significant contribution to the teaching of history, even though it differs from traditional written history.

The third chapter deals with the depiction of the ideological and political clash between the Founding Fathers John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton. A significant clash occurs between Jefferson and Adams in a debate over the necessity of a binding constitution. Jefferson argues against it, whereas Adams believes in the stability that a constitution would provide, which is essential for a civilised society. Moreover, the chapter shows Adams' troubled period, after he proposed to call the president by monarchic titles and was met with ridicule. The chapter also touches upon the conflict between France and Great Britain and the involvement of the United States. Moreover, it shows that the Federalists, led by Hamilton, favour the British, whereas Democratic-Republicans support France. Both sides are trying to bring Adams on their side, however, he remains neutral. What is more, after he became president, he succeeded in maintaining neutrality and peace with both France and Great Britain.

The fourth and last chapter delves into the depiction of John Adams and the techniques used by Hollywood historians in the miniseries. It presents numerous events portraying Adams' character. Furthermore, it highlights Adams' courage, starting with his defence of British soldiers after the Boston Massacre. Moreover, it shows him as a prophet, after a number of exceptional speeches he gave. The chapter also portrays Adams' diplomatic efforts, showing both his failures in France and successes in Holland and Great Britain. He is overall depicted as a heroic figure, unafraid to express his opinions. To continue, the chapter shows how Hollywood historians dramatize scenes to engage viewers, sometimes changing historical facts for emotional impact. For example, in the miniseries, the romantic relationship between Adams and his wife is greatly emphasized, aiming to make a romantic story.

In conclusion, this thesis explores the ideological and political clashes between the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans and highlights John Adams' position between these two factions. Also, it shows that the popular culture is capable of presenting history. The depiction of John Adams in the miniseries demonstrates his importance in American history.

RESUMÉ

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vyobrazením americké historie v televizní minisérii John Adams. Jelikož byl tento politik jedním z otců zakladatelů, jeho důležitost v historii Spojených států amerických nelze zpochybňovat. Cílem této práce je zjistit, jak televizní minisérie zobrazuje americkou historii a dobu, o které seriál pojednává. Na úvodu práce jsou definovány různé koncepty a pojmy, které jsou nezbytné pro zařazení do kontextu. Teoretická část, která se skládá ze dvou kapitol tak definuje pojmy úzce se spojující s americkou historií a politikou. Po teoretické části následuje praktická část práce, která se skládá také ze dvou kapitol. Tyto kapitoly jsou primárně zaměřené na konkrétní zobrazení americké historie a představitelů důležitých pro americkou historii v televizní minisérii John Adams.

Úvod této bakalářské práce nejdříve stručně představuje analyzovanou televizní minisérii. Následně úvodní kapitola navazuje představením každé ze čtyř kapitol této práce. Je zde uvedeno, o čem každá kapitola pojednává a jakou problematikou se zabývá.

První kapitola této bakalářské práce pojednává o teoretickém zobrazení dvou hlavních politických stran doby, o které televizní minisérie John Adams pojednává. Uvádí také střety mezi jednotlivými politickými stranami a jejich představiteli. V této kapitole je dále uvedeno, že federalisté, v čele s Alexanderem Hamiltonem byli zastánci ústavy. Federalisté se kromě tohoto obávali vlády většiny a věřili v silnou centrální moc. Tato kapitola dále uvádí federalisty do kontrastu s demokratickými republikány. Demokratičtí republikáni v čele s Thomasem Jeffersonem naopak od federalistů podporovali vládu většiny. Je zde také uvedeno, že Demokratičtí republikáni věřili v decentralizovanou vládu, jelikož věřili v občany Spojených států amerických. Závěrem kapitola uvádí postoj Johna Adamse k vládě většiny a menšiny. Přestože byl Adams nestranný a později kandidoval za Federalisty, jeho postoje souhlasily s postoji Demokratických republikánů, tedy s podporou vlády většiny. Zastával tedy decentralizovanou vládu a kladl důvěru v obyvatele.

Druhá kapitola této bakalářské práce definuje pojmy jako akademický historik a hollywoodský historik. Akademičtí historici jsou zde definováni jako lidé, kteří usilují o objektivní a exaktní výklad a výuku historie. Jelikož kladou důraz na přesnost a zakládají si na objektivní interpretaci významných historických událostí, řada z nich pracuje a vyučuje na univerzitách, podílí se na výzkumech nebo píše různé vědecké články či knihy. Akademičtí historici jsou následně komparováni s hollywoodskými historiky, kteří často historii vykládají a interpretují jiným způsobem. Pojem hollywoodský historik je

definován jako filmař, který se zabývá zobrazením významných historických událostí v kinematografických snímcích. Velmi často se tak stává, že jsou různé detaily americké historie vynechány, zdůrazňovány, nebo naopak vynechány. V této kapitole je uvedeno, že hollywoodští historici si zakládají na dramatičnosti a věří, že právě ta jim přinese větší sledovanost a oblíbenost u široké veřejnosti spíše než exaktní pojetí historických událostí, jako by tomu bylo u přístupu akademických historiků. Tato kapitola dále navazuje debatou, zda právě již zmiňované hollywoodské historiky považovat za historiky. Většina autorů, které tato kapitola zmiňuje souhlasí s názorem, že hollywoodské historiky za historiky považovat lze. Závěrem jsou uvedeny argumenty těchto autorů, kteří se schodují na názoru, že rozdílné pojetí a interpretace významných amerických historických událostí neznamená, že by toto pojetí nebylo nesprávné. Hollywoodští historici zde tedy jsou definováni jako historici.

Třetí kapitola této bakalářské práce zobrazuje střety mezi otci zakladateli, tedy mezi Johnem Adamsem, Thomasem Jeffersonem a Alexandrem Hamiltonem. Střety mezi těmito politiky vyobrazeny v již zmiňované televizní minisérii John Adams jsou jak ideologické, tak politické. Je zde například popsán střet mezi Thomasem Jeffersonem a Johnem Adamsem, kdy se rozchází jejich názory v debatě o nutnosti závazné ústavy. Zatímco Jefferson je proti, Adams věří ve stabilitu, kterou by tato ústava zajistila a která je dle něho nezbytná pro civilizovanou společnost. Kapitola se dále také zabývá vyobrazením zapojení Spojených států amerických do konfliktu mezi Francií a Velkou Británií. Je zde také uvedeno, že obě strany, tedy jak Francie, tak Velká Británie se snaží dostat Johna Adamse na svou stranu, Adams dle svého přesvědčení však zůstává nestranný.

Čtvrtá a zároveň poslední kapitola bakalářské práce se zabývá vyobrazením Johna Adamse ve stejnojmenné televizní minisérii. Zabývá se také zkoumáním hollywoodských historiků a filmařů, jejich podílem na tvoření a ovlivňování populární kultury. Je zde také vyobrazeno, jakými technikami hollywoodští filmaři a historici k pojetí filmu přistupují. Tato kapitola dále uvádí významné události, které vykreslují Adamsovu postavu. Kapitola dále líčí jak Adamsovy úspěchy, tak i jeho neúspěchy. Dále je zde uvedeno, že je John Adams v minisérii vyobrazen jako hrdinská postava, která se nebojí vyjadřovat své názory a postoje a i když se s ním ostatní neshodují, za svými názory si Adams stojí. Jedna z technik, kterou hollywoodští historici použili v této minisérii bylo vytvoření romantického příběhu mezi Johnem Adamsem a jeho ženou Abigail Adamsovou, který byl značně dramatizován a zobrazován v televizní minisérii mnohem častěji, něž tomu

tak bylo v knižní předloze. Závěrečná kapitola této bakalářské práce sumarizuje všechny předchozí kapitoly této práce a uvozuje obecnější závěry. Je zde uveden stručný přehled a obsah jednotlivých kapitol bakalářské práce. Závěrem jsou zde uvedena dílčí zjištění z jednotlivých kapitol.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, John. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations, by his Grandson Charles Francis Adams, vol. 6*. Boston: Brown and Co., 1856.

"Alien and Sedition Acts (1798)." *National Archives*. Accessed March 20, 2023. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/alien-and-sedition-acts>.

"America's First Political Parties." *Students of History*. Accessed December 13, 2023, <https://www.studentsofhistory.com/federalists-republicans >.

Beck, Peter J. *Presenting History: Past and Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Bernstein, Richard. "Can Movies Teach History?" The New York Times, November 26, 1989.

Chambers, William Nisbet. "Party Development and the American Mainstream." In *The American Party Systems*, edited by William Nisbet Chambers, and Walter Dean Burnham, 3-33. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

"Democratic-Republican Party." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Democratic-Republican-Party>.

Farrand, Max. *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, Vol. 1*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Hooper, Tom. John Adams. HBO, 2008.

Jefferson, Thomas, and Paul L. Ford. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1892-1899.

Jefferson, Thomas. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Being His Autobiography, Correspondence, Reports, Messages, Addresses, and Other Writings, Official and Private*. New York: H. A. Washington.

"John Adams." Encyclopedia Britannica. Accessed February 17, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Adams-president-of-United-States>.

"John Jay's Treaty, 1794-95." *Office of the Historian*. Accessed March 19, 2023. <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1784-1800/jay-treaty>.

Leff, Benjamin J. J. "Popular Culture as Historical Text: Using Mass Media to Teach American History." *The History Teacher* 50, no. 2 (2017): 227-254. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44504480>.

Madison, James. "Federalist No. 10." In *The Federalist Papers*, edited by Clinton Rossiter. New York: New American Library, 1961.

Madison, James. *James Madison: Writings*. New York: The Library of America, 1999.

Mayville, Luke. "Fear of the Few: John Adams and the Power Elite." Polity 47, no. 1 (2015): 5-32. doi: 10.1057/pol.2015.1. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24540274>.

McCullough, David. *John Adams*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Merriam, C. E. "The Political Theory of Jefferson." *Political Science Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1902): 24-24. doi: 10.2307/2140379. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2140379>.

Morgan, Ted. *FDR: A Biography*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

"Perspectives on the Boston Massacre." Massachusetts Historical Society. Accessed May 14, 2024. <https://www.masshist.org/features/massacre/trials>.

Rosenstone, Robert A. *History on Film/Film on History*. New York: Routledge, 2024.

Stouzh, Gerald. *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970.

Taylor, John. *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States*. Fredericksburg, VA: Green and Cady, 1814.

Thompson, C. Bradley. *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998.

Toplin, Robert B., and Jason Eudy. "The Historian Encounters Film: A Historiography." *OAH Magazine of History* 16, no. 4 (2002): 7-12. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25163542>.

Toplin, Robert B. "The Filmmaker as Historian." The American Historical Review 93, no. 5 (1988): 1210-1227. doi: 10.2307/1873536. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1873536>.

"What is a Historian and How Do You Become One?" Norwich University. Accessed May 14, 2024, <https://online.norwich.edu/online/about/resource-library/what-historian-and-how-do-you-become-one>.

White, Kenneth John, and Matthew R. Kerbel. "Hamilton vs. Jefferson: How Political Parties Began." In *American Political Parties: Why They Formed, How They Function, and Where They're Headed*, 10-25. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2022.

Wills, Garry. *Explaining America: The Federalist*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001.