

Student Activity – Hamilton v. Jefferson

Directions: Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson were both appointed to George Washington’s Cabinet, despite differing opinions on the role of the government. Your task is to read each man’s view on the topic (direct quotes from primary sources), and side with the viewpoint that you agree with the most. Ultimately, you will use this information to write a two to three page persuasive essay on which man had a better policy regarding the role of the government: Hamilton or Jefferson.

1. ISSUE: View on the general public

[Hamilton]: **"Has it not. . . invariably been found that momentary passions, and immediate interests, have a more active and imperious control over human conduct than general or remote considerations of policy, utility and justice?" – Hamilton, Federalist #6**

[Jefferson]: **"I am persuaded myself that the good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army. . . . They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves." – Jefferson, to Edward Carrington, 1787**

→ Whose argument do you agree with? Explain why. _____

2. ISSUE: How to govern people

[Hamilton]: **"In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place, oblige [force] it to control itself." – Hamilton, The Federalist, 1788**

[Jefferson]: **"What more is necessary to make us a happy and prosperous people? ...a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from labor the bread it has earned... I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than those attending too small a degree of it." – Thomas Jefferson**

→ Whose argument do you agree with? Explain why. _____

3. ISSUE: Who has the power: the federal government or the people?

[Hamilton]: **"A government ought to contain in itself every power requisite to the full accomplishment of the objects committed to its care, and to the complete execution of the trusts for which it is responsible, free from every other control but a regard to the public good and to the sense of the people."- Hamilton, Federalist #31**

[Jefferson]: **"We established however some, although not all its [self-government] important principles. The constitutions of most of our States assert, that all power is inherent in the people; that they may exercise it by themselves, in all cases to which they think themselves competent, as in electing their functionaries executive and legislative, and deciding by a jury of themselves... that it is their right and duty to be at all times armed. - Thomas Jefferson**

→ Whose argument do you agree with? Explain why. _____

7. ISSUE: The power of the Constitution. Should there be a neutral or strict interpretation of the Constitution?

[Hamilton]: “The powers contained in a constitution... ought to be construed liberally in advancement of the public good.” – Hamilton

[Jefferson]: “I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground – that all powers not delegated [given] to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states, or to the people.” - Jefferson

→ Whose argument do you agree with? Explain why. _____

5. ISSUE: Division of power among the people: Who is more important to maintaining a steady government?

[Hamilton]: “All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well born; the other, the mass of people... The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a ... permanent share in the government... they therefore will ever maintain good government.” – Hamilton

[Jefferson]: “The small landowners are the most precious part of the state.” – Jefferson

→ Whose argument do you agree with? Explain why. _____

So, overall, which man had a better policy regarding the role of the government: Hamilton or Jefferson?

** I choose: _____ for the following three reasons:

1.

2.

3.

Optional Assignment: Write a two page essay answering which man had a better policy regarding the role of the government: Hamilton or Jefferson?

This essay is due: _____ and will be worth 30 points.