

Aaron Burr

1756–1836



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Aaron Burr was Vice President of the United States under Thomas Jefferson. He is infamous for killing his political rival Alexander Hamilton during a duel.



As you read the biography below, think about how events of Aaron Burr's life affected his reputation.

Aaron Burr was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1756 and attended what is now known as Princeton University. He fought in the Revolutionary War as a lieutenant colonel in the Continental Army. Burr began practicing law in New York around 1782. At this time, Burr also became active in politics, joining the New York Assembly as a state attorney general. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1791.

Burr's achievements in law and politics were seen as an asset for the Democratic-Republican Party. The party chose Burr to be Thomas Jefferson's vice presidential running mate in 1796 and again in 1800. At that time, the presidential elections were conducted differently than they are today. The Electoral College would vote for two people. The person with the most votes became president, and the person with the second-most votes became vice president.

In 1796, Jefferson lost the presidency to John Adams, but received enough votes to become vice president. During the 1800 election, Burr and Jefferson tied for the number of votes. The U.S. House of Representatives broke the tie, electing Jefferson as president and Burr his vice president.



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VOCABULARY

slander false statement or report about someone intended to ruin one's reputation

Burr and Alexander Hamilton were bitter rivals. Hamilton often disagreed with Burr and Jefferson over political matters. When Burr ran for governor of New York in 1804, Hamilton opposed him. Burr accused Hamilton of attempting to **slander** him. Burr challenged Hamilton to a pistol duel, where he mortally wounded his opponent. Burr was accused, but never arrested, for the murder of Alexander Hamilton.

After Burr's term as vice president ended, he left Washington to travel to the country. Though his intentions are still unclear, Burr gathered a group of soldiers, weapons, and supplies. Some historians think Burr was trying to raise an army to invade Mexico. Others think that Burr may have been planning to get some of the southwestern territories to secede from the United States.

Burr's behavior was considered suspicious and his motives were questionable. He was accused of treason. Burr was later tried and found not guilty. However, Burr's reputation was greatly affected by these series of events and his political career was ended. Aaron Burr died in 1836.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What did you learn about Aaron Burr from your reading? Name two facts.

2. **Compare and Contrast** Think about the election of 1800 compared to what you know of today's elections. How are they different? Which way do you think is better?

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are in charge of Aaron Burr's campaign. Make a poster or a flyer for Aaron Burr as vice president.