

Expert Available for Comment:

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Author of:

Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents that Forged the Republic
(Oxford University Press, September 2024)



DR. LINDSAY M. CHERVINSKY is a presidential historian and Executive Director of the George Washington Presidential Library at Mount Vernon. Previously, she was a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University, a historian at the White House Historical Association, and a fellow at the Kluge Center at the Library of Congress. She received her B.A. in history and political science from George Washington University and completed her master's and Ph.D. from the University of California, Davis. Dr. Chervinsky is the author of [*Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents that Forged the Republic*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2024), [*The Cabinet: George Washington and the Creation of an American Institution*](#)

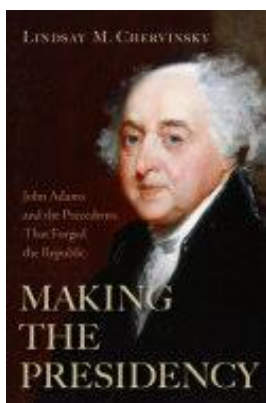
(Belknap / Harvard University Press, 2020) and co-editor of [*Mourning the Presidents: Loss and Legacy in American Culture*](#) (University of Virginia Press, 2023).

Dr. Chervinsky regularly writes for public audiences in publications like the [*Washington Post*](#), [*TIME*](#), [*USA Today*](#), [*CNN.com*](#), [*The Wall Street Journal*](#), [*Washington Monthly*](#), [*The Daily Beast*](#), and many others. She frequently provides political commentary and historical context for outlets like [*CBS News*](#), [*C-SPAN*](#), [*CNN New Day*](#), [*Face the Nation*](#), [*NewsNation*](#), and [*NPR's Morning Edition*](#). Dr. Chervinsky is a knowledgeable, accessible voice in moments of political uncertainty; for example, when President Biden withdrew from the 2024 presidential campaign, Dr. Chervinsky spoke with Martha Teichner on [*CBS Sunday Morning*](#) about the Democratic Party's historic nomination of Vice President Harris and when J.D. Vance insulted women without children she spoke with [*NPR's Morning Edition*](#) about childlessness in politics.

She has recently appeared on NPR's [*Morning Edition*](#), interviewed by Steve Inskeep, and MSNBC's [*Morning Joe*](#), interviewed by Mika Brzezinski, to discuss her new book *Making the Presidency*.

You can learn more about Dr. Chervinsky and her new book *Making the Presidency* on her [website](#) as well as view clips of her speaking [here](#). You can also follow her on Twitter at [@lmchervinsky](#).

ABOUT MAKING THE PRESIDENCY



The United States of 1797 faced enormous challenges, provoked by enemies foreign and domestic. The father of the new nation, George Washington, left his vice president, John Adams, with relatively little guidance and impossible expectations to meet. Adams was confronted with intense partisan divides, debates over citizenship, fears of political violence, potential for foreign conflict with France and Britain, and a nation unsure that the presidency could even work without Washington at the helm.

Making the Presidency is an authoritative exploration of the second US presidency, a period critical to the survival of the American republic. Through meticulous research and engaging prose, Lindsay Chervinsky illustrates the unique challenges faced by Adams and shows how he shaped the office for his successors. One of the most qualified presidents in American history, he had been a legislator, political theorist, diplomat, minister, and vice president—but he had never held an executive position. Instead, the

quixotic and stubborn Adams would rely on his ideas about executive power, the Constitution, politics, and his wife Abigail to navigate the hurdles of the position. He defended the presidency from his own often obstructionist cabinet, protected the nation from foreign attacks, and forged trust and dedication to election integrity and the peaceful transfer of power between parties, even though it cost him his political future.

Offering a portrait of one of the most fascinating and influential periods in US history, *Making the Presidency* is a must-read for anyone interested in the evolution of the presidency, the peaceful transfer of power and the creation of political norms and customs at the heart of the American republic.

TO BE IN TOUCH WITH LINDSAY:

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THEMES AND IDEAS THAT LINDSAY CHERVINSKY CAN DISCUSS:

- The eerie parallels between John Adams' political moment and today, including:
 - Pandemics
 - Intense partisanship
 - Foreign interference in elections
 - Political violence
 - Contested election results, and more
- The creation of the peaceful transfer of power between Washington and Adams, and after Adams's loss to Jefferson, and why that history matters for this election
- The history and norms of the presidency, how those norms were established by John Adams, and how they come to bear on the present

A FEW QUESTIONS FOR LINDSAY CHERVINSKY:

Q: What led you to write *Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents that Forged the Republic*?

I was toying around with a John Adams book in some fashion. I was curious about how the presidency survived after George Washington. He was such a unique figure with unparalleled stature. He established critical precedents, but if they weren't repeated and if his successors didn't uphold the office, it wouldn't have worked. Then the insurrection on January 6, 2021, happened and it changed the way I observed presidential transitions. It inspired me to look at the earliest peaceful transfers of power and examine how the presidents developed that practice as central to our republic. Once I started looking for the emergence of that tradition, it unlocked the Adams presidency.

Q: What is the central argument of the book?

John Adams knew his presidency was going to be rough. Whoever came after Washington was going to have a terrible time. He took on the challenge anyway, faced down threats to executive power from within his cabinet and party, demonstrated incredible political courage, preserved peace, and defended executive power. He crafted essential norms and customs central to our democratic institutions, most notably the peaceful transfer of power, and ensured the survival of the presidency.

Q: Many Americans know that John Adams was our second president, but if pushed for a second fact, some people would admit to not knowing much about him at all. Besides being our second president (and first vice-president), what makes Adams such a significant figure in American political history?

Adams was present and instrumental in so many critical moments. He engineered Washington's appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, he ensured Jefferson wrote the draft of the Declaration of Independence, he fought for American sovereignty in several pivotal treaties including the Treaty of Paris which ended the Revolutionary War and secured independence, he drafted the Massachusetts state constitution which served as a model for the US Constitution, and he served faithfully as the first vice president. His roles were rarely as flashy as military exploits or authoring the Declaration of Independence, but the work he did behind the scenes often made those achievements possible.

Q: Given your previous work on Washington's cabinet, how did John Adams go about constructing his own cabinet?

Poor John Adams. There was no precedent of cabinets resigning during a transition and Adams had no model to follow. He knew Washington had struggled to fill cabinet vacancies as these positions were not as prestigious as they are today, were underpaid, and kept secretaries away from their home and families for months at a time. If Washington had trouble, Adams would too. He also worried that replacing Washington's appointments would appear to be a rebuke of the first president's judgment. Finally, Adams believed that keeping the secretaries would provide helpful continuity at a moment of incredible anxiety and turmoil. So he did, and it turned out to be a terrible mistake.

Q: What advice would you give to a student who wants to write a biography on a famous American?

Find someone who ignites your curiosity, makes you laugh, and with whom you want to spend your time. Be sure to embrace their flaws and strengths. Then find something about them that hasn't been covered by other biographies. Most big figures have been written about a lot. That doesn't mean you shouldn't write about them, but you should probably try and find a new angle.

Q: What does your book reveal about America's founding principles and history?

Making the Presidency depicts a founding generation that was extraordinarily real and flawed. But they cared so deeply about the future of the nation. They were earnest and devoted and gave decades of their lives to its success. They also genuinely feared the republic would collapse at any moment. They also remind us that our norms, customs, and institutions require citizen buy-in and participation. *Making the Presidency* reveals that the founding generation understood the republic's fragility and teach us not to take any of it for granted.