# John Taylor Biography

## John Taylor

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# Biography

John Taylor (1753-1824), American politician and political theorist, was a major spokesman for southern agrarian, planter society.

John Taylor was born in Virginia in December 1753. His parents died while he was a child, and he was raised by his uncle, Edmund Pendleton. Taylor attended William and Mary College (1770-1772), read law in Pendleton's office (1772-1774), and then began to practice law.

At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, Taylor joined the Virginia militia and then the Continental Army. He soon became a major. When the Continental Army was reduced in 1779, he resigned and returned home. In 1783 he married Lucy Penn, the daughter of a wealthy North Carolina planter. His legal practice prospered during the next 10 years, and building on his wife's properties, he acquired a number of plantations. By 1792 Taylor was able to devote all of his time to his two major interests: scientific agriculture and public office.

From 1779 to 1785 and again from 1796 to 1800, Taylor sat in the Virginia House of Delegates. He served as a U.S. senator in 1792-1794, 1803, and 1822-1824. He early allied himself with the emerging Jeffersonian Republican party. During the 1790s he strongly opposed the financial program of Alexander Hamilton. Toward the end of the decade Taylor introduced James Madison's famous resolutions condemning the Alien and Sedition Acts in the Virginia Assembly. In 1800 he worked enthusiastically for Thomas Jefferson's election.

By about 1808, however, Taylor had become disillusioned with Jefferson's administration, accusing it of abandoning its original principles of agrarianism and states' rights. During Madison's two terms as president, Taylor moved even more sharply into opposition, speaking out vigorously against the War of 1812 and its centralizing consequences--the increased national debt, tax program, and expanded armed forces.

Much of Taylor's lasting significance rests with his published writings. Unsystematic and tedious, they nonetheless offer a cogent criticism of Hamiltonian Federalist policies and a defense of the South's agrarian, states'-rights philosophy. Among his most important publications are *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (1814) and *Constructions Construed and Constitutions Vindicated* (1820). Linked with these were his *Arator* essays (1803), suggesting agricultural reforms necessary for southern equality in the struggle against northern interests. He died on Aug. 21, 1824, at his plantation home, Hazelwood, in Virginia.