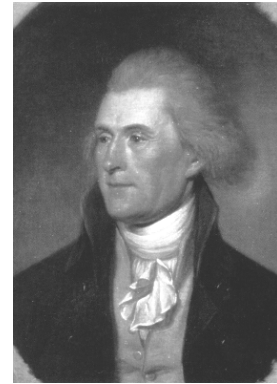


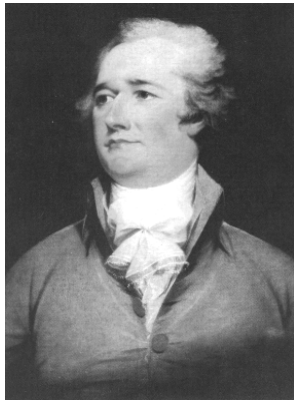
## Chapter 2

### Hamilton and Jefferson— The Men and Their Philosophies

He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, yet he claimed to speak for the vast majority of average Americans and not the wealthy. He owned slaves, but wrote the Declaration of Independence declaring that all men were born with God-given, unalienable rights. He believed in limiting the powers of the national government, but as President greatly extended its powers. It was said that he was not practical, but he is known for his inventions, his brilliance as an architect, and his careful notes on the geographical features of his home state. He was a poor public speaker, but a brilliant writer and conversationalist. The name of the man who encompassed such a bundle of contradictions was Thomas Jefferson, honored and revered for his service to his country as ambassador, Secretary of State, and President.



**Thomas Jefferson**



**Alexander Hamilton**

He was born in the West Indies to parents who were not married, but became a devoted patriot. He involved himself in the Revolution against British tyranny, but was a life-long admirer of Britain and its government. His origins were truly humble, but he spent his life dedicated to the cause of the rich and wealthy. He practically apprenticed himself as George Washington's secretary during the Revolution, but never truly admired the man. His friends and acquaintances enriched themselves following his lead, but he died in poverty and debt. He thought the Constitution was a "weak reed," but was responsible for making the government established under it successful. He favored large government but helped establish the political party currently known for its devotion to states' rights. The name of the man whose life and career sheltered such contradictions was Alexander Hamilton, first U.S. Secretary of the Treasury.

The careers of Hamilton and Jefferson were among the most interesting in American history. Few men played more pivotal roles in the period between 1770 and 1800; few were further apart on important political issues during the 1780s and 90s. Each became a political leader and played a major role in forming the first real political parties in the United States. Although each did his best to stop the other, both made unique contributions to their nation as they served President Washington in their capacities as Secretary of the Treasury and Secretary of State.

Since Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson had such an influence in the development of our country, it is fitting that we study their lives and philosophies.

## Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton, born to an unwed mother, taught himself to read and write while still living in his native West Indies. At age 14, he was managing an important trading business; at 15 he wrote an essay that caught the attention of wealthy Americans who brought him to New York for an education. He attended Kings College (now Columbia) for one year where he worked out many of the political theories he championed the remainder of his life. During this time, he also became involved in political protest against Great Britain.

During the Revolution, Hamilton attracted George Washington's attention. Washington made Hamilton his personal secretary, with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Before the war ended, the restless Hamilton found time to write hundreds of letters for his general, study and practice law, become one of the country's leading lawyers, play a major role in the battle of Yorktown, serve in Congress, and meet, court, and marry Elizabeth Schuyler, the beautiful daughter of one of New York's most influential and wealthy men, General Philip Schuyler.

After the war, Hamilton played a leading role in calling the Constitutional Convention. At the Convention, he worked hard to give more power to the national government and to the rich and well born, and less voice in government to the states and the poor and uneducated. Outvoted at the Convention by the two other delegates from his state, Hamilton left the Convention to return to New York. Returning to the Convention, Hamilton argued passionately against including a bill of rights. He harbored great reservations about the Constitution, which he regarded as too weak and too democratic. Nevertheless, Hamilton worked hard and effectively in getting the Constitution ratified in New York. He made a name for himself during this period by combining with James Madison and John Jay in writing a series of 85 essays on the Constitution. Originally published in newspapers, these influential writings have been collected in book form. Known as *The Federalist Papers*, they are still regarded as one of the best examples of political writings by Americans.

As Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton's ideas formed the basis for the government's economic policies. These policies helped establish the financial credit of the U.S. government, provided the country with a uniform currency, established a National bank, and influenced foreign policy. While holding his post, Hamilton found time to advance the cause of the Federalist Party in hundreds of newspaper articles, backstage deals, and personal letters.

Hamilton, also influential in the administration of Washington's successor, John Adams, continued to play an important role in New York State politics. His activities there brought him into a deep personal rivalry with his political foe, Jefferson's Vice-President, Aaron Burr. To prove he was not a coward, Hamilton accepted when Burr challenged him to a duel. He died with Burr's bullet in his chest in Weehawken, New Jersey, on July 12, 1804.

## Thomas Jefferson

Unlike Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson was an aristocrat by birth and a democrat by conviction. At age 14, the young Jefferson inherited his father's plantation and slaves. Soon afterwards he entered William and Mary College, where he studied ancient history, literature, and law. He did not begin to practice law, however, until he was 24. Two years later, he was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses and soon became involved in the movement for independence. As Virginia's delegate to the Second Continental Congress, Jefferson gained lasting fame by writing the Declaration of Independence, an expression of the ideals on which this country was founded.

# Digital History

www.digitalhistory.uh.edu

Returning to Virginia in 1779, Jefferson was elected its governor. He served for two years, but temporarily retired from politics following the death of his beloved wife. Though Jefferson never remarried, he resumed an active political career. In his native state, Jefferson worked for freedom of religion, a system of public education, and an expanded right to vote. As a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation, Jefferson spearheaded a drive to prohibit slavery in the Northwest Territory, which included present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Between 1785 and 1789, Jefferson served as America's ambassador to France, where he lived with one of his slaves and allegedly fathered a child by her. More important, he played a role in the events leading to the French Revolution. Returning from France in time to enter Washington's cabinet, Jefferson was critical of the new U.S. Constitution, which not only lacked a bill of rights but also, according to Jefferson, was too aristocratic.

While serving as Secretary of State, Jefferson opposed Hamilton on virtually every issue. Though he lost most of his battles with Hamilton, Jefferson managed to organize an opposition political party, called the Republicans (the forerunner of the present Democratic Party). Following his term as Secretary of State, Jefferson served as Vice-President under John Adams, 1797-1801, and two terms as President, 1801-1809.

After completing his term in office as President, Jefferson busied himself with taking care of his plantation, maintaining a huge personal correspondence, entertaining an endless series of guests, writing his Notes on Virginia (a keen observation of the customs, manners, and geography of his native Virginia), and devoting himself to his invention. He died on July 4, 1836, the same day that marked the death of his friend and sometimes rival John Adams. Jefferson left his personal library to the U.S. Government; it became the basis for the current Library of Congress.

## **Contrasting Philosophies of Hamilton and Jefferson**

The following are among the best-known ideas from the writings of Hamilton and Jefferson. As you read them, try to understand not only the differences between these men, but also the consistencies in the thoughts of each.

## ***Whose Support Is Needed Most: The Rich or the 'Great Mass of People'***

### ***Hamilton***

All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and the well-born; the other, the mass of the people. The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct and permanent share in the government.

Our great error is that we suppose mankind more honest than they are. Our prevailing passions are ambition and interest; it will be the duty of a wise government to control these passions in order to make them subservient to the public good.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Jefferson***

Men...are naturally divided into two parties. Those who fear and distrust the people [and] those who identify themselves with the people and have confidence in them as the most honest and safe [for keeping a government in check]...Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government.

The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately by the grace of God.<sup>3</sup>

## ***On Rebellions***

### ***Hamilton***

Beware, my dear sir, of magnifying a riot into an insurrection, by employing in the first instance an inadequate force. 'Tis better far to err on the other side. Whenever the government appears in arms, it ought to appear like Hercules, and inspire respect by the display of strength.<sup>4,5</sup>

### ***Jefferson***

A little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and necessary in the political world as storms in the physical. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in, Thomas Bailey, *The American Spirit*, (D.C.Heath: Boston, MA, 1965), p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-45.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

## ***National Government or Local Control***

### ***Hamilton***

There is no reason to keep state governments the way we have them today. They are not necessary for any great purpose—neither for agriculture, commerce, revenue, or defense. Yes, they are necessary to administer laws—but not to make them. The states need not continue to have any great authority. We can all but abolish them and have one government for all the people of the country.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Jefferson***

Our country is too large to have all its affairs directed by a single government. Public servants at such great distance from under the eye of their constituents must be unable to administer and overlook all the details necessary for good government...and will invite public agents to corruption and plunder, and waste...Let the general government be reduced to a very simple organization and a very inexpensive one; a few plain duties to be performed by a few public servants.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

## ***On the Need for a Bill of Rights***

### ***Hamilton***

A bill of rights is not only unnecessary in the proposed Constitution, but would even be dangerous. They would contain various exceptions to powers not granted; and on this very account, would afford a usable pretext to claim more than were granted. For why declare that things shall not be done which there is no power to do? Why, for instance, should it be said that the liberty of the press shall not be restrained, when no such power is given by which restrictions may be imposed?<sup>9</sup>

### ***Jefferson***

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

A bill of rights is what the people are entitled to against every government on earth.<sup>10</sup>

## ***On Industrializing America***

### ***Hamilton***

It is in the interest of nations to diversify the industrious pursuits of the individuals who compose them; that the establishment of manufacturers is calculated not only to increase the general stock of useful and productive labor, but even to improve the state of agriculture...<sup>11</sup>

### ***Jefferson***

For the general operation of manufacture, let our workshops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there than bring them (here). The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government. The mobs of great cities add to government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.<sup>12</sup>

## **Suggested Student Exercises:**

1. Summarize the beliefs of either Jefferson or Hamilton on at least four of the issues raised in this chapter. Come to class prepared to argue favoring the views of one and opposing the views of the other. Include a short statement on the biography of either man to support your case.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787.

<sup>10</sup> Saul Padover, *Thomas Jefferson and Democracy*, (New American Library: New York 1958), p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), p. 176.

<sup>12</sup> Saul Padover, *op. cit.*, p. 70.