

## **OVERVIEW:**

As *part* of a unit I teach on the Federalist Era in my AP U.S. History class, I have prepared the following as part of my studies during a National Endowment for Humanities grant to study the life, character and writings of Thomas Jefferson:

- A Document-based Question (DBQ) that requires students to consider what Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton thought about human nature and how their thinking in this regard influenced their views toward the proper strength and role of the federal government.
- An essay I wrote entitled: A Late-in-life Conversion: Why I Finally Decided Thomas Jefferson is a “Good Man.”

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- To get my students to understand the importance of the deep-seated and far-reaching tensions between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton and how these tensions influenced early U.S. history.
- To expose students to my personal evolution in thinking with regard to Jefferson, where I introduce them to the pitfalls of personal bias and “presentism” and get them thinking about heroes and why we should not put them on too high a pedestal.

## **AUDIENCE & SETTING:**

- Advanced Placement U.S. History Class // Unit on Federalist Era

## **INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESS:**

- I will provide my students with the Document-based Question and I will use my essay on Thomas Jefferson as an in-class discussion piece.

**Submitted by Bernard Yanelli, History Teacher at Saint Stephen’s Episcopal School, Bradenton, FL**

## Document-based Question for Advanced Placement U.S. History

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**Background:** In his introduction to John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government*, C.B. McPherson notes: "Every political theory which sets out to justify a particular system of government, or a limited or unlimited degree of obligation of the citizen to the state, must rest on an explicit or implicit theory of human nature."

Given this statement, the excerpts from the original source documents below, and your prior knowledge about the intense political rivalry between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton during the 1790s, compose an essay that fully addresses the following statement:

Briefly explain your understanding of the views toward human nature held by Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton and then compare and contrast their individual thoughts toward how strong of our national government, including how it should combat a potential rebellion.

### Document A

All communities divide themselves into the few and the many...The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second.

Alexander Hamilton, 1787  
*Federalist Papers*

### Document B

I think with you that it is a good world on the whole, that it has been framed on a principle of benevolence, and more pleasure than pain dealt out to us...My temperament is sanguine. I steer my bark with Hope in the head, leaving Fear astern.

Thomas Jefferson, 1816  
Letter to John Adams

### **Document C**

The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all. I like a little rebellion now and then. It is like a storm in the Atmosphere.

Thomas Jefferson, 1787  
Letter to Abigail Adams

### **Document D**

Beware, my dear sir, of magnifying a riot into an insurrection, by employing in the first instance an inadequate force. 'Tis far better to err on the other side. Whenever the government appears in arms, it ought to appear like a Hercules and inspire respect by the display of strength.

Alexander Hamilton, 1799

### **Document E**

A firm union will be the utmost moment to the peace and liberty of the states, as a barrier against domestic faction and insurrection.

Alexander Hamilton, 1787  
*Federalist Papers*

### **Document F**

We have lately heard of strange occurrences in France. What is to be the issue of republicanism there may not be doubted. Some here consider this last revolution as an additional proof of the impracticability of republican government. But I will never believe that man is incapable of self-government...On the other hand, I view this last revolution as an additional lesson against a standing army without which it is evident that Bonaparte could not have accomplished it.

Thomas Jefferson, 1800  
Letter to Everard Meade

### **Document G**

“...the vigor of government is essential to the security of liberty...a dangerous ambition often lurks behind the specious mask of zeal for the rights of the people...”

Alexander Hamilton, 1787  
*Federalist Papers*

### **Document H**

I think the best remedy is exactly that provided by all our constitutions, to leave to the citizens the free election and separation of the [natural aristocrats\*] from the [pseudo-aristocrats], of the wheat from the chaff. In general they will elect the good and wise. In some instances, wealth may corrupt, and birth may blind; but not in sufficient degree to endanger society.

\* Note: Jefferson thought that a natural class of aristocrats—people who would rise up in society through their talents and virtues and via their public education—should lead the country rather than the pseudo-aristocrats, or those who are simply well-born.

Thomas Jefferson, 1813  
Letter to John Adams  
(Regarding Natural Aristocracy)

### **Document I**

The power of regulating the militia and of commanding its services in times of insurrection and invasion are natural incidents to the duties of superintending the common defense, and of watching over the internal peace of the confederacy.

Alexander Hamilton, 1787  
*Federalist Papers*

### **Document J**

I am not a friend of a very energetic government. It is always oppressive...I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries, as long as they are agricultural...When they get piled up upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe. Above all things, I hope the education of the common people will be attended to; convinced that on their good sense we may rely...”

Thomas Jefferson, Dec. 1787  
Letter to James Madison (from Paris)