# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

You Decide: Who has a more long lasting vision for the United States – Jefferson or Hamilton?

Introduction:



Thomas Jefferson

Inventing the United States meant not only creating a government, but imagining the future. **Thomas Jefferson** embodied his vision in the inspiring words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men."

But actions also embody visions. When George Washington chose **Alexander Hamilton**, self-made man and war hero, as the nation's first secretary of the treasury, along with Thomas Jefferson as secretary of state, he put in power two brilliant men with radically different notions of what the United States ought to become, and different plans for how to reach their goals. While Jefferson cared most about political ideals, Hamilton focused his energy on creating the institutions that would make America a world power.



Alexander Hamilton

*With what I already know, I'd select*

**Thomas Jefferson** **OR** **Alexander Hamilton**

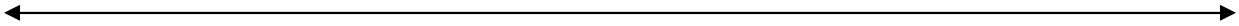
# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

#1

## Jeffersonian

What if you knew that Jefferson trusted the people to act wisely, and thought that governments should leave citizens as free as possible to act as they wished?

Did you change your mind?



## Hamiltonian

#1

What if you knew that Alexander Hamilton had a bleak view of human nature, and worried that too much democracy might unleash the worst in people?

Did you change your mind?

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## On the Virtue of the People

**"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?"**

-- Alexander Hamilton, Federalist #6



Thomas 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."**

-- Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 1787



Alexander Hamilton

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## Jeffersonian

#2

What if you knew that Jefferson trusted the people to act wisely, and thought that governments should leave citizens as free as possible to act as they wished?

Did you change your mind?

## Hamiltonian

#2

What if you knew that Alexander Hamilton had a bleak view of human nature, and worried that too much democracy might unleash the worst in people?

Did you change your mind?

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## On the Role of Government

Jefferson was a philosopher who argued from principle. Outraged by Congress's passage of the repressive Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 and 1799, Jefferson secretly drafted resolutions passed by the Kentucky legislature that claimed that states had the right to "nullify" federal laws they found obnoxious. Indeed, Jefferson wrote James Madison, states might even find themselves driven to secede "from that union which we so value, rather than give up the rights of self-government which we have reserved."



Thomas Jefferson



Alexander Hamilton

Hamilton was a practical man and a problem-solver. As secretary of the treasury, he proposed programs to tie the interests of the rich to the government. His enemies accused him of handing out favors to his wealthy friends, but Hamilton insisted that the new nation needed the support of the rich, who would not be patriotic unless they could make money doing so. The United States, said Hamilton, had to prove to business and professional men who "thought continentally" that

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## Jeffersonian

#3

What if you knew that Thomas Jefferson never freed his slaves, and died owing so much money that most of those slaves had to be sold to pay his debts?

Did you change your mind?

---

## Hamiltonian

#3

What if you knew that Alexander Hamilton publicly opposed slavery, while vocally insisting that there would always be social inequality?

Did you change your mind?

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## On Slavery



Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson declared, in deathless words, that the United States had been "conceived in liberty," and that all men possessed "unalienable rights" including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And yet he died owning hundreds of slaves, freeing in his will only a few. Again and again he declared his hatred of slavery. But just as often, he refused to associate himself with abolitionist groups.

**"Those whom I serve have never been in a position to lift up their voices against slavery... I am an American and a Virginian, and, though I esteem your aims, I cannot affiliate myself with your association."**

-- Thomas Jefferson to French abolitionist J. P. Brissot de Warville, c. 1788



Alexander Hamilton

Alexander Hamilton was no egalitarian. He was comfortable with the prospect of a gap between rich and poor, a society of plenty for the few and misery for the many.

**"... an inequality would exist as long as liberty existed, and . . . it would unavoidably result from that very liberty itself."**

-- Alexander Hamilton to the Constitutional Convention, 1787

Hamilton's conscience was far more troubled by slavery. He served as president of New York's Society for the Promotion of the Manumission (freeing by owner) of Slaves at a time when many of that state's leading families were slaveholding planters. Hamilton declared that though some people might imagine slaves as property,

**"they are persons known to the municipal laws of the states which they inhabit, as well as the laws of nature."**

-- Alexander Hamilton to the New York Ratifying Convention, 1788

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## Jeffersonian

#4

What if you knew that Thomas Jefferson envisioned a nation of independent, yeoman (free man owing land) farmers, despite the importance of cities to national greatness?

Did you change your mind?

## Hamiltonian

#4

What if you knew that Alexander Hamilton wanted to promote the growth of cities, at whatever cost to rural America?

Did you change your mind?

# Jefferson vs. Hamilton

## The Place of Cities



New York City
National Archives

**Alexander Hamilton** thought that the nation should encourage the growth of cities and the development of manufacturing. His 1791 Report on Manufactures proposed government subsidies to the nation's "infant industries," encouragement of inventions and discoveries, and high import taxes (or tariffs). For Hamilton, agricultural societies were doomed to backwardness. Manufacturing, he said, would give inventors outlets for their genius, open up entrepreneurial opportunities, generate markets for farmers' products, and create jobs for the idle, including women and children.

**Thomas Jefferson** believed that the future of the republic depended on nurturing farm life and low-density living. He wrote in his 1785 Notes on the State of Virginia that "The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body." Farmers, by contrast, embodied American virtue. "Put a question to a professor and a plowman," he said, and you'd get the better answer from the plowman



Loudon County, Tennessee
National Archives

You Decide: Who has a more long lasting vision for the United States – Jefferson or Hamilton?