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Background Information Reading Alexander Hamilton

Personal Background

Hamilton was born in the West Indies and raised on the Caribbean island of *St. Croix*. When Hamilton was 13, a devastating hurricane struck the island. Hamilton wrote a vivid description of the storm that impressed all who read it. A few St. Croix leaders arranged to send the talented teenager to New York, where he could get the education he deserved.

With no money or family connections to help him rise in the world, he made his way on ability, ambition, and charm. George Washington spotted Hamilton's talents early in the Revolutionary War. Washington made the young man his aide-de-camp or personal assistant. Near the end of the war, Hamilton improved his fortunes by marrying Elizabeth Schuyler. His new wife came from one of New York's richest and most powerful families. With her family's political backing, Hamilton was elected to represent New York in Congress after the war. Later, he served as a delegate from New York to the Constitutional Convention.

View of Human Nature

Hamilton's view of human nature was shaped by his wartime experiences. All too often, he had seen people put their own interests and personal profit above patriotism and the needs of the country.

Most Federalists shared Hamilton's view that people were basically selfish and out for themselves. For this reason, they distrusted any system of government that gave too much power to "the mob," or the common people. Such a system, said Hamilton, could only lead to "error, confusion, and instability."

Best Form of Government

Federalists believed that the country should be ruled by "best people" - educated, wealthy, public-spirited men like themselves. Such people had the time, education, and background to run the country wisely. "Those who own the country," said Federalist John Jay bluntly, "ought to govern it."

Federalists favored a strong national government, they believed in loose construction - broad or flexible interpretation - of the Constitution. They hoped to use the new government's powers under the Constitution to unite the quarreling states and keep order among the people. In their view, the rights of the states were not nearly as important as national power and unity.

delegate - somebody chosen to represent their state

human nature - human behavior that does not change over time

public-spirited - motivated by or showing concern for others in the community

loose construction - broad interpretation
interpretation - an explanation of something
quarreling - an angry disagreement between two or more people

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promptly - done at once without delay

Ideal Economy

Hamilton's dream of national greatness depended on the United States developing a strong economy. In 1790, the nation's economy was still based mainly on agriculture. Hamilton wanted to expand the economy and increase the nation's wealth by using the power of the federal government to promote business, manufacturing, and trade.

In 1790, Hamilton presented Congress with a plan to pay off all war debts as quickly as possible. If the debts were not **promptly** paid, he warned, the government would lose respect both at home and abroad.

Hamilton's plan for repaying the debts was opposed by many Americans, especially in the South. Most southern states had already paid their war debts. They saw little reason to help states in the North pay off what they still owed.

Differences between the First Political Parties

Federalists	Democratic-Republicans
Leader: Alexander Hamilton	Leader: Thomas Jefferson
Favored: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule by the wealthy class• Strong federal government• Emphasis on manufacturing• Loose interpretation of the Constitution	Favored: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule by the people• Strong state governments• Emphasis on agriculture• Strict interpretation of the Constitution

Student Handout 3

Alexander Hamilton's Ideas about Government and the Federalist Party

Directions: Write three important ideas from Document 1 in each bubble.

View of Human Nature

Best Form of Government

Ideal Economy

Personal Background

What he might say about Jefferson

Additional Notes