**Lecture 2: The Rise of Political Parties in America**

The result of the Constitutional Convention was the United States Constitution. The Constitution created a federal government consisting of three separate branches in order to impose checks and balances on the powers of each branch.

* The executive branch would be headed by a president, who would be elected.
* The legislative branch would be composed of an upper house, the Senate, and a lower house—the House of Representatives. Representation in the House would be based on population—including counting enslaved men and women at the proportion of three to five for the purposes of representation and taxation. Each state would elect two representatives to the Senate.
* The judicial branch would consist of a Supreme Court and lower courts to interpret and apply the law.

The finished Constitution was signed on September 17, 1787 by 39 of the 42 delegates present. The Convention had decided that the Constitution would take effect upon ratification by conventions in nine of the 13 states.

By June 1788 the required nine states ratified the Constitution, but the large states of Virginia and New York had not. Most people felt that without the support of these two states, the Constitution would never be honored. To many, the document seemed full of dangers: would not the strong central government that it established tyrannize them, oppress them with heavy taxes and drag them into wars?

Differing views on these questions brought into existence two parties, the Federalists, who favored a strong central government, and the Antifederalists, who preferred a loose association of separate states. Impassioned arguments on both sides were voiced by the press, the legislatures and the state conventions.

Virginia Antifederalists were led by Patrick Henry, who became the chief spokesman for back-country farmers who feared the powers of the new central government. Wavering delegates were persuaded by a proposal that the Virginia convention recommend a bill of rights, and Antifederalists joined with the Federalists to ratify the Constitution on June 25.

In New York, Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison pushed for the ratification of the Constitution in a series of essays known as *The Federalist Papers*.

**The Federalist Papers**

The Federalist was originally planned to be a series of essays for publication in New York City newspapers, but ultimately expanded into a collection of 85 essays, which were published as two volumes in March and May 1788. They did not become known as "The Federalist Papers" until the 20th century. The essays were aimed at convincing opponents of the US Constitution to ratify it so that it would take effect as the nation’s fundamental governing document. (Opponents of the Constitution drafted their own series of essays, which became known collectively as the Anti-Federalist Papers.)

The essays comprising the Federalist Papers were authored by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison, three of the most influential nationalist thinkers. The nationalists urged the creation of a stronger central government that would be sufficiently empowered to confront the many challenges facing the young nation. Many of the most influential essays in The Federalist were penned by either Hamilton or Madison:

* In Federalist No. 10, Madison reflects on how to prevent rule by majority faction and advocates the expansion of the United States into a large, commercial republic.
* In Federalist No. 39 and Federalist 51, Madison seeks to “lay a due foundation for that separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government, which to a certain extent is admitted on all hands to be essential to the preservation of liberty,” emphasizing the need for checks and balances through the separation of powers into three branches of the federal government and the division of powers between the federal government and the states.
* In Federalist No. 84, Hamilton advances the case against the Bill of Rights, expressing the fear that explicitly enumerated rights could too easily be construed as comprising the only rights to which American citizens were entitled.

Although the primary purpose of The Federalist was to convince New Yorkers to send to the Constitutional Convention delegates who would vote to ratify the Constitution, fully two-thirds of New York’s delegates initially opposed ratification. These delegates refused to ratify the document unless it was amended by a [Bill of Rights](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/road-to-revolution/creating-a-nation/a/the-bill-of-rights). Thus, the authors of The Federalist failed in their original objective.

Antipathy toward a strong central government was only one concern among those opposed to the Constitution; of equal concern to many was the fear that the Constitution did not protect individual rights and freedoms sufficiently. Virginian George Mason, author of Virginia's 1776 Declaration of Rights, was one of three delegates to the Constitutional Convention who refused to sign the final document because it did not enumerate individual rights. Together with Patrick Henry, he campaigned vigorously against ratification of the Constitution by Virginia. Indeed, five states, including Massachusetts, ratified the Constitution on the condition that such amendments are added immediately.

When the first Congress convened in New York City in September 1789, the calls for amendments protecting individual rights were virtually unanimous. Congress quickly adopted 12 such amendments; by December 1791, enough states had ratified 10 amendments to make them part of the Constitution. Collectively, they are known as the Bill of Rights[[1]](#footnote-1).

**Washington's presidency**

The states ratified the new Constitution of the United States in 1787, which created three branches of the federal government: Congress, the courts, and the presidency. In 1789, George Washington became the first person to hold the office of President of the United States. When Washington took office, the new Constitution enjoyed neither tradition nor the full backing of organized public opinion. Moreover, the new government had to create its own machinery. No taxes were forthcoming. Until a judiciary could be established, laws could not be enforced. The Army was small. The Navy had ceased to exist. Congress quickly created the departments of State and Treasury, with Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton as their respective secretaries.

**HAMILTON VS. JEFFERSON**

Coming out of the American Revolution, the United States was faced with the issue of a large national debt. After taking out loans from France to cover the expenses of fighting the war, the state debt totaled about 25 million dollar. The new nation had to find ways to bring in money and pay what it owed. The new Constitution said the national government was responsible for re-paying the states' wartime loans.

One way to get money was to borrow it. But no one wanted to lend money to the United States unless they were sure they would get it back. So, the Congress asked Treasury Secretary Hamilton to write a report about how to build up the government's credit.

Hamilton's report said the government must pay back the full amount of all its debts. This caused a dispute. Many of the debts were in the form of government notes. The notes promised to pay someone for supplying food, clothing, and weapons to the rebel army. Some promised to pay soldiers for joining the army. The notes really were worth nothing, however. The wartime Congress had no money. People who got them lost hope of ever getting re-paid. So they sold them to anyone willing to pay even part of the value.

Hamilton's plan would repay the full value of the notes to those who owned them last. This meant the people who first got the notes from the government would receive nothing. And the people who bought them at low cost would receive much more than they paid. Congressman James Madison of Virginia protested. He said the people who bought the notes at low cost should be paid, but not in full. Some of the money, he said, should go to those who got the notes in exchange for supplies or services.

Hamilton said the purpose of his plan was greater than simply paying debts. He said it was a way to build up the nation's credit so it could borrow money more easily in the future. Hamilton believed that those who bought the notes had a right to earn money from them. These men took a chance that the worthless notes would be worth something, someday. The government could not deny them their profits. Many members of Congress felt sorry for the poor soldiers and their families. Yet they voted against Madison's proposal and supported Hamilton's plan.

As a southerner, James Madison also led the fight against the other part of Hamilton’s  
plan, the paying of state debts. By 1789, most southern states had paid off their debts from the  
American Studies Revolution. They thought that other states should do the same. As a result, they bitterly opposed Hamilton’s plan. In the end, Hamilton proposed a compromise. Many southerners wanted the nation’s capital to be located in the South. Hamilton offered to support that goal if southerners agreed to his plan to repay state debts.

Alexander Hamilton's plan to re-pay the nation's debts caused much protest. However, another one of his financial plans caused even more. It was his plan to create a national bank. Hamilton argued that there were central banks in Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. He said the banks greatly helped those countries' commerce, industry and agriculture. Hamilton said a central bank in the United States would increase the flow of money throughout the country. It would help the national government negotiate loans and collect taxes.

There was just one problem: the Constitution said nothing about creating a national bank. However, Hamilton and his followers believed that under the “necessary and proper”[[2]](#footnote-2) clause of Article I, the Constitution gave Congress the right to create the bank to fix the debt problem. Thomas Jefferson and his followers disagreed with Hamilton’s argument, stating that it was a misinterpretation of the necessary and proper clause. He believed that creating a national bank would be an abuse of power by the federal government.

After much debate between these two emerging factions—the Federalists, represented by Hamilton, and the Democratic-Republicans, represented by Jefferson—the bill establishing the first Bank of the United States passed the House and Senate, President Washington signed the bill into law in early 1791.

**The French Revolution and the Proclamation of Neutrality**

April 1793, French ambassador Edmond Charles Genêt arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, to a hero’s welcome from the city’s Jeffersonian-Republican inhabitants who supported France over Great Britain in foreign affairs. Genêt had had the audacity to raise funds and use them to commission French privateers to seize British vessels in American waters and bring them back to port, which was an insult to American national sovereignty. The enthusiastic reception, which continued as he made his way north to Philadelphia, convinced “Citizen” Genêt (as he was known in Revolutionary France) that all Americans unconditionally supported the French Revolution and would support the French war effort against Great Britain and its allies.

Genêt expected American support because France had helped the United States win its independence, and the 1778 Treaty of Alliance between France and the United States was still in effect. This fact, along with assurances from Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, encouraged Genêt to take it for granted that the United States was unified in its support for France’s war with Great Britain. On April 19, the cabinet met to discuss the issue and formulate American foreign policy.

President Washington had an important decision to make based on numerous important critical variables. First, Europe was aflame, and the president knew the United States was too weak to go to war with any of the major European powers. Second, it was not clear whether the French alliance still applied, because France had launched an offensive war in Europe and the treaty was a defensive one. Third, Washington’s cabinet and the American people were divided along party lines between supporting France or Great Britain in American foreign policy. Finally, the imperious Genêt was making reasonable diplomatic talks nearly impossible, due to his arrogance. After listening to the advice of his cabinet and responding to Genêt’s latest outrages, the president faced a choice that could affect the survival of the new American republic.

In 1789, Americans had reacted sympathetically to the French Revolution. But in recent months, the French revolutionary government had killed more than fourteen hundred clergy and nobles in prison and then executed Louis XVI. It then tried to spread its ideology by declaring war on European monarchies, including Great Britain. Washington had to decide whether the United States should throw in its lot with such a government or chart a neutral course.

By early 1793, the French Revolution had sparked a fierce partisan debate between the Federalists and Jeffersonian-Republicans. The Federalists were becoming increasingly hostile to it and sympathized with Great Britain. Alexander Hamilton had hoped the French would show the “same humanity, the same dignity, the same solemnity, which distinguished the course of the American Revolution.” He and other Federalists were concerned the French Revolution was instead characterized by mob rule and murderous rampages. Jeffersonian-Republicans, in contrast, remained supportive of America’s sister republic, which they saw as carrying on the fight against monarchy.

Washington eventually decided to issue his Proclamation of Neutrality on April 22, 1793, the document was simply titled “A Proclamation” and did not use the word neutrality, but its intent was clear.

1. **Check the document entitled “The Bill of Rights”.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [The Congress shall have Power . . . ] To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)