

JOHN ADAMS' TITLE CAMPAIGN

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“THE most superlatively ridiculous thing I ever heard of,” Thomas Jefferson exclaimed, when he was informed in Paris in the summer of 1789 that a few months before, a Senate committee had proposed that George Washington be called “His Highness, the President of the United States, and Protector of their Liberties.”¹ A perplexing thing it was, too, for the leading proponent of a presidential title was reported to be John Adams and what this sturdy republican was doing pursuing such strange gods was more than Jefferson could imagine. He could think of only one explanation. A few years earlier, Benjamin Franklin had charged that Adams, though “‘always an honest man’” and “‘often a great one’” was “‘sometimes absolutely mad,’”² and in the absence of any reasonable explanation for the first Vice-President’s performance in the Senate, Jefferson concluded that Franklin had been right. Adams, it appeared to him, had simply taken leave of his senses during the spring of 1789.