

THOMAS JEFFERSON AND AARON BURR PEOPLE, PLACES AND POLITICS

Segment IV - The Burr Conspiracy



The Duel



Burr



Hamilton

Believing Alexander Hamilton responsible for a smear-campaign and fierce assassination on his character, Burr challenged Hamilton to a duel. On July 11, 1804 at Weehawken, New Jersey Burr's shot proved fatal and he was charged with the crime of murder in New York and New Jersey.

Have students define the concept of a duel and discuss the rules that usually governed a duel. Are there other famous duels or duelists in history?

Help students to discuss dueling as an archaic (old-fashioned) means of conflict resolution/problem solving and conclude the discussion by listing more civil methods of ending an argument. Have the students role play one or more of the disagreements between Burr and Hamilton and to act out nonviolent resolutions.

What was the result of the warrants issued for Burr in New York and New Jersey?

Had either Burr or Hamilton been involved in previous duels? Can you draw any conclusions about either of their demeanor?

What were the political outcomes of the duel?

Did Hamilton's ideas continue to influence the government after his death?

How did the duel affect Burr politically?

Have students read this account of [The Burr Conspiracy](#) (PDF) as told by Public Broadcast Service (PBS).

Have students make a list of the major characters in the conspiracy and the trial that followed. By each name, students should outline what each individual's role was in the events that unfolded. Students can use the images below in their outline to help tell the story.



Blennerhassett Mansion



Arrest of Aaron Burr



John Marshall



James Wilkinson



Harman and Margaret Blennerhassett



Aaron Burr



Thomas Jefferson

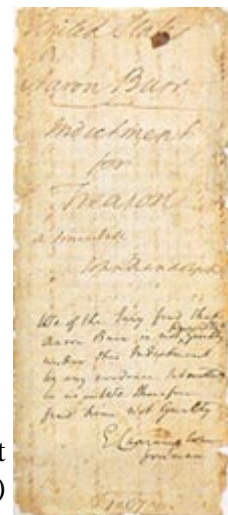


Burr gathering support



Subpoena to Jefferson

Indictment Cover Page with Verdict
(click image for indictment transcription)



Create a timeline showing the events of the conspiracy and trial as they occurred. Students can also use the images above on the time line.

Use the maps to trace out the progression of The Burr Conspiracy ending in Richmond, Virginia.



Examine the following documents. What conclusions can you draw based on these documents?

[Burr's Cipher Letter to General Wilkinson](#)

[Robert Smith's, Secretary of Navy, letter regarding Burr's movements](#)

[Jefferson's letter responding to being subpoenaed by Burr's defense](#)

[Jefferson's Special Message to Congress of January 22, 1807](#)

Portion of cipher key used to create Burr's letter to General Wilkinson

Aaron Burr was accused of leading an expedition to create an independent nation along the Mississippi River by separating territories from the United States and Spain and was tried in the federal court in Richmond, Virginia in 1807. Chief Justice John Marshall, sitting as circuit judge, found probable cause to try Burr on charges of conspiring to invade a nation at peace with the United States. Marshall however stated that he did not find probable cause, based on the evidence submitted, to try Burr for treason against the United States. ([Click to read Marshall's Opinion](#)) Chief Justice Marshall would not allow the presentation of any evidence on treason during the trial.

Burr was acquitted by the jury: "not proved to be guilty under this indictment by any evidence submitted to us."

Have students examine the Burr trial records at <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/trials/burr/burrtrial.html>

Assign students roles in order to re-enact the trial. What decision did the jury reach in your re-enactment?

Be a newspaper reporter and interview Thomas Jefferson on his reaction to being subpoenaed to testify.

Be a newspaper reporter and interview Aaron Burr upon the completion of the trial and the jury's verdict. Students should reference [Burr's trial statement](#) on the charges.

What is treason? How does the U. S. Constitution define treason?

Have students investigate other treason cases in the United States and report their findings to the class.