

17.037/17.038 American Political Thought  
Spring 2004

3/9/04 Student Lecture Notes

Jefferson Republicans v. Hamiltonian Federalists, with Madison in the Pivot

Notes from Presentation:

Mar 9<sup>th</sup> Handout  
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Jeffersonian Republicans v. Hamiltonian Federalists, with Madison in the Pivot

I. Background Themes

1. Central question of the period: how strong (and big) the national government should be; relationship between federal and state jurisdiction unresolved in Constitution.
2. Nascent federal government: each major decision thought to set a precedent.
3. Unsettled political roles.
  - a. Cabinet secretaries publicly vying (often on opposing sides) to persuade the President and Congress to support legislation.
  - b. Burgeoning of first political parties: competing sides need to establish voting coalitions in first congresses to enact legislation.

II. Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*

1. Centrality of states' rights.
2. Emancipation and colonization of slaves.
3. Free market enthusiast or strategic politician?

III. Constitutionality of a National Bank

Jefferson and Hamilton disagree about the constitutionality of a national bank. Jefferson favors strict interpretation, creating a government with powers limited to those specifically enumerated in the Constitution and additional powers only strictly or absolutely necessary to exercise express powers. According to his view, the federal government does not have the power to establish a corporation, and thus cannot establish a national bank. Hamilton takes a wider view of the role of government, claiming powers implied in the constitution. Hamilton claims "all government is a delegation of power" (p. 615) and identifies his argument with Jefferson as a question of how far this delegation of power should extend.

**Hamilton's** argument fundamentally contains three points: the government is given certain implied powers, the bank fits within these implied powers, and without such powers the government would be largely ineffective. His argument on the bank issue and

on the issue of subsidizing manufactures implies that he thinks the government is the best judge of the “general welfare” of the country.

**Madison** does not directly comment on the bank issue, although his presidency helped to establish the Second Bank of the United States. He does, however, side with Hamilton on government subsidy of manufacture. Simultaneously, he agrees with Jefferson that *laissez faire* views of industry are better for the common good, as individuals and industry will act in the common good if pursuing private profit. He also claims government regulation of private property sets up a dangerous precedent since a larger definition of property includes anything that a person puts value on and has a right to.

IV. Discussion questions:

1. Did the Framers anticipate the contention over the powers (or lack thereof) of the newly-created national government? In other words, did the Framers deliberately leave unresolved the question of the future role of the federal government (compared to the states), or was it merely a result of political compromise?
2. How do we reconcile Jefferson’s position on slavery with his adherence to the principles and ideas of the Revolution?
3. How should we define property? Is Madison’s definition of property as “everything to which a man may attach a value and have a right” (p. 267) justified within a constitutional framework? Would Hamilton and Jefferson agree or disagree with this definition of property?

#### Prof’s Comments

- Dahl, *How Democratic is the Constitution?*
  - Three phases of U.S. political experience:
    1. proto-republican phase: first century and a half of experience of government; e.g., town meetings; elections to state legislators
    2. republican phase: Declaration of Independence – triggered democratic practices; extension of franchise
    3. democratic-republic: no universal equality, but compared to rest of world, United States better than most; similar to Tocqueville’s characterization that there is a “general equality of conditions.”
- Federalists → Democratic-Republicans
  - Framers (Federalists) concerned that privileged interests would be disadvantaged; feared that majority would constitute an unruly mob, which was a threat to property
  - Framers (Federalists) had a general fear of parties or factions (Madison in Federalist #10)
  - Yet, ironically, Madison was instrumental in helping Jefferson create the Democratic-Republicans, and to inaugurate a two-party system.

- What happened? Partisan politics transformed the Constitution.
  - Framers did not foresee necessity, desirability, or inevitability of political parties (became necessary, desirable and inevitable to construct winning voting coalitions in Congress, and to successfully compete with opponents in elections).
- Hamilton:
- Federalists: modernizing, nationalists.
  - Wanted to establish the new country as a great industrial and military power.
  - Promoted use of government to subsidize manufacturing in a predominantly agricultural country.
  - Wanted strong army and naval fleet.
  - Need broad constitutional interpretation to carry out this plan – doctrine of implied powers.
- Jefferson:
- Democratic-Republicans: agrarian, isolationists
  - Loathed Federalists.
  - Identified with agrarian society, free of manufacturing; based largely on Adam Smith’s idea that the US could not compete with European’s industrially. Exceptions: 1) production of clothes and farm tools; small-scale would not corrupt; 2) infrastructure.
  - Agrarian strategy presupposed global division of economy.
- Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation*, contemporary book on American political thought.
- Hamilton should be replace Jefferson – argues that modern political institutions and U.S. political experience clearly repudiates Jeffersonian ideas (e.g., strong federal government, strong military, industrial and capitalist society, and strong judiciary).
  - Regards Hamilton as a “forgotten hero.”
- Madison:
- Shift from deploring factions to helping create Jeffersonian Republicans; later in life calls parties a “natural offspring of freedom.”
  - Worried that extension of suffrage beyond property owners was a potential danger, but much later argues that majority rule was the “least imperfect form of government.”