

Alexander hamilton: conservative revolutionary research paper example

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



Alexander Hamilton was the leading architect of the federalist model of government, which asserted the need for a strong centralized national system. As such, he stood in opposition to the likes of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who espoused the doctrine of states' rights. Hamilton's brilliant legal mind produced some of the most important interpretations of the U. S. Constitution, a document the writing and ratification of which was spearheaded by Hamilton. Hamilton also wrote more than half of the Federalist Papers, the book that provides the philosophical basis for the Constitution. Hamilton insisted on the need for foundational institutions including a strong executive branch and a court system capable of regulating and adjudicating commercial and civil matters at the state and federal levels. As Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton established a national bank and the federal mint, the bases of the American economic system.

Alexander Hamilton was born on Nevis in the British West Indies, the illegitimate son of James Hamilton, whose Scottish father was the laird of Grange, in Ayrshire (Chernow, 13). His mother died when Hamilton was 13, leaving him alone and without means. The Church of England forbade illegitimate children from attending school, which likely had a profound personal effect on Hamilton. In 1772, Hamilton left for America, eventually settling in New Jersey, where he attended school and attracted the attention of William Livingston, a scholar and leading intellectual whose revolutionary ideas had a profound impact on the young Hamilton (Chernow, 44). He attended King's College in New York prior to entering political life.

Hamilton was the only founding father not born on American soil, which

shielded him from the kind of regional prejudices that led many to champion the cause of states' rights. As such, he was predisposed toward the creation of a federal system. It has often been argued that the federal-states' rights argument between Hamilton and Jefferson was the single most influential political question in American history, and one which still looms over American political life. This has had the effect of institutionalizing not only two ideologies but the men who promoted them, men who today are considered by many to occupy the oppositional philosophical poles of American democracy. " Their differences are considered central to, if not defining of, the meaning of America, its revolution, and of republican government and democracy" (Federici 215). Thus, Alexander Hamilton may be said to have given form to one half of America's dualistic political soul. Hamilton's position on democratic government, his concerns and reservations over pure Republican, representative government, resonate today. The present-day unpopularity of Congress is reminiscent of the concerns expressed by Hamilton over a too-weighty legislative branch. Hamilton worried that " In pure Republican government, the legislature exerts ' an imperious control over the other departments'For Hamilton, legislative supremacy united all power in the same hands and thus established legislative tyranny" (Federici, 138). Consequently, Hamilton's concern was that the executive and judicial branches should not be subject to the tyrannies of those who wield too much legislative power. For this reason (and others), Hamilton wrote in the Federalist Papers that the executive branch's autonomy is best secured by means of the veto. Without it, " the separation of the executive from the legislative department, would

be

nominal and nugatory" (Goebel 352).

Hamilton, as were the other founding fathers, was party to the compromise that produced an equal representation in the Senate and a proportional, population-based representation in the House of Representatives. This was seen as a solution to a confounding problem that required for resolution some means of making both the small and large states happy. Though a New Yorker and northerner, Hamilton believed that representation in Congress in an agricultural republic should favor the "cultivators of land (who) must upon the whole preponderate in the government" (Chernow, 257). Thus, in Federalist #60, Hamilton foresaw a House of Representatives that emphasized the planter class and yet preserves an inclusiveness in which the industrial class also has a voice (Federalist #60, 548).

Hamilton was nowhere as conciliatory toward the planter class on the subject of slavery. Biographer Ron Chernow writes that Hamilton did not believe in the intrinsic physical/intellectual inferiority of Africans, as did most of his contemporaries. As such, he was remarkably enlightened. And unlike other founding fathers who opposed slavery on principle but did little or nothing to seek its abolition, Hamilton was of a different stripe. Indeed, his fundamental moral opposition to the institution does much to modify criticism that Hamilton was an elitist, little concerned with the problems of society's underclasses, let alone its slaves. "Few, if any, other founding fathers opposed slavery more consistently or toiled harder to eradicate it than Hamilton - a fact that belies the historical stereotype that he cared only for the rich and privileged" (Chernow, 211-212). Some have claimed that

Hamilton's relationship with his wife's family, the slave-owning Schuyler clan of New York, made him a party to the slave trade.

Yet his fervent defense of slaves who were forced back into servitude despite having fought for American independence undermines the credibility of any such claim.

Another controversy held that Hamilton was a monarchist, an assertion supported by the fact that during the Constitutional convention Hamilton lobbied hard for the offices of president and senator to be lifelong positions. Hamilton, who is arguably the most authoritative interpreter of the Constitution, drafted his own version of the document during the convention. He proposed, among other things, that the Senate should proportionately reflect the population of the states, and that the Supreme Court would have the right to absolute and immediate review of all court cases. Despite claims that Hamilton favored a monarchist government, his version of the Constitution included an elaborate and complex electoral system for senators that was painstakingly representative, albeit somewhat convoluted.

The final version of the Constitution was not to Hamilton's liking, but he accepted and supported it despite what he regarded its many imperfections. From a philosophical standpoint, he was uncomfortable with what he considered undue weight given to the legislative branch. As well, he brushed off calls for a Bill of Rights, which many politicians believed was absolutely necessary if the work of the convention was to be fully realized.

Nevertheless, Hamilton worked hard for ratification by the New York delegation, which proved important to final passage. As well, Hamilton's

laboriously detailed explanation of the Constitution in The Federalist Papers helped secure understanding and support at a time when suspicion and dissension over what many considered esoteric political rhetoric were rife. After ratification, Hamilton noted that something remarkable had been accomplished. “ The establishment of a constitution in (a) time of profound peace by the voluntary consent of a whole people is a prodigy, to the completion of which I look forward with trembling anxiety” (Chernow 260).

During the convention, Hamilton was not as involved in the proceedings as other notable colleagues. His efforts were opposed by the states’ rights delegates. He also faced opposition from within the New York delegation to the convention, most of which simply left during deliberations. Hamilton’s most important contributions, from a historical standpoint, were his authorship of the Federalist Papers and his grudging acceptance, though unqualified, support of the final version of the Constitution, support which resulted in New York’s ratification.

As previously discussed, Hamilton sought a final version that granted more power to the executive and judicial branches, and that imposed a multi-level electoral system for the offices of president and senator. Critics have ascribed political elitism as the motivation behind Hamilton’s promotion of such measures. Yet in the Federalist Papers, Hamilton refers to his concern for a government that is truly representative of all classes and commercial pursuits. In Federalist #60, Hamilton makes pointed reference to his concerns over a legislature imbued with authority that puts too much power in the hands of individuals. In retrospect, while Hamilton’s emphasis on

executive power is still emphasized by historians, there are overt examples of the abuse of power in the recent past and our own time. One is reminded of Huey Long, who

became a virtual potentate in his native Louisiana, or Joseph McCarthy, whose power allowed him to singlehandedly create a national forum from which to launch an ideological terror campaign.

Such depredations would doubtless raise objections and criticism from Hamilton today, given his reservations over the impact of a too-powerful legislature within a democratic body. "The propensity of the legislative department to intrude upon the rights and to absorb the powers of the other departments," and the "insufficiency of a mere parchment delineation of the boundaries of each" (Federalist #73, 474). One need only follow the news to witness a manifestation of Hamilton's fears; for example, the ability of powerful Senators like Mitch McConnell and John Boehner to obstruct presidential policy seemingly at will. At present, political stalemate is the closest the American political system has come to achieving balance.

Hamilton's view of the relationship between the states and the federal government may be the most enduringly unpopular argument he put forth during the Constitutional convention. Frederick Scott Oliver writes that Hamilton's basic position concerning the relationship between state and federal governments was that the processes of government had to be funneled through a strong, centralized authority to be effective. "If the central government was restricted to an indirect authority which could only operate through the state legislatures, it could only coerce at second hand" (Oliver, 152). Hamilton also expressed a fundamental admiration for the

British parliamentary system. Power, Hamilton contends, has historically resided in the upper classes for good reason. “ The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right” (Farrand 299). He believed that electing representatives for life would help prevent abuses of power and assure that the people who were best equipped to run government would be in place.

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