

America's First Political Parties – Federalists vs. Democratic-Republicans

Document 1

Hamilton defends the use of force.

Leading a force of 13,000 militiamen, Hamilton put down the “whiskey rebellion,” among frontier farmers who resented a tax on their “condensed grain” being shipped to market. Here he justifies his action.

“Let us then see what is this question. It is plainly this: Shall the majority govern or be governed? Shall the nation rule or be ruled? Shall the general will prevail, or will the will of a faction? Shall there be government or not government?

...the four western counties of Pennsylvania undertake to rejudge and reverse your decrees [laws]. You have said “the Congress *shall have power* to lay excises [internal taxes].” They say, “the Congress *shall not have* this power,” or – what is equivalent – “they shall not exercise it”... they say,... “the sovereignty [power to rule] shall not reside with you, but with us. If you presume to dispute and point by force, we are ready to measure swords with you, and if unequal ourselves to the contest... we will league ourselves with a foreign power [Britain].”

Source: *Viewpoints USA*, pg. 70. August 26, 1794. Hamilton, *Works*, VI, 414-416.

Document 2

But Jefferson objects that the excise tax is a bad one, and that enforcement will dismember the union.

“The excise tax is an infernal one. The first error was to admit it by the Constitution; the second, to act on that admission; the third and last will be to make it the instrument of dismembering the union...

...[the people's] detestation of the excise tax is universal, and has now associated to it a detestation of the government; and that separation, which perhaps was a very distant and problematic event, is now near, and certain, and determined in the mind of every man.”

Source: *Viewpoints USA*, pg. 70. December 28, 1794. Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, (P.L. Ford, ed.). New York. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904, VI, 518-519.

Document 3

Hamilton Argues for a national bank.

Because the power to establish a bank was not specified in the Constitution, Washington asked for opinions by several cabinet members. Here Hamilton, urges a “loose” interpretation of the Constitution.

“...this general principle is inherent in the very definition of government, and essential to every step of the progress to be made by that of the United States, namely: That every power vested in a government is in its nature *sovereign*, and includes, by *force of the term*, a right to employ all the means requisite and fairly applicable to the attainment of the *ends* of such power, and which are not precluded by restrictions and exceptions specified in the Constitution, nor not immoral, or not contrary to the essential *ends* of political society...

It is not denied that there are *implied*, as well as *express powers*, and that the *former* are effectually delegated as the *latter*... as a power of erecting a corporation may as well be *implied* as any other thing, it may as well be employed as an *instrument* or *means* of carrying into execution any of the specified powers... The only question must be, in this, as in every other case, whether the mean to be employed... has a natural relation to any of the acknowledged objects or lawful ends of the government...

Under a conviction that such a relation subsists, the Secretary of the Treasury,... conceives... that the incorporation of a bank is a constitutional measure...”

Source: *Viewpoints USA*, pg. 71- February 23, 1791. Hamilton, *Works*, III, 446-450.

Document 4

Jefferson denies the authority of the federal government to establish a bank, arguing for a “strict” interpretation of the Constitution.

I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground – that *all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states, or to the people*... To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specifically drawn around the powers of Congress is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible of any definition. The incorporation of a bank, and the powers assumed by this bill, have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the United States by the Constitution.”

Source: *Viewpoints USA*, pg. 71. February 15, 179. Jefferson, *Writings* (Ford, ed.), VI, 198.