



# **The Treason Trial of Aaron Burr: Law, Politics, and the Character Wars of the New Nation (Cambridge Studies on the American Constitution)**

*R. Kent Newmyer*

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The Burr treason trial, one of the greatest criminal trials in American history, was significant for several reasons. The legal proceedings lasted seven months and featured some of the nation's best lawyers. It also pitted President Thomas Jefferson (who declared Burr guilty without the benefit of a trial and who masterminded the prosecution), Chief Justice John Marshall (who sat as a trial judge in the federal circuit court in Richmond), and former Vice President Aaron Burr (who was accused of planning to separate the western states from the Union) against each other. At issue, in addition to the life of Aaron Burr, were the rights of criminal defendants, the constitutional definition of treason, and the meaning of separation of powers in the Constitution. Capturing the sheer drama of the long trial, Kent Newmyer's book sheds new light on the chaotic process by which lawyers, judges, and politicians fashioned law for the new nation.

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