

Merritt/ US History and Government

Directions: Read the attached documents and answer the following questions in complete sentences. Explain all answers and support with quotes from the documents. 20 pts.

1. According to Hamilton, what is the most important role of the government?
2. Why does Hamilton support a strong central government?
3. Why does Thomas Jefferson attack Alexander Hamilton?
4. Why does Roger Sherman agree with Hamilton on the public debt?

Document 1: Hamilton Scans the Future (1787)

Alexander Hamilton of New York, though only thirty-two, was probably the most brilliant and eloquent member of the Philadelphia assemblage. His great contribution was in engineering the call for the Convention and in campaigning for the Constitution. His own federalist and centralist views were too extreme for the other delegates. Hamilton prepared the following memorandum shortly after the Constitution was drafted in which he explains why the rich be would be favorable to the new instrument and the poor and the states' righters would be unfavorable?

"The new Constitution has in favor of its success these circumstances: A very great weight of influence of the persons who framed it particularly in the universal popularity of General Washington. The good will of the commercial interest throughout the states, which will give all its efforts to the establishment of a government capable of regulating, protecting, and extending the commerce of the Union. The good will of most men of property in the several states, who wish a government of the Union able to protect them against domestic violence and the degradations which the democratic spirit is apt to make on property, and who are besides anxious for the respectability of the nation. The hopes of the creditors of the United States, that a general government, possessing the means of doing it, will pay the debts of the Union. A strong belief in the people at large of the insufficiency of the present Confederation to preserve the existence of the Union and of the necessity of the Union to their safety and prosperity . . .

Add to these causes: the disinclination of people to taxes, and of course to a strong government. The opposition of all men much in debt who will not wish to see a government established, one object of which is to restrain the means of cheating creditors. The democratical jealousy of the people, which may be alarmed at the appearance of institutions that may seem calculated to place the power of the community in the hands of a few hands, and to raise a few individuals to stations of great pre-eminence. And the influence of some foreign powers, who, from different motives, will not wish to see an energetic government established throughout the states. . .

The present appearances and all other circumstances considered, the probability seems to be on the side of adoption."

From: Thomas A. Bailey, and David M. Kennedy. The American Spirit, Volume I, Sixth Edition; Boston: D.C. Heath, 1987, p. 135. The Works of Alexander Hamilton, New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1904, vol. 1, pp. 420-423.

Document 2: Hamilton Details His Opposition to Jefferson

By the spring of 1792, the conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson was being widely discussed in the legislature and in the newspapers. Hamilton, in an attempt to explain his position toward Jefferson, wrote a long letter to his friend, Colonel Edward Carrington, probably with a wider audience in mind. Portions of this letter of May 26, 1792, appear below.

"It was not till the last session that I became unequivocally convinced of the following truth: 'that Mr. Madison, cooperating with Mr. Jefferson, is at the head of a faction decidedly hostile to me and my administration; and actuated by views, in my judgment, subversive of the principles of good government and dangerous to the Union, peace, and happiness of the country.'

First—As to the point of opposition to me and my administration. In various conversations, with foreigners as well as citizens, he has thrown censure on my principles of government and on my measures of administration. In the question concerning the bank, he not only delivered an opinion in writing against its constitutionality and expediency, but he did it in a style and manner which I felt as partaking of asperity and ill humor toward me. When any turn of things in the community has threatened either odium or embarrassment to me, he has not been able to suppress the satisfaction which it gave him. A part of this is, of course, information, and might be misrepresentation, but it comes through so many channels, and so well accords with what fails under my own observation, that I can entertain no doubt...

In almost all the questions, great and small, which have arisen since the first session of Congress, Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison have been found among those who are disposed to narrow the federal authority. The question of a national bank is one example. The question of bounties to the fisheries is another. Mr. Jefferson, it is known, did not in the first instance cordially acquiesce in the new Constitution for the United States, he had many doubts and reserves. He left this country before we had experienced the imbecilities of the former [constitution]...

As to my own political creed, I give it to you with the utmost sincerity. I am affectionately attached to the republican theory. I desire above all things to see the equality of political rights, exclusive of all hereditary distinction, firmly established by a practical demonstration of its being consistent with the order and happiness of society. As to State governments, the prevailing bias of my judgment is that if they can be circumscribed within bounds, consistent with the preservation of the national government, they will prove useful. . . . As the thing now is, however, I acknowledge the most serious apprehensions, that the government of the United States will not be able to maintain itself against their influence. I see that influence already penetrating into the national councils and preventing their direction; hence, a disposition on my part towards a liberal construction of the powers of the national government.

On the whole, the only enemy which Republicanism has to fear is in the spirit of faction and anarchy. . . If I were disposed to promote monarchy and overthrow the state governments, I would mount the hobby-horse of popularity; I would cry out 'usurpation,' 'danger to liberty,' etc., etc.; I would endeavor to prostrate the national government, raise a ferment, and then 'ride in the whirlwind, and direct the storm.' That there are men acting with Jefferson and Madison who have this in view, I verily believe; I could lay my finger on some of them. That Madison does not mean it, I also verily believe; and I rather believe the same of Jefferson, but I read him upon the whole thus: 'A man of profound ambition and violent passions.'

Perhaps I have treated certain characters with too much severity. I have, however, not meant to do them injustice, and, from the bottom of my soul, believe I have drawn them truly. . . "

From: Blanche Touhill, Readings in American History, New York: Laidlaw Brothers, 1970, p. 82. Reprinted from H.C. Lodge, ed., The Works of Alexander Hamilton, New York, Houghton Mifflin, and Company, 1904, vol. 1, pp. 420-423.

Document 3: Jefferson Details his Opposition to Hamilton

On September 9, 1792, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson wrote to President Washington in reply to a letter Washington had sent to both Hamilton and Jefferson, berating them for causing such dissension in the government. In the excerpt below from Jefferson's letter to Washington, the Secretary of State defends his actions and explains his reasons for opposing Hamilton

"I now take the liberty of proceeding to that part of your letter wherein you notice the internal dissensions which have taken place within our government, and their disagreeable effect on its movements. . . To no one have they given deeper concern than myself; to no one equal mortification at being myself a part of them. Though I take to myself no more than my share of the general observations of your letter, yet I am so desirous ever that you should know the whole truth, and believe no more than the truth, that I am glad to seize every occasion of developing to you whatever I do or think relative to the government, and shall, therefore, ask permission to be more lengthy now than the occasion particularly calls for, or could otherwise perhaps justify. That I have utterly, in my private conversations, disapproved of the system of the Secretary of the Treasury, I acknowledge and avow; . . His system flowed from principles adverse to liberty, and was calculated to undermine and demolish the Republic, creating an influence of his department on the members of the Legislature . . . If what was actually doing, begat uneasiness in those who wished for virtuous government was further proposed was not less threatening to the friends of the Constitution. For in a report on the subject of manufacturers, (still to be acted on,) it was expressly assumed that the General Government has a right to exercise all powers which may be for the *general welfare*, that is to say, all the legitimate powers of government, since no government has a legitimate right to do what is not for the welfare of the governed. Thus, the object of these plans, taken together, is to draw all the powers of government into the hands of the general Legislature, to establish means for corrupting a sufficient corps in that Legislature to divide the honest votes, and to have the corps under the command of the Secretary of the Treasury, for the purpose of subverting step by step, the principles of the Constitution which he has so often declared to be a thing of nothing, which must be changed. . .

He charges me. . .with having written letters from Europe to my friends to oppose the present Constitution. . .The first charge is most false. No man in the United States, I suppose, approved of every title in the Constitution: no one, I believe, approved more of it than I did, and more of it was certain disapproved by my accuser than by me, and of its parts most vitally republican. . . You will see that my objection to the Constitution was, that it wanted a bill of rights securing freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom

from standing armies, trial by jury, and a constant habeas corpus act. Colonel Hamilton's was, that it wanted a king and a House of Lords...

My whole correspondence while in France, and every word, letter and act on the subject, since my return, prove that no man is more ardently intent to see the public debt soon and sacredly paid off than I am. This exactly marks the difference between Colonel Hamilton's views and mine, that I would wish the debt paid tomorrow; he wishes it never to be paid, but always to be a thing wherewith to corrupt and manage the Legislature.

I will not suffer my retirement to be clouded by the slanders of a man, whose history, from the moment history can stoop to notice him, is a tissue of machinations against the liberty of the country which not only has received and given him bread, but heaped honors on his head."

From: Blanche Touhill, Readings in American History, New York: Laidlaw Brothers, 1970, pp. 82-85. Reprinted from: A.L. Albert Ellery Bergh, ed., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Charlottesville: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1905, pp. 394-408.

Document 4: Roger Sherman on Assumption

In the following letter, Roger Sherman, a member of Congress from Connecticut and the author of the Connecticut Compromise at the Constitutional Convention, explains why he supports Hamilton's policy on the debt and outlines the ideal relationship between federal and state governments.

"The report of the Secretary [Hamilton] has been under consideration for some time respecting a provision for the national debt. There has been a long debate respecting a discrimination between the Securities in the hands of the original creditors and those which have been transferred [i.e., bought up by speculators]- but it was finally decided by large majority against a discrimination, the motives were that the Securities were by government made transferable, & payable to the bearer, and therefore the transfer vested the whole property in the purchaser, if there were no fraud or compulsion. No common market price could be fixed without great inequality & injustice in many instances, and a particular inquiry into the circumstances of every case would be impracticable. Besides, the public faith had been pledged after the transfers in most of the cases of speculation by issuing new securities to the purchasers in their own names. It was, therefore, concluded that government could do nothing to impair or alter the contracts consistent with good faith. The assumption of the debts of the several states incurred for the common defense during the late war is now under consideration. The Secretary of the Treasury has been directed to report what funds can be provided for them in case they should be assumed. His report is contained in one of the enclosed papers. He supposed that sufficient provision may be made for the whole debt, without resorting to direct taxation. If so, I think it must be an advantage to all the states, as well as to the creditors. Some have suggested that it will tend to increase the power of the federal government & lessen the importance of the state governments, but I don't see how it can operate in that manner. The constitutions are so framed that the government of the United States & those of the particular states are friendly & not hostile to each other. Their jurisdictions being distinct, & respecting different objects, & both standing upon the broad basis of the people, will act for *their* benefit in their respective spheres without any interference. And the more strength each has to attain the ends of their institutions the better for both, and for the people at large.

I have never been of the opinion that the governments of particular States ought to be supported in their full vigor, as the security of the civil & domestic rights of the people more immediately depend on them, that their local interests & customs can be best regulated and supported by their own laws. The principal advantages of the federal government is to protect the several States in their enjoyment of those rights, against foreign invasion, and to preserve peace, and a beneficial intercourse between each other, and to protect & regulate their commerce with foreign nations."