

Topic: Candidates, Parties, and Ballot Measures

What the students do: Read about how political parties began and examine a chart describing some of Hamilton's and Jefferson's views. Select views they think were important both during the founding period and today.

California History-Social Science Standards: 8.3, 11.1, 12.6, 12.7

CMS Proven Practices: 1,2

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How American Political Parties Began

Overview

In this lesson, students read about how political parties began during the founding period. Next, working in pairs or small groups, students examine elements of Hamilton's and Jefferson's views on major topics. Putting themselves in the time period of the new nation, they decide which overall vision was best for America, then they select federalist and republican views that they think are relevant today.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the evolution of political parties in American history through the early 1800s.
- Analyze items from Hamilton's and Jefferson's political agendas.
- Select items from those agendas that were most important then and now, and justify their choices.

Materials

Copies of the reading, "How American Political Parties Began" — one per student.

Copies of the handout, "Two Visions for America" — per student.

Procedure

I. Focus Activity — Political Parties

A. Engage the students in a discussion using the following questions:

- What are political parties?
- What are some political parties you have heard of?
- Do you think it is good or bad to have political parties in our country? Why?

Explain to students that political parties play a big role in American politics and elections and that today they are going to learn more about how political parties got started.

II. Reading — How American Political Parties Began

A. Distribute the reading, "How American Political Parties Began" to each student. When they complete the reading, discuss:

- Under the Constitution, what role do political parties have?
- What did George Washington say about political parties in his Farewell Address? What reasons did he give?
- What circumstances led to the development of the Federalist Party?
- How did the presidential election of 1800 contribute to the development of political parties?

III. Activity — Two Visions for America

- A. Distribute the handout, "Two Visions for America" to each student. Divide the class into pairs or small groups and explain that first they will imagine that they are living during the time when Hamilton and Jefferson were members of Washington's Cabinet and decide which vision they think is best for the new nation. Then, they will choose two views from each side that they think are relevant today.
- B. Ask half of the groups to report and justify their responses to the first question, and the other half of the groups to respond to the second question.

IV. Debrief — Political Parties Today

- A. Engage students in a discussion using the following questions:
- What are some of the issues political parties are talking about now?
 - Do you think political parties are good for democracy today? Why or why not?

How American Political Parties Began

At first, our nation's founders—including Hamilton, Jefferson, and others—believed political parties were evil and a threat to the new nation. But these early American leaders soon began to invent a new and important role for political parties in a democracy.

When the Constitution was written in 1787, the founders did not include any mention of political parties. Even in electing the president, the founders did not intend a role for political parties. The Constitution established an Electoral College. It called for a small number of electors—elected or appointed in the states—to meet and choose the best person for president. The person with the most elector votes would become president. The runner-up would automatically become the vice president.

Hamilton vs. Jefferson

In 1788, George Washington won a large majority of electoral votes and became the nation's first president. John Adams, who won the second highest number of electoral votes for president, became vice president.

When Washington appointed his Cabinet, he included Alexander Hamilton as secretary of the treasury and Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state. As it turned out, these two Cabinet members disagreed on many issues.

Hamilton strongly believed that for the new nation to succeed, it had to gain financial investors—both American and foreign. The new nation needed them, Hamilton argued. They would invest in businesses and make loans to the government for projects like roads, harbors, and canals. To gain the confidence of investors, Hamilton promoted a plan to help stabilize America's financial condition. Supported by Washington, it called for the federal government to pay off all Revolutionary War debt owed by the federal government and the states. This would show investors that the United States was a good investment.

Hamilton proposed a bold economic plan to raise revenue to settle these debts. He asked Congress to approve taxes on products like whiskey made in the United States. He also proposed creating a Bank of the United States to centralize federal government finances.

Almost immediately, Thomas Jefferson in Washington's Cabinet and James Madison in Congress opposed Hamilton's economic program. They complained that many of the investors would be greedy and would make huge profits at America's expense.

Jefferson and Madison also objected to new taxes because these taxes mainly burdened small farmers and city workers. Hamilton replied that wealthy Americans already carried a heavy tax burden and that it was time for the common people to pay their share.

Jefferson and Madison also opposed a national bank that, they said, would give too much power to the federal government. Hamilton and his supporters thought that a central bank was vital for a strong and stable economy.

As differences emerged between supporters of Hamilton and Jefferson, many began referring to Hamilton and his allies as the Federalist Party. Jefferson claimed Federalist policies mainly benefitted the "opulent" (rich) classes while he and his supporters represented "the mass of the people" (middle class).

In foreign affairs, the Federalists wanted a strong trade relationship with Britain. Washington sent John Jay to Britain in 1794 to negotiate an end to its interference with American merchant ships to prevent another war. Hamilton was satisfied with the Jay Treaty and pushed for Senate approval. Jefferson and his followers condemned the treaty as too favorable to the British.

Jefferson and his supporters favored a closer relationship with Britain's rival, France. The French had helped the Americans win the Revolutionary War. During Washington's presidency, the French Revolution erupted. Revolutionaries executed King Louis XVI and declared a French republic. The new French republic's motto was "Liberty, equality, fraternity."

Unlike the American Revolution, the one in France upended French society. The republic confiscated (took) the land of the rich people and hunted them down. In 1793, a "reign of terror" led to the execution of thousands of people condemned as disloyal to the republic.

France's new republic scared the Federalists, who feared mob rule, lawlessness, and the confiscation of property. Many of Jefferson's followers, however, cheered the French republicans. They believed the republicans were carrying forward the ideals of equality contained in the American Declaration of Independence.

American support increased for France in 1793 when it declared war against Britain. Many of Jefferson's followers wanted to enter the war on the side of France. Many Federalists called for aiding the British. But Hamilton persuaded Washington to be neutral with Britain and France. In a rare moment of agreement with Hamilton, Jefferson supported this policy.

When Washington's second term began, Jefferson left the Cabinet. He deeply opposed most of Hamilton's Federalist Party policies. Jefferson believed the Federalists were attempting to establish an all-powerful federal government, one that would soon become a monarchy.

Jefferson began working with Madison to organize opposition to the Federalist Party. The Federalists referred to this opposition as the Democratic-Republican Party. Soon, however, those opposing Hamilton and the Federalist Party began to call themselves Jeffersonian Republicans, or simply Republicans.

Federalists vs. Republicans

At the end of his second term, Washington announced he would not run again for president. The bitter rivalry that had developed between the Federalists and Republicans deeply disturbed him. In his Farewell Address, he warned that parties were likely "to become potent engines by which... unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government." In other words, Washington believed that the powerful political parties could get people elected who might not make good decisions for "we, the people."

Washington's warning did not convince many. In the presidential election of 1796, the first without Washington as a candidate, candidates were backed by the Federalist and Republican parties. The Federalists favored John Adams and the Republicans backed Thomas Jefferson.

Neither Adams nor Jefferson actively campaigned. They remained at home while their supporters wrote letters and newspaper articles promoting their candidate. Adams won the presidency with 71 of the 139 Electoral College votes, one more than the required majority. Jefferson with 68 electoral votes came in second to become vice president. Thus the new administration had a Federalist president and Republican vice president.

Adams continued Washington's pro-British trade policies. Angered, France began to attack American merchant ships. The attacks enraged the American public and Adams threatened war against France. He also proposed increasing taxes to create a navy and expand the federal army. Jefferson and the Republican Party were alarmed at the rush to war and opposed the idea of building up the military. They viewed a large military as a threat to the power of the states.

As war loomed, the Federalists claimed that French spies and Americans who insulted federal officials were a threat to the security of the nation at home. In 1798, Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts. These laws forbid any mean criticism of the president or other federal officials. In a series of trials, Federalist judges and juries convicted about a dozen Republican writers and newspaper editors, mainly for defaming President Adams. Jefferson thought these convictions were wrong and accused the Federalists of trying to destroy the Republican Party.

With Congress controlled by the Federalists, legislation was passed for a navy and bigger army. But Adams used diplomacy to avoid war with France. This angered many of his fellow Federalists who wanted to take a tougher stand against the French.

The Struggle for Power in 1800

In 1800, the Federalists again chose John Adams to run for president. They chose Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, a Hamilton loyalist from South Carolina, as their candidate for vice president. The Republicans nominated Thomas Jefferson for

president. They selected Aaron Burr, Hamilton's opponent in New York, for vice president.

Campaign tactics changed in this election. Adams made a speechmaking tour, campaigning on his record and promoting himself as a political moderate. Jefferson remained at home but wrote numerous letters to his supporters. He also wrote a statement of principles, perhaps the first party platform. Jefferson's statement called for restoring civil liberties, curbing the growth of federal power, and protecting states' rights.

Both parties used political attacks and smears, perhaps making this one of the dirtiest presidential elections in U.S. history. Republicans called Adams a monarchist who wanted to enslave the people. The Federalists called Jefferson a political radical and atheist.

Backstabbing occurred within both parties. Hamilton despised Adams and worked to line up the Federalist electoral vote to elect Pinckney as president, who was supposed to be running for vice president. This divided the Federalist Party between Adams and Hamilton factions. On the Republican side, Aaron Burr, running for vice president, secretly plotted to become president in the event of a tie between Jefferson and himself.

Jefferson and Burr ended up with more electoral votes than Adams and Pinckney. In fact, with 73 electoral votes each, the two Republicans did tie for president.

The tie in the Electoral College threw the election for president into the House of Representatives. Jefferson needed a majority, nine of the 16 states, to win the presidency. The House voted 35 times and each time, no candidate won nine states.

Finally, Hamilton asked fellow Federalists to vote for Jefferson. Hamilton distrusted Burr even more than he did Jefferson. On the 36th ballot, Jefferson won the presidency with 10 states. Burr came in second and became vice president.

The Federalist Party handed over the government to Jefferson and the Republicans. The ruling party had peacefully given up power as the result of a democratic election. Even today, this is a major test for any nation wanting to be a democracy.

Because of the election results, the Federalists also became a party of the minority. This means that they had fewer members in Congress than the majority party. This, too, was significant. The election of 1800 produced a new positive role for a political party that was out of power. It became the "loyal opposition", opposing the ruling party while still remaining loyal to the Constitution and nation.

In 1804, the 12th Amendment was added to the Constitution. It required the Electoral College to vote separately for president and vice president rather than for the two best candidates for president. From then on, parties nominated candidates to run for president or vice president. In effect, this amendment recognized the permanent role of political parties in American government.

Two Visions for America

Study the political differences between the Federalist and Republican parties summarized in the chart below.

1. Discuss and decide which vision overall was best for the new nation when Hamilton and Jefferson were members of Washington's Cabinet.
2. Select two of Hamilton's views and two of Jefferson's views that are relevant and important for America today.
3. Prepare to report and justify your conclusions to the rest of the class.

Two Visions for America The Federalist and Republican parties held two visions for America based on the thinking of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson.	
Hamilton and the Federalists	Jefferson and the Republicans
<p>The People "The people are turbulent and changing, they seldom judge or determine right." —Hamilton (1787)</p> <p>Government</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong federal government and president acting for the national interest. 2. Voting and holding elected office limited to those who own property. 3. Interpret the Constitution in a flexible way to enable the nation to grow. 4. Order, stability, and unity have priority over individual rights. <p>Political Parties</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The party that rules should be controlled by the educated and wealthy elite. <p>Economy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. A commercial and industrial economy is best for the nation. 7. Tax certain products like whiskey so that everyone shares the tax burden. <p>Security</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Strong permanent army and navy to defend the homeland and free trade overseas. 9. Internal security laws are needed to prevent criticism and insults against the president and other elected leaders. 	<p>The People "The will of the majority . . . is the only sure guardian of the rights of man." —Jefferson (1790)</p> <p>Government</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Small federal government with strong states' rights. 2. All white adult males should have the right to vote and hold office. 3. Interpret the Constitution according to the strict meaning of its wording. 4. Individual rights should have top priority. <p>Political Parties</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The party that rules should be controlled by the common people. <p>Economy</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. An agricultural economy is best with most people owning small farms. 7. Collect taxes mainly from the business and large landowner classes. <p>Security</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. A permanent military may lead to a takeover by a strongman like Napoleon; rely on local and state militias for defense. 9. Internal security laws interfere with freedom of speech and press are a threat to liberty.