

## **Are you a Jeffersonian, Hamiltonian Or Lincolnian?**

**Jeffersonians**, so named after Thomas Jefferson, support a federal government with greatly constrained powers, and are strong advocates and followers of a strict interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. Jefferson himself followed and exhibited these principles. He rejected the title of Anti-Federalist, but greatly feared government power. Jeffersonian philosophy also called for state and local governments to safeguard the rights and property of citizens. Jeffersonians recognized both private and common property. During his early public career, Jefferson hoped that each State and County would be smaller examples of the national American Republic. He believed that republican governments established and governing at these levels would best keep the federal government in check.

The Jeffersonian philosophy held that all men had the right to be informed, and thus, to have a say in the government. The protection and expansion of human liberty was one of the chief goals of the Jeffersonians. They also reformed their respective state systems of education. They believed that their citizens had the right and should be educated no matter their circumstance or status in life.

Internationally, Thomas Jefferson and the Jeffersonians believed that America was "the world's best hope." They believed that the United States would be an example to the rest of the world in establishing their own sovereign constitutional republics. When the French Revolution broke out, American supporters and allies of France had hopes that the monarchy would fall and the people would form a government of themselves. Domestically, original Jeffersonian thought also had agrarian elements, and believed that the farmer should be the backbone of any nation, supplying it with a strong work ethic and virtue.

**Hamiltonians**, carry the ideals of the first Secretary of the Treasury under George Washington, which supported a large Federal government, necessary for regulating a corrupt citizenry. Alexander Hamilton, born in Jamaica believed that most citizens were dishonest, selfish and therefore needed to be monitored by a ruling elite, namely an Aristocracy. While such a philosophy supports private ownership, Hamilton had no illusions about equality of classes, believing the average citizen to be ignorant of the necessities of government. Regulation by a strong central system, made up of landed gentry was essential.

Governments did require benevolence toward their people, but this was seen more as protecting those who could not protect themselves due to lack of Power and understanding. Education is important to Hamiltonians, but a certain set of the people are laborers needed for the industrialization of America. Hamilton promoted the move to cities and massive government investment into economic mechanized development.

Hamilton's economic plan in the Treasury erased a massive national debt after the Revolution by enhancing internal developments, creating excise taxes, land sales, speculation and bonds. In a very short time the United States of America became one of the richest nations on the planet due to his great support for Industrialization through Loose Construction of the US Constitution.

### **Lincoln: Hamiltonian Economics with Jeffersonian Political Ideals**

A great part of the interest in the study of Abraham Lincoln lies in the fact that he isn't put into a neat partisan box. In early American politics, one was usually defined as a Hamiltonian: aggressive

industrialist, upper class elitist and oft intellectual snob, who was distrustful of the labor class, or a Jeffersonian: agricultural, enlightened and distrustful of large government that impinges on individual rights. Abraham Lincoln was a hybrid of these two founders. Alexander Hamilton, a loose constructionist, did battle with Thomas Jefferson over the National bank, declaring that no reference in the Constitution to such a bank, meant that it was left to the Federal Government to decide it's worth, and when needed, its construction. Jefferson vehemently opposed, calling such a move unconstitutional and dangerous to the individuality of the states through the tyranny of the few.

Hamilton, seeking national wealth, argued that constitutionally, the Framers left such arguments for further deliberation. Leaving the powers of creation of federal departments out of the Constitution didn't deny them, but left them to future design. Of course their argument was fought while the Document was still warm, but such debates, Hamilton thought, were the heart of a living Law, "jarring of parties," and meant to "promote deliberation and circumspection."<sup>1</sup> Lincoln would have agreed as a young Whig party member and Hamiltonian torch bearer, who counted Henry Clay and his America Plan as essential steps for the progress of the wealth of the young nation. The direction of American prosperity was left to its posterity and much discussion would be essential in such development.

It is historically understood that Lincoln valued and sought internal improvements to the wilds of the Union, particularly the west. He promoted the building of canals and rails that attached western markets to the eastern seaboard. This required a national commerce system and a national bank to regulate it, but at the same time, like Jefferson, he valued the individual rights of American citizens, particularly when it came to the right of a man to eat from the labor of the sweat of his own brow. Jefferson understood this eloquently as the "pursuit of happiness." Unlike Hamilton, Lincoln trusted the growing labor class, and wanted to protect and nurture it.

So stood Lincoln, between the uncharted depths of a constitution that at once promoted growth through debate and interpretation, and the fervent belief that certain principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence and supported by the Constitution were universal, self evident and non-negotiable, like human equality. So, says Future President Barack Obama, as a guide "I am left then with Lincoln, who like no man before or since understood both the deliberative function of our democracy and the limits of such deliberation. We remember him for the firmness and depth of his convictions—his unyielding opposition to slavery and his determination that a house divided could not stand."<sup>2</sup> Not only did Lincoln want to preserve the House, but he sought to improve it.

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<sup>1</sup> Obama, Barack. *Audacity of Hope*. Crown Publishers: NY. 2006. P.88. I use this text not to be trendy, but to use a Lincoln scholar who understands the moderating nature of Lincoln as a Statesman.

<sup>2</sup> Obama, 97.