

# Constitutional characterizations of federalists and democratic republicans

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Throughout time, in reference to the constitution, Jeffersonian Democratic Republicans have been stereotyped as strict constructionists, while Federalists as loose interpreters. The true test of these assumptions is revealed throughout the presidencies of Jefferson and Madison, two leading figures of these two political parties. Although Jefferson advocated strict interpretation of the Constitution in his speech his actions proved otherwise, while Madison was at times a loose interpreter of the Constitution and in other situations a strict one. This is revealed throughout specific circumstances during their presidencies, such as the issuing of the embargo act and the Louisiana Purchase in Jefferson's terms, and the issuing of a military draft and the Tariff of 1816 during Madison's terms. Jefferson's theories supported a strict interpretation of the Constitution, however, his issuing of the Embargo Act and his purchase of Louisiana from Napoleon demonstrated his support for loose interpretation of the Constitution as he saw fit for the nation. Jefferson issued the Embargo Act in 1807, forbidding the export of all goods or materials from the United States. The overuse of power by the federal government is evident through the embargo act (Document C). It denies states' rights regarding foreign policies. Jefferson also believed that states should only be able to act according to the dictates of the Constitution (Document B). Nowhere in the Constitution is he given the right to issue an embargo, regardless he implemented this in our relations around the world (Document E). Secondly, Jefferson displays his loose interpretation of the Constitution through the Louisiana Purchase. Because of Napoleon's failure to reconquer Santo Domingo, his need for money in his war with Britain and

his opposition to the idea that America would fall into the arms of Britain is Britain should gain this territory, he desired to sell Louisiana to the United States. Jefferson was offered the option to purchase Louisiana Territory for 15 million dollars. As he considered this great region of territory now within grasp, which would strengthen the nation, he chose to purchase the land with a guilty conscience knowing he is not given the right to purchase land in the constitution. He claimed not to be an advocate of frequent changes in laws, but a believer in the progress of America therefore acting outside what was written in the Constitution (Document G). Jefferson believed in the theory that the Constitution should be preserved, yet clearly acted against his beliefs (Document A). In Jefferson's doctrine, he believed in a rigorous analysis of the Constitution, but his actions often proved otherwise. This showed that the Democratic Republicans were not really strict constructionists as they claimed to be. Madison, at different times alternated to be either a strict or loose interpretation of the Constitution, showing that Federalists tended to be loose interpreters of the Constitution. In the instances of Madison issuing a military draft and the Tariff of 1816, he demonstrated a loose interpretation of the Constitution, while his rejection of Henry Clay's American System proved he could be a more strict constructionist. Throughout America's first great war, the war of 1812 fought against Great Britain, the Madison administration tried to pass a conscription bill through Congress. This however was viewed as unconstitutional because nowhere in the Constitution was there any right granted to issue a military draft (Document D). Secondly, Madison could be categorized a loose constructionist as a result of his issuing of the Tariff of 1816, the first tariff

instituted mainly for protection. Again, nowhere in the Constitution was he given the right to issue tariffs on the United States (Document F). However James Madison's rejection of the American System displays actions on which he favored rigorous interpretation of the Constitution (Document H). He did not believe the creation of roads and canals was the same as regulating commerce, and because of this, he rejected the system. Despite Madison being prominent among the Federalist Party, Madison also demonstrated that Federalists can be both loose as well strict constructionists. Those who believe the stereotypes given to both Federalists and Democratic Republicans of loose and strict interpreters of the Constitution should evaluate two of the most crucial leaders, Jefferson and Madison, along with the actions taken during their presidencies. Jefferson stated in his words he would abide strictly by the Constitution, but his actions demonstrated the opposite. Madison was both a loose analyst of the Constitution as well as a strict one throughout various scenarios he faced in office. It is important to note that despite Constitutional philosophies presidents will ultimately follow their instincts in deciding the best course for the country. All of these decisions made, whether abiding strictly to the Constitution or not, have made a profound impact on American history.