

# John Adams Unbound

## Exhibition Content

September 22, 2006 – April 29, 2007

Boston Public Library, Copley Square

## Introductory Panel:

*“Fame, Fortune, Power say some, are the Ends intended by a Library. The Service of God, Country, Clients, Fellow Men, say others. Which of these lie nearest my Heart?”*

Diary of John Adams, 1768

Believing at age 32 that an "*ample and well chosen Assortment of Books*" could serve seven possible ends—Fame, Fortune, Power, God, Country, Clients, and Fellow Men—John Adams began assembling one of the greatest private libraries in early America.

This extraordinary collection of more than 3,500 books is the culmination of the founding father's lifelong endeavor. We invite you today to explore John Adams's library, his remarkable life, and his deeply personal reflections on each of these seven themes.

## The History of the John Adams Library:

John Adams acknowledged in his diary that it would require much "*thought and care, as well as money... to assemble an ample and well chosen assortment of books.*" He took enormous pride in his library, and his books served as essential tools in his varied roles as student, lawyer, revolutionary, diplomat, president, and elder statesman. Toward the end of his life, Adams made arrangements for the library to continue serving the public good. At the age of 86, Adams deeded 2,742 volumes from his personal collection in 1822 to the Adams Academy, a boys' preparatory school to be built in his hometown of Quincy, Massachusetts.

Plans for the school languished and Adams's library, stored in a farmhouse behind the family home, remained unused for two decades after his death. In 1848, John Adams's grandson Charles Francis Adams arranged to transfer the collection to the Quincy Town House and later to the Town Hall. After the Adams Academy was finally completed in 1870, the books were installed in open stacks but sadly left exposed to theft and mutilation by students and autograph hunters.

In 1882, the John Adams Library was moved again to the new Thomas Crane Library in Quincy. It was carefully arranged, housed in a special alcove and marked with an elegant wooden plaque (displayed on the column to your right), but the collection received little public attention. Adams's great-grandson, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., ruefully noted that after ten years, the Adams Library had "been consulted by but two persons, one of the two being myself."

As the Boston Public Library's elegant new McKim building in Copley Square neared completion in 1893, the Library Trustees approached the supervisors of the Adams Temple and School Fund in Quincy to ask if they might consider relocating the John Adams Library to a more central and accessible location in Boston. The supervisors agreed, and the books were formally transferred to the care of the Boston Public Library in 1894.

## THE BOOKWALL:

1. ***Encyclopaedia: or, A dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature. The First American Edition, 1798, 18 volumes.*** John Adams hand-inscribed the front cover of Volume 1 of this encyclopedia with the title, "His Excellency the Vice President of the United States," indicating that he used the book during his service under President George Washington. Perhaps anticipating his upcoming installation as the second American chief executive—or perhaps because he had simply taken a long time reading through it—he inscribed the second volume "President."
2. **John Quincy Adams, *Report upon Weights and Measures, 1821, 1 volume.*** In 1817, John Quincy Adams, then Secretary of State, was commissioned by Congress to undertake a thorough examination of America's system of weights and measures and prepare recommendations for their standardization. He conducted and published a comprehensive, four-year study, presenting this affectionately inscribed copy, "From John Quincy Adams to His Father."
3. **Miguel de Cervantes, *Vida, y Hechos del Ingenioso Caballero Don Quixote de la Mancha, 1777, 4 volumes.*** John Adams read Cervantes for pure pleasure. This Spanish edition of *Don Quixote* was likely purchased while Adams was traveling overland through Spain in late 1779, after his ship to France was forced off-course by a serious leak.
4. **Jonathan Swift, *Works, 1768, 13 volumes.*** Adams greatly admired Swift's elegant command of language and his genius for capturing distinctive characters in print. He consciously mimicked the satirist's clever humor and probing observations in his own diary, letters, and annotations, presciently noting that his documentation of "*miscellaneous thoughts*," modeled on Swift's, might be of later use.
5. **Richard Hurd, *Moral and Political Dialogues, 1765, 3 volumes.*** A 1755 graduate of Harvard College, John Adams humorously expressed his loyalty to his alma mater in the margins of this book. In response to a paragraph by Reverend Hurd describing an "absurd, illiberal, clownish" youth, Adams penned slyly in the margin: "*An exact description of a Dartmouth educated scholar.*"
6. **Johan Luzac. *Verzameling van Stukken, 1797, 1 volume.*** The Adams Library includes books printed in eight languages: English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Latin, and Dutch. Among the latter are twenty-nine volumes printed in Holland, including this work by Dutch friend Luzac. Many of these Dutch books are exceedingly rare in the United States. Adams collected most of these works during his diplomatic missions to the Netherlands in the 1780s.
7. **John Locke, *The Works of John Locke, Esq., 1740, 2 volumes.*** In his monumental *Two Treatises of Government*, English philosopher Locke argued that all forms of governance were based on a "social contract" between subjects and rulers. His works were must-read materials for America's founding fathers, and many of Adams's early writings reflect Locke's influence.
8. **Pierre Danet, *Magnum Dictionarium Latinum et Gallicum, 1726, 2 volumes.*** At the age of fourteen, Adams's son John Quincy accompanied Ambassador Francis Dana on a 1781 diplomatic mission to St. Petersburg, Russia. He spent more than a year as Dana's secretary and French interpreter before returning to Holland to join his father. John Quincy purchased a number of books during this trip, including this Latin and Greek dictionary inscribed, "*Bout at St. Petersbourg Febr. 15/26, 1782. 6, Rbl. No. 17 John Q. Adams.*" The date "15/26 1782" represents the different calendars used in Russian and Western Europe, and "6 Rbl" the six rubles he paid for the book.
9. **David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688, 1778, 8 volumes.*** Although President Adams requested that wife Abigail forward this set of Hume's popular British history to him in Philadelphia, he often lost patience with the philosopher-historian. He pronounced Hume a "*blockhead*" in the margins of Mary Wollstonecraft's work (on display in POWER), and then continued, "*If ever there existed a Wise Fool, a learned Idiot, a profound dupe too... it was David Hume.*"

10. **Isaac Newton, *The Method of Fluxions and Infinite Series, 1736, 1 volume.*** This is a rare and exceptionally valuable first edition of Newton's unfinished and ground-breaking treatise on differential calculus. Though no expert mathematician, the intellectually ambitious Adams made numerous notes in this book, comparing Newton's treatise to those of other contemporary mathematicians and practicing equations in the margins.
11. **Homer, *The Iliad, 1759, 4 volumes.*** The John Adams Library includes four copies of the *Iliad*, including two sets of the work translated by Alexander Pope. This edition is signed "John Quincy Adams." Both Homer and Pope were great favorites in the Adams household and were frequently quoted in family letters and personal papers.
12. **Michael Combrune, *The Theory and Practice of Brewing, 1762, 1 volume.*** Many New England farmers brewed their own beer and distilled apple cider at home. John Adams peevishly wrote to Abigail from Philadelphia that he had recently purchased "bad beer," far inferior to her own home brew. Consumption of beer and cider at all times of the day was common in early America. John Adams partook of a "gill" (half cup) of hard cider every morning, noting that it "*seems to do me good, by diluting and dissolving the Phlegm or the Bile in the Stomach.*"
13. **Aristotle, *Aristotelis Opera Omnia Quae Extant, Graecè & Latinè, 1629, 2 volumes.*** This complete collection of Aristotle's work features Greek text and Latin translation in parallel columns. These gigantic volumes are the heaviest books in the Adams's Library, with volume 1 weighing in at a back-breaking twenty-two pounds.
14. **Strabo, *Strabōnos Peri tēs Geōgraphias Biblia Iz, 1549, 1 volume.*** Many of the "used" books in the John Adams Library had interesting histories before Adams took ownership. This handsome folio contains an additional leaf printed for the Collegium Grassinaeum of the Academie de Paris. According to the inscription, this rare volume was given as first prize in Oratory to a student at the Academie in 1657, and is likely to have been purchased by Adams during his time in France.
15. **Jean-Henri Castéra, *The life of Catharine II, Empress of Russia, 1798, 3 volumes.*** John Adams often gave books as gifts, and this three-volume set was inscribed, "To his granddaughter Caroline Amelia de Windt Feb 3d 1822." These volumes were recently purchased by the Boston Public Library and permanently reunited with the collection in 2004.
16. **Later additions to the Library, 75 volumes.** In 1822, John Adams deeded his library of over 2,700 volumes to the town of Quincy for a new boys' preparatory school. These books form the core of the John Adams Library, and a published catalog was created at that time. Throughout the nine (add hyphen) tenth century, Adams family members continued to donate hundreds of books to the library, (cut off in proof) Cutincludng the seventy-five books featured here. Many were formerly owned by John Adams and bear his inscription.
17. **United States Continental Congress, *The Journals of the Proceedings of Congress, 1777-1778, 49 volumes.*** Adams's library contains nearly fifty copies of the proceedings of the early Continental Congresses, and he drew heavily from these collected papers in his autobiography.
18. **Frans Burman, *Synopsis* comes from *Theologiae & Speciatim Oeconomiae Foederum Dei, 1671, 2 volumes.*** This book is most interesting because of later handwritten notes added by a former owner, John Checkley. Born in Boston in 1680, Checkley was a loyalist clergyman who worked as a missionary in Providence, Rhode Island. He used the blank leaves of this religious text to transcribe full copies of his personal letters to correspondents in England on heated religious and political controversies in Boston. How Adams acquired this intriguing book is unclear.
19. **William Peck, *Natural History of the Slug Worm, 1799, 1 volume.*** This description of the common garden pest is the first American work on the subject. It was written by a Harvard professor and presented to Adams during his presidency, simply inscribed "Adams Library

1799." Peck's work merited a gold medal and a prize of fifty dollars from the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Agriculture.

20. **Niccolò Machiavelli, *The works of Nicholas Machiavel: translated from the originals, 1775, 4 volumes.*** In the years before the American Revolution, Niccolò Machiavelli was widely read and much maligned for his brutally frank treatise on the nature of power, *The Prince*. Other family members also read Machiavelli: wife Abigail referenced his writings in her letters, indicating that she frequented her husband's library as well.

## GOLD RIBBONS:

The John Adams Library is of particular historical importance because hundreds of the books retain a permanent record of John Adams's interaction with them. The founding father read with a pen clasped firmly in his hand, and his books feature signatures, dates of acquisition, purchase amounts, inscriptions, pen trials, and a wide variety of family bookplates, as well as inserted manuscripts, newspaper clippings, handwritten indices, and a fair number of doodles.

Most importantly, scores of volumes contain Adams's personal, handwritten commentary in the margins. These private notes often represent a lively dialogue between Adams and the author, moments where he felt compelled during his reading to respond to the printed text with force, passion, and his unique brand of curmudgeonly insight.

The gold ribbons represent those volumes that preserve some permanent indication of use by Adams and his family. That interaction might be simple as a few stray pencil marks to identify key sentences or involve thousands of words of original commentary.

## COLORED SPINES

The colored bands displayed throughout this bookcase represent the spines of volumes that are on display in cases elsewhere in this exhibition. The color of the band corresponds to the section in which the volume is exhibited.

## FAME:

*“Mausoleums, statues, monuments will never be erected to me. I wish them not. Panegyric romances will never be written, nor flattering orations spoken, to transmit me to posterity in brilliant colors. No, nor in true colors. All but the last I loathe.”*

Letter to Benjamin Rush, 23 March 1809

John Adams was a man driven by ambition, although he often denied the charge. Much of his intellectual passion and political drive originated from a yearning for acclaim. Yet Adams admitted the darker side of this desire—pride—and privately confessed that he had battled the “*foul fiend*” of vanity his entire life. The sharpest attacks by Adams’s detractors lampooned his ambition and egotism, not his politics.

In Adams’s view, popularity should have no bearing on fame. He admired the values of the ancient Romans: immortal distinction could be achieved only through virtue and public service. However, the charismatic leading men of his age—Washington, Franklin, and especially Hamilton—all exhibited clear personal flaws, yet they were deified in orations and marble monuments. The staunchly principled John Adams felt his own legacy was painfully obscured.

Adams spent his final years rewriting the historical record to claim his rightful place. His autobiography, letters, and annotations passionately defend his contributions and pronounce his enduring legacy—in his own voice.

### CASE #1: DISCOURSES ON DAVILA

As news of the French Revolution reached the United States in late 1789, Vice President John Adams turned to his library for historical insight. He devoted particular attention to Enrico Davila’s three-volume *History of the Civil Wars in France*, an account of the wars of religion that had torn apart France two centuries earlier.

Davila’s work only reinforced what Adams had long feared—this new revolution in France would ultimately sink into injustice and bloodshed. Adams quickly produced a series of essays in 1790, his *Discourses on Davila*, to prove that support for the French Revolution was unfounded and ill-informed. His publication sparked an immediate firestorm. He was accused of harboring monarchist leanings, belittling republican values, and championing hereditary aristocracy. The criticisms had some merit; the *Discourses* acknowledge the benefits of hereditary succession and the need for an American “*natural aristocracy*” of educated, propertied men to provide a stabilizing force in American government.

The accusation of “monarchist” cut Adams particularly deeply and hounded him to the end of his life. During the contentious presidential election of 1800, Adams’s Republican opponents wielded *Discourses on Davila* as a powerful weapon, and Adams counted its widespread misinterpretation among the chief causes of his loss to Thomas Jefferson. As he later complained to Jefferson in 1813,

*“My Defence of the Constitutions and Discourses on Davila laid the foundations of that immense unpopularity... Your steady defence of democratical principles, and your invariable favourable opinion of the French Revolution laid the foundation of your unbounded popularity.”*

1. **John Adams, *Discourses on Davila, a Series of Papers on Political History, Written in 1790, 1805*.** This is the first full collected edition of all 32 essays in one volume. The *Discourses* were originally serialized in a newspaper, *The Gazette of the United States*, beginning in April 1790.
2. **Arrigo Caterino Davila, *Historia delle Guerre Civili di Francia, 1757*.** Davila’s *Historia* was very popular when first published in 1630. More than two-thirds of Adams’s *Discourses* consist of little more than straight translations from Davila’s *Historia*, and most are not distinguished by source or author from Adams’s commentary.

Transcriptions:

Adams's extensive marginal annotations, written nearly 25 years after the essays were first published, reverberate with his lingering anger and disappointment at the damage the work caused to his political reputation and national memory.	<i>"This dull, heavy, Volume Still excites the Wonder of its Author...The Work, however, powerfully operated to destroy his Popularity. It was urged as full Proof that he was an Advocate for Monarchy."</i>
Adams bristled at the adulation heaped upon the other founders, especially when he believed his own contributions had been grievously overlooked. Here, he slyly comments on the "glory" heaped upon Thomas Jefferson at the expense of the "little John Adams."	<i>"This Declaration of Rights was drawn by the little John Adams. The mighty Jefferson by the Declaration of Independence 4. July 1776 carried away the glory both of the great and the little."</i>
As Adams notes here, the publisher of the <i>United States Gazette</i> succumbed to intense public pressure from members of the anti-Federalist party and abruptly ceased publication of Adams's <i>Discourses on Davila</i> in 1791.	<i>"...the Rage and fury of the Jacobinical Journals versus these discourses increased as they proceeded, intimidated The Printer John Fenno, and convinced me that to proceed would do more hurt than good. I therefore broke off abruptly."</i>
Adams re-read the <i>Discourses</i> when he was in his seventies, perhaps reminded of the book by news of Napoleon's empire building. Many annotations in this volume are dated 1813.	<i>"Remember This was written in 1790. The Blood of Louis and the Government of Napoleon show to Kings and People the Truth. 1813."</i>

## CASE #2: REVISIONIST HISTORY

In 1802, John Adams began writing his autobiography to correct "that mass of odious Abuse of my Character, with which News Papers, private Letters and public Pamphlets and Histories have been disgraced for thirty Years." Plagued by accusations of personal failings and imprudent behavior, Adams was haunted by the possibility that slander would overshadow his contributions to American independence, including his call for revolution in the Continental Congress, pivotal diplomatic negotiations, authorship of the Massachusetts Constitution, and evasion of war with France during his presidency.

Adams had good reason to be fearful for his legacy. His unvarnished honesty and argumentative nature had earned him many enemies, and his suppression of public dissent during his presidency had further alienated an already vindictive press. Adams believed that newspapers and contemporary histories were misguided full of lies, and all accounts of America's founding underplayed his personal role and achievements. In response, he resorted to the margins of his books to recount the "true" version of events and lament his mistreatment by history.

1. ***Political Cartoon, ca. 1798. Handcolored print.*** Boston Public Library, Print Department. Political infighting marred much of Adams's presidency and reached a comic pinnacle in January 1798. This cartoon lampoons the attack by Republican Matthew Lyon of Vermont on Federalist Roger Griswold. The mayhem is captured by the vengeful "Porcupine," pen name for printer William Cobbett.
2. ***William Gordon, History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America, 1788.*** Reverend William Gordon spent years interviewing revolutionary leaders, including Adams, for his history of the early republic. Displeased with the result, Adams angrily noted in the margins that Gordon's account was "*designed more for Booksellers' and Author's Profit than for the Honour of America or the Cause of Truth.*"

3. **James Callender, *The American Annual Register*, 1797.** Anti-Federalist printer James Callender attacked Adams vigorously in newspaper articles throughout his presidency. In retaliation, Adams invoked the Sedition Act to jail Callender for false and malicious statements against the government.
4. **Alexander Hamilton, *Letter from Alexander Hamilton concerning the Public Conduct and Character of John Adams*, 1800.** Federalist Alexander Hamilton dealt a fatal blow to John Adams's re-election bid in 1800 with the publication of this pamphlet, which attacked Adams's "disgusting egotism" and "ungovernable temper."
5. ***Alexander Hamilton. Engraving.*** Boston Public Library, Print Department.

<b>Scan of first page from Gordon (List of Subscribers)</b>	<i>"How happened it, that Jefferson was an Ambassador, and that first subscriber only a Minister? Oh History! How accurate thou art?"</i>
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As seen on this page, Adams resorted to the margins of his books to personally revise the written record of American history. In many cases, his handwritten notes appear only on pages where Adams himself is specifically mentioned in the printed text.	<i>"This Letter was a Forgery. No such Letter was ever written to Mr. Cushing or any other Man by John Adams."</i>
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Scandalized by Hamilton's treacherous assault on a member of his own political party, Federalist party members hurriedly issued rebuttal pamphlets such as these. However, the damage to Adams's reputation was done. Republican Thomas Jefferson would succeed Adams in 1801 as America's third president.

### CASE #3: AN ENDURING LEGACY

While Adams's fame never attained the heights of glory heaped upon George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, Adams enjoyed a far greater measure of respect and recognition than his disgruntled letters and annotations suggest. Adams's early brilliance as a lawyer and his years of forceful influence in the cause of American freedom brought him lifelong accolades and scores of admirers. Many sent tokens of their esteem in the form of books, often signed as presentation copies to him by their authors. Other books bear printed dedications to Adams himself.

Although Adams humbly claimed in 1779 that "*by my Physical Constitution, I am but an ordinary Man. The Times alone have destined me to Fame—and even these have not been able to give me much,*" the books in his library belie this pessimistic claim. One hundred and eighty years after Adams's death, the library itself stands as a testament to the powerful intellect of its owner, the depth of regard in which he was held, and his enduring legacy.

1. **John Marshall, *Life of George Washington*, 1805-1807.** With one month remaining as president in 1801, Adams nominated Secretary of State John Marshall as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Marshall's distinguished tenure on the court included the clear establishment of the judiciary branch's independence—a key element of Adams's vision for balance of power within government.

2. **John Luzac, *Ioannis Luzac Oratio De Socrate Cive*, 1796.** One of the few members of the press befriended by Adams, John Luzac published an extremely influential Dutch newspaper, *Gazette de Leyde*. The two men collaborated on numerous publications, including the first European translation of the Massachusetts Constitution.
3. ***Manuscript Translation of Dedication*. August 15, 1825.** This translation of Luzac’s dedication to Vice President John Adams in *Ioannis Luzac Oratio De Socrate Cive* was transcribed for the aged, nearly blind Adams by friend William Weyks.
4. **Peter Thacher, *A Sermon Preached to the Society in Brattle-Street, Boston, March 25th, 1798, Occasioned by the Death of Madam Rebecca Gill*, 1798.** Adams received many books as gifts, and this small volume’s decoratively embossed cover belies its somber contents—two sermons eulogizing Adams’s distant relative Rebecca (Boylston) Gill, wife of then-Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor.
5. **Jane Stuart, *John Adams*, undated.** Oil painting. After the original 1800 portrait by her father, Gilbert Stuart. Courtesy of the National Park Service, Adams National Historical Park.

<p>Adams was 89 years old when this extensive dedication to him printed in John Luzac’s work was translated from Latin into English. The two-sided manuscript was simply tucked into the volume. Remarkably, the document survived intact through all the library’s transfers.</p>	<p>~~~~~ <i>To the Illustrious John Adams</i> ~~~~~  <i>Vice President of the Federal Republic of North America and the Entire Representative Senate Adams, equally in Genius and Talents, most illustrious...</i></p>
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Adams met Dutch publisher John Luzac, a fervent supporter of the American cause, during Adams’s ambassadorship to the Netherlands in the 1780s.

Several hundred books in the Adams Library, including this five-volume set from Chief Justice John Marshall, are inscribed “presentation copies” or “gift copies” from admirers. Many bear extensive testimonials praising Adams on the front flyleaves.

## FORTUNE:

*I have had the very richest Clients in the Province: Yet I am Poor in Comparison of Others...I ought however, to be candid enough to acknowledge that I have been imprudent. I have spent an Estate in Books.*

Letter to Abigail Adams, June 29, 1774

As a public servant, John Adams never amassed the fortune he might have earned as a successful attorney. While he freely made the sacrifice, he also lamented his limited means compared to those of the independently wealthy Founding Fathers. He and his wife Abigail lived very frugally with one notable exception: he spent enormous sums on books.

Adams did not purchase books with a collector's eye—their value for him lay in their contents. However, Adams's library today is indeed worth a fortune. Many volumes are extremely rare, and their connection with Adams and his many annotations make the collection priceless.

A national monument has yet to be erected to John Adams's memory. However, by his 1822 donation of his library to a school in his native Quincy and its subsequent transfer to the Boston Public Library, he left a fitting monument for a man so devoted to books and learning. Adams's fortune in books has become a public treasure: the property of the people and free to all.

### **CASE #1: TREASURED GIFT**

The *Constitutions des Treize Etats-Unis de l'Amerique* is one of the rarest and most valuable books in the collection. Published in Philadelphia in 1783, it is the first complete French translation of all thirteen American state constitutions, as well as the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation. Benjamin Franklin arranged for its publication several weeks before the Treaty of Paris was signed, believing this book would help gain recognition for his new country from the European powers. Only one hundred large paper copies, including this elegantly bound edition, were prepared for presentation to the French king, queen, and their foreign ministers.

The translation of the constitutions into French was made by Franklin's close friend Louis-Alexandre, Duc de La Rochefoucauld. Adams was well acquainted with the duke and socialized with him many times during his years abroad. Rochefoucauld, a Bourbon loyalist, was executed nine years later in 1792 at the hands of an angry mob during the French Revolution.

3. ***Constitutions des Treize Etats-Unis de l'Amerique, 1783.***
4. **Title page featuring the Great Seal of the United States.** The seal features a bald eagle with its wings outstretched, clutching a bundle of thirteen arrows in its left talon and an olive branch with thirteen leaves and thirteen olives in its right talon. The eagle's head is turned towards the olive branch, symbolizing a preference for peace. John Adams had submitted his own idea for the Great Seal in 1776: an engraving of Hercules resting on his club, as portrayed in Adams's copy of Lord Shaftesbury's work, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.
5. **Inside front cover featuring John Adams' bookplate, ca. 1783.** This armorial is based primarily on the Boylston family arms from Adams's mother's family. Adams's passport to Holland in 1782 and his wax seal on the Treaty of Paris in 1783 both feature this crest. The motto originates from Tacitus's *Annals* and reads, "Libertatem, Amicitiam Retinebis et Fidem": "Hold fast to liberty, amity, and faith."

John Adams's copy is handsomely bound in red morocco and features Adams' own armorial crest. A slightly different version of the crest is used on his bookplate.

This title page includes an image of the Great Seal of the United States, which had been recently adopted by the Continental Congress in June 1782. It is the first known appearance of the Great Seal in a printed book.

John Adams's bookplate dates from ca. 1783, when he was serving as diplomat in London. The thirteen stars represent each of the original American colonies, and the French fleur and two lions represent Adams's diplomatic missions in Paris and Holland.

*The Duke de la Rochefoucauld made me a Visit today, and desired me to explain to him some Passages in the Connecticut Constitution, which were obscure to him, which I did.*

Diary entry, December 26, 1782, in which Adams implies that he may have assisted Rouchefoucauld with portions of this translation.

## CASE #2: THE RARE AND WONDERFUL

*Of the little Acquisitions I have made, five hundred Pounds sterling is sunk in Boston in a real Estate, four hundred sterling more is completely annihilated in Library that is now wholly lost to me.*

Letter to Joseph Warren, September 26, 1775  
Four hundred pounds sterling is roughly equivalent to \$36,000 in today's dollars

Although Adams's book collecting was utilitarian, many of the books he acquired were quite rare even in his own day. Adams claimed that he had spent "*a fortune on books*," and the volumes arrayed here prove the value, financial as well as intellectual, of Adams's judicious investment. They are true treasures in every sense of the word.

1. **Edward Winslow, *Good News from New-England, 1624*.** Written by *Mayflower* passenger Edward Winslow, this rare early edition of *Good News from New England* is an extremely valuable first-hand account of the Plymouth colony between 1622 and 1623. It ranks among a handful of primary historical sources to survive from this earliest period in American history.
2. **Thomas Prince's signature from *Good News from New-England*.** This book was originally in the collection of Thomas Prince, a Boston clergyman and one of America's earliest collectors of books relating to the early history of New England. Upon his death, Prince left his library to Old South Church, and the 2,000-volume collection is now housed at the Boston Public Library in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Department.

3. **Ambrogio Leone, *De Nola Opusculum*, 1514.** This first edition represents one of the earliest printed books dedicated to the subject of archaeology. These engravings are among the first known archaeological plans of an Italian city other than Rome to appear in print.
4. **Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy, *Traite d'Economie Politique*, 1823.** John Adams received this book from Marquis de LaFayette during LaFayette's popular tour of America in 1824. A national hero in France and the United States, LaFayette visited the 88-year-old Adams at Quincy on August 29, 1824, and presented this book during the brief afternoon call.
5. **Adam Smith, *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1778.** The first edition of this landmark work on economics was published in 1776, and this two-volume second edition from Adams's library counts among the rarest of the early editions, with only five hundred copies printed.

John Adams apparently borrowed this book 233 years ago during his visit to the Prince Library library in 1773. Assuming a late fee of ten cents per day on the book, Adams's library fine would equal roughly \$8,500 today.

Nearly 500 years old, this historic volume of Renaissance archaeology is the earliest printed book in the collection. Adams owned over forty books printed before 1600, nearly all of them rarities in the United States at the time.

With its torn and soiled paper cover, this volume appears unassuming but represents a very rare book in the collection because of its "association" to Adams and LaFayette. An *association copy* references the book's relationship to a well-known owner or giver.

Adams's signature remains in this book although the top portion of the title page has been cut out. A small remnant of handwriting along the edge suggests that Adams removed notes written by himself or by an earlier owner.

### CASE #3: AN EXPENSIVE HABIT

From an early age, John Adams devoted a significant portion of his income to books and book buying. In 1771, Adams resolved at the age of 36 to make a steady investment in books printed abroad. He writes in a letter to his nephew Isaac Smith in London:

*"I want to agree with some Bookseller, of character, in whom I could entirely confide, to send me Books whenever I shall want them, and write for them, as long as I shall live. As I am a little inclined to be extravagant, in that kind of Entertainment, it is very likely I may write for Books to the amount of twenty, perhaps thirty, Pounds sterling a year."*

Adams could not resist the temptations presented by books and spent enormous sums on them, however meager his income. He kept sporadic accounts of his book acquisitions and often noted purchase prices in the upper right-hand corner of title pages, alongside his signature.

**1. Fulvio Fontana, *I Pregi della Toscana*, 1701.**

**Leonardo Bruni, *Leonardo Bruni Leonardi Aretini Historiarum Florentinarum Libri XII*, 1610**

**Giovanni Villani, *Croniche di Messer Giovanni Villani Cittadino Fiorentino*, 1537.**

***Degl'istorici delle Cose Veneziane*, 1718-1722.**

**Angelo Portenari, *Della Felicità di Padova*, 1623.**

Adams purchased many of these very expensive volumes in England between 1785 and 1788 during his embassy to London. These histories of the Italian republics of Florence, Venice, and Padua served as historical source materials for Adams while he penned his famous *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, a three-volume work first published in London in 1787-1788.

**2. Giacomo Barozio da Vignola, *Regola delli Cinque Ordini d'Architettura di M. Iacomo Barozio da Vignola*, ca. 1680.** This beautiful plate book represents the work of leading Renaissance Italian architect, Giacomo Vignola. First published in 1564, Vignola's treatise was the earliest known printed work to define fixed rules for the five orders of classical architecture. The illustrations proved so detailed and useful to practicing architects that pocket copies were printed for carrying to construction sites.

**3. Antoine-Nicolas Dézallier d'Argenville, *Voyage Pittoresque des Environs de Paris*, 1779.** The *Voyage Pittoresque* was one of the most popular guidebooks of eighteenth-century Paris, featuring descriptions of the royal houses, castles and other "pleasure grounds" located within a 15-mile radius from the city.

**4. John Adams, *Accounts of Books Purchased*, 1780.** Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

This printed Italian text in this book has been painstakingly translated into French by Adams. He took great care to avoid writing over the architectural illustrations themselves, preventing the migration of ink through the page.

Adams noted in his diary that he first borrowed a set of these Parisian guidebooks in 1778 from the flirtatious Madame Brillon. Here he documents the purchase of his own set of two volumes for eight livres, or roughly \$70 today.

# POWER:

*“Power always sincerely, conscientiously believes itself right. Power always thinks... that it is doing God service, when it is violating all His laws...Power must never be trusted without a Check.”*

Letter to Thomas Jefferson, February 2, 1816

Eighteenth-century Enlightenment Europe brimmed with idealists, and John Adams had little patience for romantic optimism. The French *philosophes*’ faith in reason as a stable foundation for government particularly rankled the practical New Englander. Adams knew personal ambition always overpowered reason—history and his long experience in politics had proven that reality time and again. For Adams, tyranny was an inevitable expression of human nature.

Only the formal institution of checks could contain man’s competitive instincts. The word “*Balance*,” scrawled repeatedly throughout his books on political science, exemplifies Adams’s philosophy. Force must be met with equal force by independent branches of government to prevent competing factions from getting an upper hand.

The French Revolution and Napoleon’s rise proved compelling modern examples of the dangers of unchecked power. When Adams’s early warnings found few supporters, he resorted to the margins of his books to record his disapproval. His annotations reflect true disappointment in the turmoil, but they also register his satisfaction that history had proven him correct.

## CASE #1: ADAMS ON WOLLSTONECRAFT

This book is the most heavily annotated volume in John Adams’s library, with over 10,000 words of his handwritten annotations filling the margins. Mary Wollstonecraft penned this work on the origins of the French Revolution several years after her landmark feminist treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Wollstonecraft was extremely sympathetic toward the French Revolution, believing it a painful but vital step toward widespread social progress. She had moved to France in 1792 to observe the momentous event firsthand, but two years of living amid the violence and chaos of Paris had dimmed much of her early optimism. She published *An Historical and Moral View* in 1794 in an attempt to reconcile her horror at the bloodshed with her enduring confidence that humanity was essentially good and reason would prevail.

Adams’s marginal objections range from points of style and lack of historical evidence to personal attacks on the author and her gender. He decries the earthy quality of this “*weak woman*” and her “*youthful and female Enthusiasm*,” although he does issue a veiled apology on the front flyleaf. Her admiration of France’s simple one-house legislature draws his most intense condemnation: “*It is Silly to be eternally harping upon Simplicity in a form of Government. The Simplest of all possible Governments is a Despotism in one.*”

1. **Mary Wollstonecraft, *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*, 1794.**
2. **Mary Wollstonecraft, engraving from a painting by John Opie, ca. 1797.** Boston Public Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts.

The parallel construction of this annotation strongly resembles the classical orations Adams so admired. In this note, he continually reinforces the need for checks and balances within a civil society.	<i>“Power must be opposed to Power: Force to Force: Strength to Strength, Interest to Interest, as well as Reason to Reason, Eloquence to Eloquence, and Passion to Passion.”</i>
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Wollstonecraft did not live to gain the “little experience” Adams recommended in this note. She	<i>“This is a Lady of a masculine masterly Understanding...With a little Experience in Public</i>
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died in 1897 at the age of 38 from complications following the birth of her daughter Mary (the future Mary Shelley, author of <i>Frankenstein</i> ).	<i>affairs...She would have produced a History without the Defects and Blemishes pointed out with too much Severity perhaps and too little Gallantry in the Notes."</i>
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What most enraged Adams about the <i>philosophes</i> and their admirers was their argument for "simplicity" in government. He blankets this page with his passionate rebuttal.	<i>"A Man would be more Simple with but one Ear, one Arm, one Leg. Shall a Legislature have but one Chamber then, merely because it is more Simple?"</i>
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Hand-dated annotations indicate that Adams read and commented in this work twice: as vice president under George Washington in 1796, and in his retirement sixteen years later during the Napoleonic Wars in 1812, as this note reflects.	<i>"Not one of the Projects of the Sage of La Mancha was more absurd, ridiculous or delirious than this of a Revolution in France... I thought so in 1785 when it was first talked of. I thought so in all the intermediate Time, and I think so in 1812."</i>
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## CASE #2: The French Revolution

Adams predicted the French Revolution would fail soon after learning that a mob had stormed the Bastille on July 14, 1789. During his decade of European diplomacy, Adams had become well acquainted with politicians and intellectuals on both sides of the revolt. While he was an ardent supporter of just revolutions against tyranny, France's chaotic anarchy troubled him greatly. Adams's pessimistic opinion was not a popular one; many Americans were still fired by their own revolutionary success years earlier.

In the margins of his books, Adams blamed the bloody upheaval on the *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment. Voltaire, Turgot, Condorcet, and others had emphasized rationalism over religion and asserted that reason could overcome human passions. Adams countered that neither philosophy nor reason by itself could sustain a democratic and civil society governed by the rule of law. The atrocities committed during the Reign of Terror in the 1790s confirmed Adams's view, and the power vacuum left after the execution of the Terror's leaders soon gave rise to a new, even more dangerous form of despotism in France.

1. **Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*, 1795.** The youngest of the philosophes, Condorcet wrote an early draft version of the French Constitution of 1793 calling for a single assembly, much to Adams's horror.
2. **William Playfair, *The History of Jacobinism, Its Crimes, Cruelties and Perfidies*, 1795.** The Jacobins were the most extreme republican faction to emerge during the French Revolution. In a show of solidarity, sympathizers in many other countries, including America, formed Jacobin Clubs.
3. **l'Abbe de Mably, *De la Législation*, 1776.** Although he died five years before the Reign of Terror began, the Abbe de Mably and his socialist writings remained influential through the late 1790s. Adams's library contains twenty-two volumes of Mably's works, many heavily annotated.
4. ***The Storming of the Bastille*, Jean-Pierre Louis Laurent Houel, 1789.** Watercolor painting. Courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale Française.

Condorcet was accused of treason after refusing to support Louis XVI's execution. He fled Paris and	<i>"It was Suicide by voluntary Poison. It was an Effect of his own System, of a Government in one</i>
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wrote this work during his months in hiding. He was later discovered, imprisoned, and subsequently found poisoned in his cell, as Adams references here.	<i>Assembly. It was the Fruit of the Tyranny of his own pretended democratic Majority, without a Ballance, or Check, which he abhorred."</i>
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Although Adams disagreed vehemently with Mably's politics, he greatly respected Mably personally. His annotations in Mably's books, these included, are often noticeably gentler than in many of the other <i>philosophes'</i> works.	<p><i>"Thou shalt not Steal; nor covet. The Commandments are not sufficient to make property sacred.</i></p> <p><i>A ballance was wanting in their Constitution."</i></p>
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In this note, Adams describes the imbalance in power between middle and lower classes to be "as severely felt" as the distinction between middle and upper classes, especially during periods of political upheaval.	<i>"There is as great a distinction &amp; Distance bet[ween] The Bourgeois and the petit People as between the Nobility &amp; the Bourgeois, and in a certain Stage of a Revolution it is as clearly seen and as severely felt."</i>
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### CASE #3: An Empire Rises

The collapse of the French Revolution in 1794 and the political uncertainty that followed greatly facilitated the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. His coronation as emperor in 1804 fulfilled John Adams's prophetic warnings of the dangers of unchecked power and imbalanced government. Adams was alternately fascinated and repelled by Napoleon. As he wrote in an 1808 letter to friend Benjamin Rush: "I see in him a conqueror who resembles Alexander, Caesar, Mahomet, and Kublai Khan and the vices, follies, and madness as well as the genius, courage, and desperation which belonged to them all."

Many of Adams's annotations date between 1811 and 1814, and it was during those years of Napoleon's gradual decline that Adams reread many of the *philosophes*. Adams also revisited his own serialized reflections on the early stages of French Revolution, *Discourses on Davila* (featured in FAME). In the margins of *Davila*, he soberly observed that "France has tried another Experiment more tragical to all Europe as well as to herself as we see in the history of Napoleon in 1813. Similar causes have produced similar effects, and always will."

1. **Aristotle, *Treatise on Government*, 1776.** In this famous discourse, Aristotle concluded that the best constitution for a state balances the distribution of power and political representation. Adams heartily agreed, although he and Aristotle soon parted ways on the subject of democracy.
2. **Alexandre Maurice Blanc de Lanautte, comte d'Hauterive, *De l'Etat de la France, à la Fin de l'an VIII*, 1800.** Although published anonymously, this book was almost universally recognized as Napoleon's personal appeal to other nations for support against British maritime superiority. Napoleon was so pleased with the contents of this book and the effect of its publication that he honored Hauterive with 25,000 francs in gratitude.
3. **Napoleon Bonaparte, ca. 1805. Engraving.** Boston Public Library, Print Department.

Imbalance of power in all types of government proved very similar in nature, as Adams notes here. He called the results of all unchecked power "equally arbitrary, cruel, bloody, and in every respect diabolical."	<i>"The Demagogue too and the Court Favorite are not infrequently the same identical Men and always bear a close analogy; and these have the principal Power, each in their respective forms of Government..."</i>
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Adams read the <i>Etat de la France</i> in 1801, soon	<i>"If all this was true of France what would become</i>
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after his retirement from the presidency. Having just narrowly avoided a war with France, Adams was extremely suspicious of claims of dangers from England. If England lost naval superiority, France would have unchecked power on land and sea.

*of Europe? If France has a Preponderance of Land, England ought to have it at Sea. All the rest of Europe will be slaves if either had both Preponderances.”*

*“[Napoleon] is very confident that the Age of Reason is not past; and so am I; but I hope that Reason will never again rashly and hastily create such Creatures as him.”*

*Letter to Thomas Jefferson May 26, 1817*

# GOD:

*“I have more to say on Religion. For more than sixty years I have been attentive to this great subject. Controversies between Calvinists and Arminians, Trinitarians and Unitarians, Deists and Christians, Atheists and both, have attracted my attention.”*

Letter to Thomas Jefferson, July 1813

John Adams was fascinated by questions of religion and spirituality. He read widely in the subject all his life, and he even considered becoming a minister in his younger years before settling upon the law. Despite his lifelong pursuit of religious studies and interest in simmering spiritual controversies, his fundamental beliefs remained constant. As he affirmed to Jefferson at the age of 81, *“The Ten Commandments and The Sermon on the Mount contain my Religion.”*

As steadfast as he was in his own faith, Adams could not resist ongoing debates regarding the nature of miracles and questions of religious toleration. His books functioned much like houses of worship: places where Adams could consider, question, and ultimately confirm his basic Unitarian belief in God and the inscrutability of divine mysteries. These pilgrimages carried him beyond his own moment, from the realms of ancient pagan mythologies into the mysteries of the Koran and beyond, to explore the many faiths and sects of the world in which he lived.

## CASE #1: ADAMS ON PRIESTLEY

John Adams first met Dr. Joseph Priestley, noted English scientist and radical theologian, in 1786 while Adams was serving as a diplomat in London. Famous as a discoverer of oxygen and nearly a dozen other “gaseous bodies,” Priestley was a staunch advocate of Unitarianism—a religious movement that rejected the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and embraced a rational approach to biblical interpretation.

Adams was fascinated by Priestley and heard him speak on many occasions in England and later in Philadelphia after Priestley emigrated to America. He collected as many of Priestley’s writings as he could, and the library today contains seventeen volumes of the religious dissenter’s scientific and theological works. Many are heavily annotated; Adams admired Priestley but rarely agreed with him and registered his skepticism in the margins of Priestley’s books. Their relationship was initially very cordial, although it cooled markedly in the 1790s due to intense political differences. The two never mended relations, and Priestley died in 1804.

In 1812, Adams set aside these personal differences and returned anew to Priestley’s religious writings. He expressly wished that if *“Priestley had lived, I should have corresponded with him...I should propose to him a thousand, a million Questions. And no man was more capable or better disposed to answer them candidly than Dr. Priestley.”*

1. **Joseph Priestley, *An History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ, 1786.*** In this two-volume work, Priestley drew on hundreds of sources to “prove” that the first followers of Jesus Christ were essentially Unitarians. Adams was somewhat sympathetic but bridled at Priestley’s insistent speculations that God’s intentions could be known by men.
2. **Artist unknown, *Joseph Priestley, engraving.*** Boston Public Library, Print Department.

In response to Priestley’s speculation on the reasoning and intentions of God, here Adams sets down the essence of his own simple religious philosophy: God is unknowable. He cautions Priestley to <i>“Never assume to comprehend.”</i>	<i>“There never was, is not, and never will be more than one Being in the Universe capable of comprehending it. At least this is the humble adoring opinion of the Writer of this Note.”</i>
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<p>Priestley roundly condemned those persons who viewed Christianity as a philosophy, with individual tenets to be adopted or rejected. Adams takes issue with Priestley’s assessment of philosophy, here maintaining instead that it was a natural outcome of basic human curiosity.</p>	<p>“<i>What is Philosophy but the Study of the World and its cause? Man is a riddle to himself. The world is a riddle to him. He puzzles to find a Key, and this puzzle is called Philosophy.</i>”</p>
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<p>Adams lost patience with Priestley’s reasoning that the truth could be known by only a “few.” Here, Adams sputters that he grasps nothing of Priestley’s “<i>gallimaufry</i>” (hodgepodge) and pens a cautionary verse against pride from Alexander Pope’s <i>Essay on Man</i>.</p>	<p>“Gods and a few Men! Who were these few Men? I am not one. I understand nothing of this Gallimaufry!”</p>
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## CASE #2: COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

Between 1812 and 1816, John Adams embarked on a systematic, comparative investigation of ancient religions. He periodically updated his friend Thomas Jefferson on his progress in this ambitious project. While Adams drew from a wide range of authors for his analysis, his primary reading focused on monumental works by three noted religious scholars: Benjamin Franklin’s associate, Antoine Court de Gébelin; the celebrated classicist, Jacob Bryant; and the French Revolutionary, Charles Dupuis.

Although Bryant was the earliest of this trio and Gébelin was “*the clearest and Simplest Writer*,” Dupuis appealed most to Adams because his work contained “*more ideas that were new to me.*” However, the end result of his study only confirmed for Adams that his own fundamental beliefs were sound. As he reported to Jefferson, the reading of all these volumes had “*made no Change in my moral or religious Creed, which has for 50 or 60 Years been contained in four short Words, ‘Be Just and Good.’*”

1. **Antoine Court de Gébelin, *Le Monde Primitif, Analyzé et Comparé avec le Monde Moderne, 1773–84.*** The nine-volume *Primitive World, Analyzed and Compared with the Modern World* explored ancient cultures and argued that early civilizations were far more enlightened than many had suspected. In his diary, Adams recorded dining with Gébelin at least twice in 1778 in France and described him as “*silent, soft, and still. His mind always upon the Stretch.*”
2. **Jacob Bryant, *A New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology, 1775-1776.*** This page from Bryant’s three-volume work exemplifies Adams’s Protestant suspicion of elaborate religious ceremony. Above are two images of ancient Egyptian ships carried in ritual procession, and below Adams’s exasperated response: “*Is this Religion? Good God!*” While the ancient world may have fascinated Adams, he felt no compunction about criticizing religious practices that struck him as little more than mindless mummery.
3. **Charles Dupuis, *Origine de Tous les Cultes: ou Religion Universelle, 1795.*** In his extensive treatise on the origins of religion, Dupuis studied the interrelationships among ancient cults, myths, and astronomical traditions. At the age of 81, a voracious Adams read through this entire series of twelve volumes in a four-month period. Jefferson commented that Adams’s undertaking marked “*a degree of heroism to which I could not have aspired even in my younger days.*”

<p>Adams repeatedly entered cross-references between each of the three authors. Although the three men were roughly contemporary and writing on the same subject, Adams wondered at their seeming isolation from one another. Each claimed that his arguments and discoveries were purely his own.</p>	<p>Scan of comparison of three authors page</p>
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### CASE #3: EXPLORATION OF FAITH

Following his single term as second president of the United States, John Adams developed an insatiable curiosity in matters of religion and spirituality after he retired to Quincy. He was consumed with questions of faith and deplored the prevailing lack of free inquiry. Christianity, he argued, must bear as much close examination and criticism as the science of government. For him, this investigation into unfamiliar theological realms amounted to a kind of sport, the “*Marbles and Nine Pins of old Age: I will not say the Beads and Prayer Books.*”

1. **Frederick II, King of Prussia, *Oeuvres Posthumes*, 1788.** As American ambassador to the Netherlands in 1784, John Adams negotiated his country’s first commercial treaty with Prussia’s king, Frederick II. Adams owned a twenty-volume set of the monarch’s works. Although he read some of the king’s essays and poems, Adams was most engaged by Frederick’s correspondence with the *philosophes*, Voltaire and Jean D’Alembert, on matters of religion and immortality.
2. **Andre Dacier, *Bibliothèque des Anciens Philosophes*, 1771.** Dacier’s compilation of works by ancient philosophers includes the “Golden Verses” of Pythagoras. Famous for the geometrical theorem that bears his name, Pythagoras founded a quasi-religious order and offered proscriptions for morality, diet, and behavior. Although he agreed on some points, Adams offered a final scathing opinion of Pythagoras’s work: “*How dark, mean, and meagre are these Golden Verses, however celebrated... in comparison with the Sermon on the Mount and Psalms of David or the Decalogue!*”
3. ***The Koran, Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mahomet*, 1806.** Adams’s interest in religion extended to the *Koran*, the holiest book of Islam. Although this text is not annotated, Adams often made positive references to Muhammed and the tenets of Islam in other writings. As he stated in his *Thoughts on Government*, Adams believed that “*all sober inquirers after truth, ancient and modern, pagan and Christian, have declared that the happiness of man... consists in virtue.*”
4. **Joseph Priestley, *A Comparison of the Institutions of Moses with Those of the Hindoos and other Ancient Nations*, 1799.** In this volume, Priestley aims to prove the religions of “heathens” unenlightened in comparison to those governed by revelation. Adams is deeply disappointed by the biased and unbalanced treatment; it lacks “*such Morsells of the Sacred Books as have been translated and published which are more honourable to the original Hindoo Religion than any thing he has quoted.*”

<p>Adams’s righteous indignation here is sparked by a letter from physicist Jean D’Alembert to Frederick II. D’Alembert proposed that “<i>God was at least as much in need of advice when he created the moral world as when he created the physical.</i>”</p>	<p>“Thou Louse, Flea, Tick, Ant, Wasp, or whatever Vermin thou art, was this Stupendous Universe made and adjusted to give you Money, Sleep, or Digestion?”</p>
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This volume is relatively unmarked with the exception of the Golden Verses by Pythagoras, which Adams ranked line by line. Some verses are deemed “*good*” and “*too true*” while others simply “*mad!*”

This book is the first printed American edition of the *Koran*. It was published in Springfield, Massachusetts, for Isaiah Thomas, founder of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

## COUNTRY:

*“I would cheerfully retire from public life forever, renounce all Chance for Profits or Honors from the public, nay I would cheerfully contribute my little Property to obtain Peace and Liberty. -- But all these must go and my Life too before I can surrender the Right of my Country to a free Constitution.”*

Letter to Abigail Adams, October 7, 1775

John Adams was born an Englishman, but he never considered himself a loyalist to the distant British crown. His loyalties lay closer to home, in the fields of his Massachusetts farm and with his fellow colonists who believed, as he did, that the governance of free citizens required their consent. For Adams, the term “country” signified a set of common purposes and shared values, and his country existed solely on the western shores of the Atlantic Ocean, not at the royal court of St. James.

Over the course of Adams’s long life, America grew from a group of loosely-affiliated British colonies to a powerful nation of twenty-four states. Adams was not only a participant in the creation of this new and unprecedented republic: he was instrumental in defining the new country. He made remarkable contributions on all levels. He negotiated its borders and commercial rights, persuaded European powers to officially acknowledge the fledgling nation, contributed to its most important founding documents, and served as the country’s first vice president and second president.

### CASE #1: THE ADAMS ATLAS

During John Adams’s diplomatic service abroad, he steadily collected geographies, atlases, maps, and travel guides to better understand the unfamiliar terrains in which he found himself during his voyages. His library contains hundreds of foreign language dictionaries, atlases, thesauri, encyclopedias, and other reference books, all amassed to provide their owner with the linguistic and geographical tools expected of an ambassador.

Adams was even more interested in maps and reference materials specific to his own country and the significance of its resources and expanding territories. For John Adams, the study of America’s geography was essential. As he wrote in 1776 to wife Abigail, *“Really, there ought not to be a state, a city, a promontory, a river, an harbor, an inlet, or a mountain in all America but what should be intimately known to every youth who has any pretensions to liberal education.”*

1. [Thomas Jeffreys], **“A Map Of The Most Inhabited Part of New England,”** *Atlas Ameriquain Septentrional: Contenant les Details des Differentes Provinces de ce Vaste Continent*, published by Georges-Louis Le Rouge, 1778. Adams purchased this handsome atlas of America during his embassy in France. The largest of all the books in his library, the atlas was extensively restored in 2002, thanks to its particular historical importance. The volume contains hand-colored maps from two separate atlases that Adams had bound together as a single volume.

Although the maps were printed by a French publisher, they are based on the best English cartographic sources of the period. The date on each map represents the date of publication rather than the date the map was first engraved. The elaborate, decorative cartouche in the lower right-hand corner recalls the original landing at Plymouth Rock by the Pilgrims. Although a seemingly idyllic setting, it also represents England’s commercial interests in the New World, with the beaver and its fur pelt, tree timber, and the fish swimming along the new land’s extensive seaboard. A smiling Native American gently bows, welcoming the new arrivals.

This beautiful map includes the New England country that Adams knew best. His hometown of Braintree (written here as “Brantree”) is located just south of Boston. Some roads appear simply as double lines. It is clear that Adams actively used this atlas for reference purposes, hand-indexing the exterior of each folded map for easy accessibility.

## CASE #2: FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

John Adams longed to join the military and fight in the service of American freedom. He confessed as much to wife Abigail in 1775: “*Oh that I was a Soldier! – I will be. – I am reading military Books. – Every Body must and will, and shall be a soldier.*” Adams never enlisted: his most enduring contributions to liberty originated from his pen rather than his sword.

Adams never shrank from putting controversial opinions into print. Although he relished personal acclaim, his primary purpose was a high one: he sought to influence the opinions of his readers and his fellow legislators in order to assure the establishment of a well-balanced, stable constitution and state. He argued tirelessly that governments must be based on laws and not subject to the personal passions and passing enthusiasms of men.

6. **John Adams, *Novanglus, and Massachusettensis; or, Political Essays, Published in the years 1774 and 1775, 1819.*** Adams’s early political writings included this series of twelve letters penned under the pen-name “Novanglus” in response to letters by British loyalist Daniel Leonard. In his autobiography, he claimed that “*In New England they had the Effect of an Antidote to the Poison*” of Leonard’s essays.
7. **John Adams, *Thoughts on Government, 1776.*** Boston Public Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts. Adams wrote *Thoughts on Government* in the form of an open letter to delegates attending upcoming state constitutional conventions. Arguing in support of strong executive and judicial branches, Adams’s letter was later reprinted in pamphlet form and widely distributed, greatly influencing the constitutions of North Carolina, New Jersey, and Virginia.
8. ***The Massachusetts Constitution, 1780.*** Boston Public Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts. Adams had recently returned from France in 1779 when he was selected as a delegate to the Massachusetts constitutional convention and asked to write the draft constitution. The document echoed many of his recommendations in *Thoughts on Government*, particularly the separation and balance of political powers and the establishment of an independent judiciary.
9. ***The United States Constitution, September 27, 1787.*** Boston Public Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts. John Adams’s personal copy of the United States Constitution was donated to the Boston Public Library by his great-great-grandson, Charles Francis Adams, Jr. Adams received his copy of the document in Europe and read it with “great satisfaction,” although he would have preferred more power given to the executive branch.

This copy is Adams’s personal draft copy of the *United States Constitution*, as attested by Charles Thomson, Secretary to the Confederation Congress. It was issued September 28, 1787, for delegates to bring to their home states for ratification.

*“These writings... have never done any good to me though some of them undoubtedly contributed to produce the Constitution of New York, the Constitution of the United States, and the last Constitutions of Pennsylvania and Georgia.”*  
Autobiography of John Adams

The *Massachusetts Constitution* remains the oldest functioning written constitution in the world. John Adams was justifiably proud of his accomplishment, writing to friend James Wilson that “*No government was ever so perfectly made upon the people’s right and equality. It is Sidney, Locke, Rousseau, and Mably reduced to practice in the first instance.*”

### CASE #3: PROPAGANDA AND POLITICS

John Adams had little talent for pure political propaganda. He was motivated by principle, and fiery pamphlets such as Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* held little appeal for him. In many instances, Adams’s writings read like ponderous legal briefs. Although they were less stylishly presented than those of many other popular writers, Adams’s written contributions in favor of a mixed government had a significant impact, and his influence endures today in America’s current system of government.

1. **Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776.** First published anonymously, *Common Sense* was often attributed to John Adams, although Adams claimed to a friend that he could “*not have written anything in so manly and striking a style.*” Although he supported independence, Adams condemned Paine’s call for a single-house legislature, and immediately started work on his own *Thoughts on Government* as a direct rebuttal to Paine’s more radically democratic position.
2. **John Adams, *Défense des Constitutions Américaines*, 1792.** Before the federal Constitutional Convention gathered in Philadelphia in 1787, Adams published his *Defence of the American Constitutions* in London to make his case for a strong central government and compound legislatures. This work reiterated views earlier expressed in his *Thoughts on Government* and the *Massachusetts Constitution*, but Adams delved more deeply into the subject of human nature and the “natural aristocracy” among men, opening him to charges of favoring monarchy over republicanism.
3. **Philip Mazzei and Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, *Recherches Historiques et Politiques sur les Etats-Unis de l’Amerique Septentrionale*, 1788.** Thomas Jefferson commissioned Philip Mazzei to write this work to counteract anti-American propaganda in France. Mazzei included four essays by the French *philosophe* Condorcet, written to refute Adams’s *Defence*. Condorcet had just been made an honorary citizen of New Haven, Connecticut, and wrote under the name “A Citizen of New-Heaven.”
4. **Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist: on the New Constitution*, 1818.** *The Federalist Papers* were comprised of eighty-five articles originally published serially in 1787-1788 arguing for ratification of a federal constitution that featured a strong central government. The edges of the book feature an unusual daubed decorative pattern of colored spots.
5. ***Recueil des Loix Constitutives des Colonies Angloises*, 1778.** This French compilation includes the texts of six American state constitutions. Adams purchased fourteen copies of the book in Paris on May 2, 1780 to present as gifts to French acquaintances. He put the copy displayed here to particular use in preparing his *Defence of the American Constitutions* in 1787.

In February, 1776, en route to the second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Adams purchased two copies of Thomas Paine’s <i>Common Sense</i> . He sent one to his wife Abigail and kept this remaining copy for himself.
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Adams wrote the <i>Defence of the American Constitutions</i> in response to attacks on the United States’ system of government by French <i>philosophes</i> . Condorcet’s rebuttal to the <i>Defence</i> is noted here, with Adams’s angry rejoinder that Condorcet “ <i>had not read it.</i> ”	“ <i>The following four Letters were written by the Marquis of Condorcet, a Man of Science, but little acquainted with History... They are plainly written as an answer to my Defense: but it is plain he had not read it.</i> ”
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Adams particularly disliked Pennsylvania’s first independent constitution because of its single-house legislature and lack of chief executive. Interestingly, he blotted out a significant portion of what may have been even more scathing commentary at the bottom of this page.	The frame of Government is the Worst that has been established in America, and will be found so in Experience.”
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## CLIENTS:

*“I suffered very much for want of Books, which determined me to furnish myself, at any Sacrifice, with a proper Library: and accordingly by degrees I procured the best Library of Law in the State.”*

Autobiography of John Adams

John Adams first established his reputation in the courtroom, not the political arena. As a young lawyer, his eloquence and intelligence gained him early notice, and he ultimately became one of Boston’s busiest attorneys. Political activist James Otis and the learned Jeremiah Gridley served as Adams’s chief mentors in the law, and their influences endured long after Adams gave up private practice to support the cause of American liberty.

Adams’s early legal training shaped much of his political philosophy. He always believed that the rule of law in a civil society must be immune to the clamors of public opinion. Adams was rarely tempted by expediency, and his willingness to endure popular censure in the service of principle proved a hallmark of both his legal and political careers.

As a circuit lawyer, Adams traveled great distances throughout New England to attend court sessions. Often homesick, he wrote to wife Abigail in 1772 of his longing to see her, his family, and his beloved library: *“But above all, except the Wife and Children, I want to see my Books.”*

### CASE #1: Blackstone’s *Commentaries*

The practice of law in colonial America was rooted in the English common law tradition and based on legal precedent rather than legislated statutes. Adams’s extensive law library contains hundreds of the standard British law classics of the day, including Sir Edward Coke’s celebrated *Reports of Cases*, Sir Francis Bacon’s *New Abridgement of the Law*, and Sir William Blackstone’s *Commentaries*, seen here.

The publication of the *Commentaries* in 1765 marked a significant innovation in legal writing. Unlike its weighty common law predecessors, Blackstone’s work was succinct, readable, and portable. A popular legal resource in America for over a century, Blackstone’s treatise was divided into four volumes: *The Rights of Persons*, *The Rights of Things*, *Of Private Wrongs*, and *Of Public Wrongs*. As Adams noted in his autobiography about his early days as a lawyer, *“the Study of the Law was a dreary Ramble, in comparison of what it is at this day. The Name of Blackstone had not been heard.”*

Adams read current legal rulings and court proceedings regularly, but he also studied the history and philosophy of law. Like many of his contemporaries, he filled his library with works on ancient legal traditions, particularly those of the early Roman Empire. Adams greatly admired the orations of Cicero and Demosthenes as exemplars of classical oratory and rhetorical brilliance. Many of Adams’s most compelling legal arguments drew equally from both modern and ancient sources, and the *Commentaries* demonstrate this remarkable juxtaposition between the two influences in Adams’s career.

1. **William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, 1768.*** University fellow, judge, and member of Parliament, William Blackstone compiled this monumental work from a series of lectures he delivered at Oxford University.
2. **Artist unknown, *Marcus Tullius Cicero.*** Engraving. Boston Public Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts.
3. **Artist unknown, *Sir William Blackstone.*** Engraving. Boston Public Library, Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts.

<p>Here, John Adams has transcribed a passage from Cicero’s <i>Pro Milone</i>, a case argued on the grounds of self-defense by Cicero on behalf of accused murderer Milo. This Latin annotation sits next Blackstone’s later rationale for the same point of law.</p>	<p>“<i>[Self-defense] is a law we have taken and sucked in and imbibed from nature herself: a law which we were not taught, but to which we were made,— which we were not trained in, but which is ingrained in us.</i>”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Translated annotation</p>
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Adams referenced this work in 1770 during his preparation to defend the British soldiers in the Boston Massacre trial. His argument in favor of the troops—justifiable self-defense—found its roots in classical and modern law, as this page indicates.

**CASE #2: THE LAW LIBRARY**

Jeremiah Gridley’s sage advice for young John Adams included opinions on personal and practical matters as well as an ambitious list of required legal reading. Adams borrowed liberally from his mentor’s personal law library and in 1765 helped form “the Sodality,” a weekly discussion group dedicated to the reading and analysis of classical points of law.

Adams’s propensity to write manuscript notes in the margins of his books long predated the sodality. In his 1760 diary, he wrote of his determination to master the legal canon by following a strict regimen of reading and note-taking, having “*hit upon a Project that will secure my Attention to it, which is to write in the Margin, a sort of Index to every Paragraph.*” Adams later expanded this method of note-taking to include interpretive comments on previous cases, other sources, and useful cross-references to other books in his library.

1. **Johannes van Muyden, *Compendiosa Institutionum Justiniani Tractatio*, 1707.** This commentary on the Roman Emperor Justinian’s classic civil law treatise was originally the property of Jeremiah Gridley. John Adams notes in his diary that he borrowed this book after his first interview with Gridley in 1758. Both Gridley’s and Adams’s signatures remain on the title page.
2. **Benjamin Blyth, *John Adams*, 1766. Pastel. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.**
3. **William Salkeld, *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King’s Bench*, 1731.** This chapter in Salkeld involves “villeins,” a feudal term for serfs. The first case documents the selling of a black slave in Virginia. Interestingly, Adams has carefully underlined the printed text, which notes: “The Laws of England do not extend to Virginia, being a conquered Country, their Law is what the King pleases.”
4. **John Lilly, *Modern Entries*, 1723.** Lilly’s *Modern Entries* was a standard English legal reference and commonly cited in the American colonies. Adams’s law books were in constant demand and he often loaned them to friends and law clerks. Later generations of Adamses also borrowed portions of his library during their own legal careers.
5. **John Adams and John Quincy Adams, *Manuscript notes*, undated.** These two handwritten fragments were loosely tucked into Lilly’s *Entries*. The note in John Adams’s coarser hand details a court case involving “Breaking and entering the Close or Wood lott... and carrying away the Oak Tree.” The smaller, neater handwriting of John Quincy Adams outlines a writ questioning the legal sufficiency of a claim.

<p>In this volume, Adams’s underlining, indexing, cross-referencing, and note-taking are all in evidence. He questioned Salkeld’s reporting of these two cases, noting that misinformation was</p>	<p>“<i>I cannot say indeed that these cases were well reported, which must not surprise, as Sir Edward Coke observes that there are erroneous cases in that most accurate of all Reporters Plowden.</i>”</p>
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common in legal texts, even by the “most accurate of reporters.”

After mentor Jeremiah Gridley’s death in 1767, Adams purchased his law library. Thirty books in the collection still retain Gridley’s signature on the title pages.

### CASE #3: THE BOSTON MASSACRE TRIAL

March 5, 1770, marked a watershed moment in Massachusetts’ growing unrest and a major milestone in John Adams’s legal career. That evening, a local crowd converged on a small group of British soldiers in front of Boston’s Custom House. The townspeople pelted the redcoats with sticks, oyster shells, and snowballs, provoking the anxious soldiers to fire into the crowd, killing five colonists. Anger immediately swelled among the Bostonians. Publications soon proclaimed the event the “Boston Massacre,” and a war of propaganda raged between indignant colonists and British loyalists.

Adams was then one of Boston’s leading attorneys, and he maintained that the incident was a telling reminder of the dangers of standing armies. However, he also believed deeply in every citizen’s right to a fair trial. He did not hesitate when approached to take on the defense of the British troops, although he knew that his reputation and legal practice might suffer an irreparable blow.

Drawing upon both classical and contemporary precedents, Adams’s impassioned arguments for the natural right of self-defense had an “electric effect” on the courtroom and succeeded in winning the British soldiers’ freedom. Adams was later excoriated by fellow colonists for his assistance to the Crown. Yet, he stood firm on principle and deemed it “*one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested Actions of my whole Life, and one of the best Pieces of Service I ever rendered my Country.*”

1. **John Adams, *Manuscript Notes from the Boston Massacre Trial, 1770.***
2. **John Fortescue, *De Laudibus Legum Angliae (In Praise of English Law), 1741.*** Eyewitness accounts greatly differed on the specific events of that night, and Adams argued to the jury that it was far safer to acquit a guilty man than punish an innocent one. In his summation, Adams quoted liberally from Lord Fortescue, maintaining that “twenty guilty persons” should be freed before one innocent person is executed.
3. **Paul Revere, *Autograph Manuscript Drawing of the Boston Massacre, 1770.*** This remarkable original manuscript sketch by Paul Revere depicts the British troops as small circles with gun barrels pointing outward from the Custom House. Four of the five victims lie dead in the street, making this one of the earliest forensic maps in American history.

Adams scrawled these extremely detailed notes of eyewitness testimony during the Boston Massacre trial and drew heavily from them in his summation.

“Ice & Snow Balls thrown, Sticks rattled upon their guns”... “Boys hove Pieces of Ice at Sentry as big a your fist, hard and large enough to hurt a Man.”

This Revere drawing may have been used as evidence in the Massacre trial. The numbered and lettered figures suggest the format of exhibited evidence, and it is docketed on the reverse in the regular manner of court documents of the period.

## FELLOW MEN:

*“Our little flock send duty. I called them separately and told them Pappa wanted to send them something, and requested of them what they would have. A Book was the answer of them all.”*

*Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 14, 1776*

John Adams regarded books as essential tools for leading a moral, cultivated, and successful life. It was a reverence that he passed on to future generations of Adamses, and his most enduring personal relationships were formed with friends who shared a mutual love of books and reading. His appetite for books enlivened his closest interactions with his loved ones.

In 1798, while President Adams was in Philadelphia, his wife Abigail secretly arranged for the construction of a small “book room” upstairs in their Quincy home as a gift for him to keep all his books “*in regular order and be a pleasant room for the President to do business in.*” After retirement, Adams often spent his time comfortably seated in a large armchair in his new study, engaged in his three favorite occupations: reading, writing, and receiving visitors. The room became the heart of the house, a gathering place for living friends and long-dead authors, and the place where Adams would take his final breath on July 4, 1826.

### CASE #1: BREAKFAST WITH PLUTARCH

John and Abigail Adams set high standards for the education of their four children, but eldest son John Quincy bore the heaviest weight of expectation. The future sixth president did not disappoint, throwing himself into his studies with a fierce dedication that surpassed even his father’s. At the tender age of ten, the serious child wrote to his father in Philadelphia for some advice: “*I wish, sir, you would give me Some instructions with regard to my time and advise me how to proportion my Studies and my Play, in writing and I will keep them by me and endeavour to follow them.*”

When Adams traveled to Europe in 1778 and 1779, he brought young John Quincy with him on the dangerous voyages. Recognizing his son’s intelligence, he tutored his son daily onboard ship in Greek and Latin. John Quincy spent a great deal of time in European boarding schools, and his letters are filled with details about books, lectures, and study. Adams impressed on his son the importance of reading whenever the opportunity arose: “*You will never be alone with a poet in your pocket. You will never have an idle hour.*”

1. **Plutarch, *Plutarchi Chaeronensis: Vitae Parallelae, cum Singulis Aliquot, 1723-29.*** Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* is composed of a series of twenty-three paired biographies of famous ancient Greeks and Romans, designed to juxtapose, compare, and contrast their common moral virtues and failings.
2. ***Pressed leaves.*** Books can serve many purposes, and some books in the Adams library contain more than the printed text. These leaves from New England trees—maple, oak, and poplar—were pressed between miscellaneous pages of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*. Which member of the Adams family was responsible for inserting these leaves two hundred years ago is not known, but the outlines of these charming additions endure on several pages.
3. **John Adams, *Manuscript notes, undated.*** These notes in John Adams’s hand include Greek, Latin, and English translations of key terms and important phrases from his reading. The two, double-sided sheets all concern Isocrates, the celebrated Greek rhetorician who, interestingly, was not included in Plutarch’s *Lives*. Adams may have culled this information from another source and was using it as a basis for comparison.
4. **Sidney L. Smith, *John Quincy Adams, etched copy of an engraving, 1783.*** Courtesy of National Park Service, Adams National Historical Park.

This set is handsomely bound in calfskin vellum and decorated with a diamond-shaped stamped “lozenge.” The titles were hand-inked onto the spines, which are also decorated with small stars and the impressions left by the cord used to hold the vellum in place as it dried.

During several periods abroad, John Adams oversaw son John Quincy’s education and personally tutored him in classics, mathematics, and language. Lessons took place at all hours, beginning in the early morning. They read this set of Plutarch aloud to one another over the breakfast table.

## CASE #2: A FAMILY OBSESSION

From their earliest years, the Adams children were instructed that books counted among the world’s highest goods, and that reading approximated a moral act. John Adams wanted his children to learn, as he wrote nine-year-old son John Quincy, that books were “*of the utmost importance... in business, as well as the most ingenious and elegant entertainment of your life.*” While reading was certainly pleasurable for the Adamses, it was always intended to serve a higher purpose. It was a duty of citizenship, a call to religious and moral contemplation, and a gateway to the imagination.

1. **Marcus Tullius Cicero, *M. Tullii Ciceronis Orationum Selectarum Liber*, 1734.** This small volume is the earliest of many acquisitions of Cicero’s writings by the Adams family. John Adams acquired the book at fourteen while preparing for Harvard. He believed that the reading of his beloved Cicero even provided physical benefits; he recited the orations aloud because “*it exercises my Lungs, raises my Spirits, opens my Pores, quickens the Circulations, and so contributes much to Health.*”
2. **Cornelius Nepos, *Cornelii Nepotis Vitae Excellentium Imperatorum*, 1745.** This brief collection of biographies by Roman historian Nepos is loosely modeled on Plutarch’s *Lives*. John Adams dated his copy 1781 and penned a whimsical ship drawing on the flyleaf alongside a number of “pen trials” in which he practiced his signature. The bookplate featuring the Adams family crest indicates that his grandson Charles Francis Adams possessed the volume at one time.
3. **Matthew Hale, *The History of the Pleas of the Crown*, 1736.**
4. **Jedediah Morse, *Review of American Unitarianism*, 1815.** This is one of only two volumes in the Adams Library bearing Abigail Adams’s name. Although she read heavily and often borrowed books from her husband’s library, Abigail’s own books were kept in the family and not included in the deed to the town of Quincy.
5. **Jane Stuart, *Abigail Adams*, undated. Oil painting. After the original 1800-1812 portrait by her father, Gilbert Stuart.** Courtesy of National Park Service, Adams National Historical Park.
6. **William Shakespeare, *The Works of Shakespear[e]*, 1761.** Although works of fine and popular literature are rare in the Adams Library, the works of Shakespeare held a special place in the family’s hearts. This small six-volume set was owned by John Adams, followed by his son Charles, and then nine-year-old grandson George Washington Adams.

Three generations of Adams lawyers signed this title page: John Adams in 1760, during his earliest years as attorney; son John Quincy during his years as minister plenipotentiary to Prussia; and grandson George Washington Adams, a future Massachusetts State Representative.

Abigail Adams was extraordinarily fond of Shakespeare and often quoted her favorite lines from memory in her correspondence. In letters to her husband during the Revolutionary War, she adopted the pseudonym “Portia” after the devoted and long-suffering wife in *Julius Caesar*.

“I must study Politics and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy. My sons ought to study Mathematics and Philosophy...in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Music, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelain.”

Letter to Abigail Adams, May 12, 1780

### CASE #3: INFLUENTIAL FRIENDS

Adams’s closest friends were a varied group comprised of doctors, farmers, lawyers, ministers, and, of course, enthusiasts of the “science of government.” Nearly all of them shared Adams’s love of books and book collecting.

Whether in the margins of his books or on the pages of a letter, Adams enjoyed a brisk debate on the substance of his reading, and this group of like-minded intellectuals maintained running commentaries about their own books and reading that spanned twenty years or more. Books and politics were the *lingua franca* of Adams and his colleagues, the common language that shaped their discourses, informed their experiences, and cemented their fellowships.

1. **John Winthrop, *A Lecture on Earthquakes, 1755*.** Winthrop, a Harvard professor, scientist, and close friend of Adams, wrote this pamphlet in 1755 “on occasion of the great earthquake which shook New-England the week before.” Winthrop interpreted earthquakes as scientific rather than ominous religious phenomena and he is widely considered a founder of seismology. For years, Adams recorded weather conditions in his diary based on Winthrop’s model of record-keeping. Here, he notes an earthquake felt in Quincy on March 12, 1761, about “*1/2 after two in the morning*.”
2. **Benjamin Rush, engraving.** Boston Public Library, Prints Department.
3. **Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations: Containing an Account of the Yellow Fever, As It Appeared in Philadelphia in 1797, 1798*.** John Adams met physician and revolutionary Benjamin Rush at the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1774. They corresponded regularly and warmly throughout much of their lives, despite the strains of diverging political views. As president, Adams generously appointed Rush treasurer of the United States Mint after Rush’s medical practice suffered following a yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia. Rush never forgot his friend’s patronage, as demonstrated by this grateful inscription.
4. **Thomas Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening, 1777*.** This was the most comprehensive work available on the theory and practice of natural English landscape gardening. When Thomas Jefferson visited the Adamses in England in April, 1786, the two friends toured gardens of England’s great country houses with Jefferson’s copy of this book in hand. It was one of the few relaxed times the two men would spend together, unencumbered by pressures of state affairs, and Adams later noted at least eight of the lovely gardens they visited in the margins of his own copy.
5. **Thomas Jefferson, engraving.** Boston Public Library, Prints Department.

“I have, however, either Friends who wish to amuse and solace my old age; or Enemies who mean to heap coals of fire on my head and kill me with kindness: for they overwhelm me with Books from all quarters, enough to obfuscate all Eyes, and smother and stifle all human Understanding.”

Letter to Thomas Jefferson April 18, 1817