

8. *Washington and Adams Compared*

To Thomas Jefferson

February, 1798

. . . I am glad to find the public opinion to be taking the turn you describe on the subject of arming. For the public opinion alone can now save us from the rash measures of our hotheaded Executive: it being evident from some late votes of the House of Rep^s, particularly in the choice of Managers for the Impeachment, that a majority there as well as in the Senate are ready to go as far as the controul of their constituents will permit. There never was perhaps a greater contrast between two characters than between those of the present President & his predecessor, altho' it is the boast & prop of the present that he treads in the steps of his predecessor. The one cool considerate & cautious, the other headlong & kindled into flame by every spark that lights on his passions: the one ever scrutinizing into the public opinion, and ready to follow where he could not lead it; the other insulting it by the most adverse sentiments & pursuits. W. a hero in the field, yet overweighing every danger in the Cabinet—A. without a single pretension to the character of a soldier, a perfect Quixote as a statesman: the former chief magistrate pursuing peace every where with sincerity, tho' mistaking the means; the latter taking as much pains to get into war, as the former took to keep out of it. The contrast might be pursued into a variety of other particulars—the policy of the one in shunning connections with the arrangements of Europe, of the other in holding out the U. S. as a makeweight in the Balances of power; the avowed exultation of W. in the progress of liberty every where, & his eulogy on the Revolution & people of France posterior even to the bloody reign & fate of Robespierre—the open denunciations by Adams of the smallest disturbance of the ancient discipline order & tranquillity of despotism, &c &c &c. . . .