



Democratic-Republican Group Handouts

Issue 1: Funding the Public Debt

With Hamilton's urging, the early federal government assumed the debts of the states. The Democratic-Republicans were wary of accumulating debt and of too much government intervention and spending.

- **[Letter from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington](#)**, May 23, 1792
[[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(tj060237\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field(DOCID+@lit(tj060237)))] on the EDSITEment resource **American Memory**:

It has been urged then that a public debt, greater than we can possibly pay before other causes of adding new debt to it will occur, has been artificially created, by adding together the whole amount of the debtor & creditor sides of accounts, instead of taking only their balances, which could have been paid off in a short time: That this accumulation of debt has taken for ever out of our power those easy sources of revenue, which, applied to the ordinary necessities and exigencies of government, would have answered them habitually, and covered us from habitual murmurings against taxes & tax-gatherers, reserving extraordinary calls, for those extraordinary occasions which would animate the people to meet them: That though the calls for money have been no greater than we must generally expect, for the same or equivalent exigencies, yet we are already obliged to strain the impost till it produces clamour, and will produce evasion, & war on our own citizens to collect it: and even to resort to an *Excise* law, of odious character with the people...

- **[Letter from Albert Gallatin to Thomas Jefferson](#)** (feedback on Jefferson's First State of the Union Address, November 16, 1801, on taxation) [[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(tj090161\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mtj:@field(DOCID+@lit(tj090161)))] on the EDSITEment resource **American Memory**:

On the other hand, if this Administration shall not reduce taxes, they never will be permanently reduced. To strike at the root of the evil and avert the danger of increasing taxes, encroaching government, temptations to offensive wars, &c., nothing can be more effectual than a repeal of *all* internal taxes, but let them all go, and not one remain on which sister taxes may be hereafter engrafted. I agree most fully with you that pretended tax-preparations, treasury-preparations, and army-preparations against contingent wars tend only to encourage wars. If the United States shall unavoidably be drawn into a war, the people will submit to any necessary tax, and the system of internal taxation which, *then*, shall be thought best adapted to the then situation of the country may be created, instead of engrafted on the old or present plan; if there shall be no real necessity for them, their abolition by this Administration will most powerfully deter any other from reviving them. A repeal now will attach as much unpopularity to them as the late direct tax has done to that mode of taxation.

Issue 2: U.S. Relations with Great Britain/France

The Democratic-Republicans were generally more inclined toward France than Britain. They did not approve of the way import duties tended to make the U.S. economically dependent on Great Britain less than 10 years after the end of the War for Independence.

- **[James Madison on Great Britain in the Aurora General Advertiser](#)**, January 23, 1799
[http://www.constitution.org/jm/17990123_foreign.htm] on the website of the Constitution Society, a link from the EDSITEment resource **Internet Public Library**:

The conclusion with me, is, that Great Britain, above all other nations, ought to be dreaded and watched, as most likely to gain an undue and pernicious ascendancy in our country.

...The United States are the greatest and best market for her manufactures. To keep out those of other nations, and to keep down those of our own, is the grand object to which her efforts have ever been directed.

To conclude: Great Britain feels every motive that a foreign power can feel to pinch our growth, and undermine our government; and enjoys greater means of influence for these purposes than ever were possessed by one nation towards another. On Great Britain then our eye at least will be constantly fixt by every real

- **[Thomas Jefferson on France](#)** in the Jefferson Encyclopedia, available via a link from the EDSITEment resource **Internet Public Library**:

To these I will add, that I was a sincere well-wisher to the success of the French revolution, and still wish it may end in the establishment of a free & well-ordered republic; but I have not been insensible under the atrocious depredations they have committed on our commerce.

The first object of my heart is my own country. In that is embarked my family, my fortune, & my own existence. I have not... a single motive of preference of any one nation to another, but in proportion as they are more or less friendly to us. But though deeply feeling the injuries of France, I did not think war the surest means of redressing them. I did believe, that a mission sincerely disposed to preserve peace, would obtain for us a peaceable & honorable settlement

Issue 3: The National Bank: Implied Powers vs. Strict Interpretation

The Democratic-Republicans argued that, even if a national bank would be of benefit to the country, nowhere in the Constitution does it specify that the federal government is allowed to be in the banking business. But the Constitution does say that any power not specified in the Constitution is delegated to the states.

- Excerpts from **[Jefferson's Opinion on the Constitutionality of a National Bank](#)**, 1791:

...I consider the foundation of the Constitution as laid on this ground: That "all powers not delegated to the United States, by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States or to the people." [XIIth amendment.] To take a single step beyond the

boundaries thus specially drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no longer susceptible of any definition.

The incorporation of a bank, and the powers assumed by this bill, have not, in my opinion, been delegated to the United States, by the Constitution.

I. They are not among the powers specially enumerated: for these are: 1st A power to lay taxes for the purpose of paying the debts of the United States; but no debt is paid by this bill, nor any tax laid. Were it a bill to raise money, its origination in the Senate would condemn it by the Constitution.

2. "To borrow money." But this bill neither borrows money nor ensures the borrowing it...

3. To "regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the States, and with the Indian tribes." To erect a bank, and to regulate commerce, are very different acts...

II. Nor are they within either of the general phrases, which are the two following:

1. To lay taxes to provide for the general welfare of the United States, that is to say, "to lay taxes for *the purpose of* providing for the general welfare." For the laying of taxes is the *power*, and the general welfare the *purpose* for which the power is to be exercised. They are not to lay taxes *ad libitum for any purpose they please*; but only *to pay the debts or provide for the welfare of the Union*. In like manner, they are not *to do anything they please* to provide for the general welfare, but only to *lay taxes* for that purpose. To consider the latter phrase, not as describing the purpose of the first, but as giving a distinct and independent power to do any act they please, which might be for the good of the Union, would render all the preceding and subsequent enumerations of power completely useless.

It would reduce the whole instrument to a single phrase, that of instituting a Congress with power to do whatever would be for the good of the United States; and, as they would be the sole judges of the good or evil, it would be also a power to do whatever evil they please.

2. The second general phrase is, "to make all laws *necessary* and proper for carrying into execution the enumerated powers." But they can all be carried into execution without a bank. A bank therefore is not *necessary*, and consequently not authorized by this phrase.

If has been urged that a bank will give great facility or convenience in the collection of taxes, Suppose this were true: yet the Constitution allows only the means which are "*necessary*," not those which are merely "*convenient*" for effecting the enumerated powers. If such a latitude of construction be allowed to this phrase as to give any non-enumerated power, it will go to everyone, for there is not one which ingenuity may not torture into a *convenience* in some instance *or other*...

Perhaps, indeed, bank bills may be a more *convenient* vehicle than treasury orders. But a little *difference* in the degree of *convenience* cannot constitute the necessity which the Constitution makes the ground for assuming any non-enumerated power...

- For more on the national bank, read the first two paragraphs of the annotation to [**Hamilton: Report on Manufactures**](#) [<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/collection/document.php?id=326>] on the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History website, a link from the EDSITEment resource **History Matters**. Interested students can also view a digitized image of the original copy of [**Jefferson's Opinion on the Constitutionality of a National Bank**](#) [<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/images/vc129.jpg>] on The Library of Congress website, a link from the EDSITEment resource **American Memory**.

Issue 4: Manufacturing/Agriculture

Hamilton developed economic proposals that Madison thought went beyond the enumerated powers of the Federal government. Madison argued that the doctrines advanced by Hamilton in his Report on Manufactures subverted “the fundamental and characteristic principle” of the federal government.

- [**Letter from James Madison to Edmund Pendleton**](#), January 21, 1792 [<http://www.jmu.edu/madison/biography/opposition.htm>] on the website of the James Madison Center, a link from the EDSITEment resource **The American President**:

“If Congress can do whatever in their discretion can be done by money, and will promote the General Welfare, the Government is no longer a limited one, possessing enumerated powers, but an indefinite one, subject to particular exceptions.”
- [**Letter from Thomas Jefferson to David Humphreys**](#) (FE 5:344) on the Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from the EDSITEment resource **The American President**:

“Too little reliance is to be had on a steady and certain course of commerce with the countries of Europe to permit us to depend more on that than we cannot avoid. Our best interest would be to employ our principal labor in agriculture, because to the profits of labor, which is dear, this adds the profits of our lands, which are cheap. But the risk of hanging our prosperity on the fluctuating counsels and caprices of others renders it wise in us to turn seriously to manufactures, and if Europe will not let us carry our provisions to their manufactures, we must endeavor to bring their manufactures to our provision.”
- [**Thomas Jefferson: Answers to de Meusnier Questions, 1786**](#) (ME 17:115) on the Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from the EDSITEment resource **The American President**:

“The commerce of the States cannot be regulated to the best advantage but by a single body, and no body so proper as Congress.”
- [**Letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 1785**](#) (ME 5:94, Papers 8:426) on the Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from the EDSITEment resource **The American President**:

“Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds. As long, therefore, as they can find employment in this line, I would not convert them into mariners, artisans, or anything else.”

- **Thomas Jefferson: 1st Annual Message, 1801** (ME 3:337) on the Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from the EDSITEment resource **The American President:**

“Agriculture, manufactures, commerce and navigation, the four pillars of our prosperity, are the most thriving when left most free to individual enterprise. Protection from casual embarrassments, however, may sometimes be seasonably interposed.”

Issue 5: The Jay Treaty

The Democratic-Republicans felt that the Jay Treaty disregarded previous agreements with France and tilted the U.S. further toward Great Britain.

- **The Jay Treaty Controversy, April-August 1795**

[<http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/B/hamilton/hamil33.htm>], an article on From Revolution to Reconstruction, a link from the EDSITEment resource **American Studies at the University of Virginia:**

When the provisions of Jay's Treaty were made public in April of 1795, the public uproar was deafening. It seemed that Jay had not accomplished anything he had set out to do, and instead handed over what amounted to an affront to the national dignity. There were no provisions for compensation for wartime damages, illegal captures of ships and impressment of American sailors, or for the protracted Indian wars caused by the British occupation of the western posts. The British agreed to abandon the posts, but only after eighteen months. Especially insulting to the American people was a seventy-ton limit on American ships trading in the British West Indies, effectively locking Americans out of the lucrative lumber trade.

- **James Madison in Congress on the Jay Treaty**, April 15, 1796 [[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(ed00429\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(ed00429)))] on the EDSITEment resource **American Memory:**

Mr. MADISON. The proposition immediately before the committee was, that the treaty with Great Britain ought to be carried into effect by such provisions as depended on the House of Representatives. This was the point immediately in question.

If the propositions for carrying the treaty into effect be agreed to, it must be from one of three considerations: either that the legislature is bound by a constitutional necessity to pass the requisite laws, without examining the merits of the treaty; or that, on such examination, the treaty is deemed in itself a good one; or that there are good extraneous reasons for putting it into force, although it be in itself a bad treaty.

The first consideration being excluded by the decision of the house that they have a right to judge of the expediency or inexpediency of passing laws relative to treaties, the question first to be examined must relate to the merits of the treaty.

He mentioned the permission to aliens to hold lands in perpetuity, as a very extraordinary

feature in this part of the treaty. He would not inquire how far this might be authorized by constitutional principles; but he would continue to say, that no example of such a stipulation was to be found in any treaty that ever was made, either where territory was ceded, or where it was acknowledged by one nation or another. Although it was common and right, in such regulation, in favor of the property of the inhabitants, yet he believed that, in every case that ever had happened, the owners of landed property were universally required to swear allegiance to the new sovereign, or to dispose of their landed property within a reasonable time. With respect to the great points in the law of nations, comprehended in the stipulations of the treaty, the same want of real reciprocity, and the same sacrifice of the interests of the United States, were conspicuous.

It is well known to have been a great and favorite object with the United States, “that free ships make free goods.” They had established the principle in their other treaties. They had witnessed, with anxiety, the general efforts, and the successful advances, towards incorporating this principle into the law of nations—a principle friendly to all neutral nations, and particularly interesting to the United States. He knew that, at a former period, it had been conceded, on the part of the United States, that the law of nations stood as the present treaty regulates it. But it did not follow, that more than acquiescence in that doctrine was proper. There was an evident distinction between silently acquiescing in it, and giving it the support of a formal and positive stipulation. The former was all that could have been required, and the latter was more than ought to have been unnecessarily yielded.

Issue 6: The Democratic-Republican Societies

The Democratic-Republican Societies were clubs that supported the French Revolution; Democratic-Republicans leaned toward France.

- [**Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison on Democratic Societies**](#), December 28, 1794 [<http://wyllie.lib.virginia.edu:8086/perl/toccer-new?id=JefLett.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=108&division=div1>], on the Electronic Text Center of the University of Virginia, a link from the EDSITEment resource **Internet Public Library**:

The denunciation of the democratic societies is one of the extraordinary acts of boldness of which we have seen so many from the faction of monocrats. It is wonderful indeed, that the President should have permitted himself to be the organ of such an attack on the freedom of discussion, the freedom of writing, printing & publishing. It must be a matter of rare curiosity to get at the modifications of these rights proposed by them, and to see what line their ingenuity would draw between democratical societies, whose avowed object is the nourishment of the republican principles of our constitution

Their sight must be perfectly dazzled by the glittering of crowns & coronets, not to see the extravagance of the proposition to suppress the friends of general freedom, while those who wish to confine that freedom to the few, are permitted to go on in their principles & practices.

Issue 7: The Alien and Sedition Acts

The Democratic-Republicans fought against the Alien and Sedition Acts. They believed the Sedition Act's attack on freedom of the press was unconstitutional. They also believed the Alien and Sedition Acts were politically motivated, an attempt to destroy them politically. Immigrants were the target of the Alien Acts; immigrants tended to support the Democratic-Republicans. Democratic-Republicans were the only targets of the Sedition Act—specifically, editors were being put on trial for statements made in their newspapers.

- **Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison** on the Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive, a link from the EDSITEment resource **Internet Public Library**:

They have brought into the lower House a sedition bill, which, among other enormities, undertakes to make printing certain matters criminal, though one of the amendments to the Constitution has so expressly taken religion, printing presses, &c. out of their coercion. Indeed this bill, and the [Col 2] alien bill are both so palpably in the teeth of the Constitution as to show they mean to pay no respect to it.

- From the **Virginia Resolutions** [<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/virres.htm>] on the EDSITEment resource **The Avalon Project**:

That the General Assembly doth particularly protest against the palpable and alarming infractions of the Constitution, in the two late cases of the “Alien and Sedition Acts” passed at the last session of Congress; the first of which exercises a power no where delegated to the federal government, and which by uniting legislative and judicial powers to those of executive, subverts the general principles of free government; as well as the particular organization, and positive provisions of the federal constitution; and the other of which acts, exercises in like manner, a power not delegated by the constitution, but on the contrary, expressly and positively forbidden by one of the amendments [JMU editor - 1st amendment] thereto; a power, which more than any other, ought to produce universal alarm, because it is levelled against the right of freely examining public characters and measures, and of free communication among the people thereon, which has ever been justly deemed, the only effectual guardian of every other right.



The Democratic-Republican Party Platform

1. Funding the Public Debt
2. U.S. Relations with Great Britain and France
3. The National Bank: Implied Powers versus Strict Interpretation
4. Manufacturing/Agriculture
5. The Jay Treaty
6. The Democratic-Republican Societies
7. The Alien and Sedition Acts