

Jefferson vs. Hamilton

State Power and Federal Power

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. Jefferson is one of the most unique characters in American history. He loved democracy and detested kings and centralized power. This made him a great candidate to write the most famous political breakup letter ever: the Declaration of Independence. Once America became a country, he continued to advocate strongly for states' rights. He didn't want the federal government to become too powerful like the one America's founders had rebelled against. He was uncomfortable with the power of the presidency but had to deal with it himself when he became the third president. He kept things more casual in the White House though, often greeting dinner guests in a pair of worn-out slippers.

Notes

2. George Washington was unanimously elected to be the first president of the United States. On April 30, 1789, he placed his hand on a Masonic Bible and took the oath of office. Washington was a well-liked Revolutionary War hero. He enjoyed long, seven-hour fox hunts, fixing things and gardening. Washington, DC wasn't the capital when President Washington took office. Instead, he began his presidency in New York, bringing seven of his slaves with him.

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3. Both Jefferson and Hamilton served in Washington's cabinet: Jefferson served as America's first secretary of state while Hamilton was secretary of the treasury. They started arguing almost immediately about the role of the government; Jefferson was a states' rights supporter and opposed Hamilton's national bank, and Hamilton found Jefferson foolishly idealistic. Jefferson thought Hamilton was a monarchist. The Anti-Federalists supported Jefferson, and the Federalists supported Hamilton.

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4. Jefferson and the Anti-Federalists wanted more power and autonomy for state governments. They wanted to limit the federal government. They opposed establishing a national bank, an institution that Hamilton and his supporters fought for. The Anti-Federalists had support from farmers and Southerners.

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In many ways, Jefferson's views on limiting the federal government didn't change when he became president. One of the first things Jefferson did after taking office was to make the footprint of the federal government smaller. He cut taxes, repealed tariffs, repealed the Whiskey Tax that had led to the Whiskey Rebellion and also cut military spending.

5. Hamilton and the Federalists favored more power and autonomy for a centralized, federal government. The Federalists worked to establish a national bank—they argued that this institution was needed for the nation to collect funds and print money. Federalists drew their support from urban centers and from the North.

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6. Hamilton didn't come to America until he was 16. He arrived to enroll in King's College (later renamed Columbia University) in New York City. Hamilton was born on the island of Nevis in the British West Indies. His mother, a Frenchwoman, had an affair with his father, a Scottish trader, and was married to someone else when Hamilton was born.

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In contrast, Jefferson was born at the Shadwell plantation located just outside of Charlottesville, Virginia. He spent his childhood roaming the woods and studying his books in the remote Virginia Piedmont region. His father, Peter Jefferson, was a successful farmer. He was also a skilled cartographer who produced the first accurate map of the Province of Virginia.

7. b'

Thomas Jefferson is one of the most controversial figures in American history: some exalt him as the Father of Freedom, but to others, he was an enslaver and a racist. Most people acknowledge that, like it or not, he was both.

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Jefferson, who made the most forceful statement for general equality that the world had ever known (We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal), enslaved over 600 people throughout his life. Clearly, he was not ready to extend equality to Black men or women of any race. Jefferson was an idealist, but his ideals were very much bound within the world he lived. He himself may have said it best: "Bigotry is the disease of ignorance."

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Hamilton's America resembles the modern US government.

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So who ended up winning the argument between Jefferson and Hamilton? Over the next half century, the battle between state and federal power would intensify over the issue of slavery, culminating in a terrible and bloody war.

But, over the course of United States history, the federal government would take on more and more responsibilities: from guiding the banking system to conserving natural parks; from supporting education to developing new technologies; from helping the poor and elderly to financing governments overseas.

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9. From the late 1790s until 1815, France, led by Napoleon Bonaparte, fought with England, Russia and Austria. These series of conflicts are known as the Napoleonic Wars. To fund the expensive Napoleonic Wars, both the English and the French began seizing American ships. Tensions flared in 1807, when the captain of the USS Chesapeake refused to let the British aboard. The British frigate HMS Leopard fired on the American ship. The British finally did board and hanged four American sailors. Jefferson was outraged. He banned all British warships from American waters. Congress quickly passed the Embargo Act of 1807. It ended all imports and exports because it banned any ships from sailing from a US port to a foreign port. The act was designed to hurt the British and French economies. But it mostly hurt the United States.

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10. The United States wasn't always a land "from sea to shining sea." Spain originally owned the area west of the Mississippi, which was known as the Louisiana Territory. Then France, under Napoleon, owned it. Jefferson attempted to purchase the territory from Napoleon. He was scared that Napoleon, in his quest for world domination, would try to build an empire in America. But Napoleon needed cash and agreed to sell Louisiana to the United States for \$15 million in April 1803.

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The Louisiana Purchase nearly doubled America's size. Ironically, the purchase was financed using bonds from Hamilton's US Bank, which Jefferson had opposed and said was unconstitutional.

11. Jefferson hired army captain Meriwether Lewis to head the expedition to map the newly purchased American West. Lewis chose his friend William Clark to co-lead the expedition, and the two of them hired forty skilled soldiers and hunters for the journey. One of the men also brought his slave, York.

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Lewis and Clark set off from St. Louis in 1804. In the Dakotas, they hired a French-Canadian trapper and one of his Indian wives, Sacagawea, as their guides.

Sacagawea, a pregnant, Native American teenager, acted as interpreter. She negotiated a crucial purchase of horses that the group needed to cross the Rockies. While on the trek, she also gave birth to a healthy child.

12. Leading up to and during the War of 1812, the British Navy captured American ships and forced their American crews into its army. This was called impressment. In response, President James Madison and Congress declared war against Britain. The War of 1812 was fought in America. When the British occupied DC, they burned it. Afterwards, the president's mansion was painted white to cover up the fire damage, giving it the name "White House."

The United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, but the British in the Gulf Coast didn't get the news. They invaded New Orleans but were quickly repelled by Andrew Jackson's troops.

13. America was tired of the French, British and Spanish keeping so many troops in North and South America. In response, President James Monroe and his secretary of state John Quincy Adams drafted the Monroe Doctrine. This declared American dominance in the Western Hemisphere. The doctrine told Europe to stay out.

Ever since, American foreign policy has reflected this doctrine. The United States has funded governments and rebel groups in Latin America as it has seen fit.

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