

The role of federal government throughout history essay sample

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Overall, what I learned was that throughout history, whether it is American or history within other countries, the game never changes. We repeat incidents in history and though we might expect the outcome to differ, it rarely does. “The names of the players change but the game does not.” There are trends in history and almost every incident we face can be referred to similar happenings of the past. But the most predominant and reoccurring theme throughout the centuries, and possibly back to the beginning of human civilization and governing, is the role of federal government in the people’s lives. From Ancient Civilization, to Tories versus the Whigs, all the way up to controversy between republicans and democrats the same question has been asked. Do you want a big, intrusive government that decides what is best for you or a smaller government whose primary purpose is to protect you and provide a bit of order and structure so that we are not running about doing anything we please? It is important to recognize this theme. For the role of federal government will always impact our lives directly and decide the amount of freedom allowed to both the people and the government.

Whilst reading the material for this semester, I came across the controversial topic of the limit of power to govern the people multiple times. America couldn’t seem to agree on where the line was drawn between the people’s power versus the federal governments. We had great difficulty with it in the 18th century and we still do today. This matter in the present day can be simply put as the political issues between democrats and republicans.

Though they are two separate parties one will find that their wants don’t differ as much as one would expect. They want what is best for the country in order to become an even greater, efficient nation. But it’s the size of the

government that divides the two. One prefers a government that is not quite significant in the decision making for the country. Republicans demand more power to the individual states. However, democrats believe in a governed lifestyle in which federal government should be given power with minimal limits. The first written constitution of the United States was the Articles of Confederation.

This document developed a national government with strictly limited powers. This was in part of people's fear of being under an imperious central government. The thought of a select group of men that makes decisions that impact millions may seem a little ludicrous to some. Some people do not like to put their life and the power to make crucial decisions in anyone's hands but their own. But then there are those that may argue that a weak confederation or government can be detrimental to our nation. They simply do not trust the individual man to make wise decisions and so they entrust that power to the government. As in 1776 " the weak Confederation government had a difficult time forging the unity and assembling the resources necessary to fight the war and win peace" (P. 217 Chapter 7.) When conditions are loose and such disallowing restrictions are in place it increases the difficulty of properly running a nation efficiently and creating a union between the states. Here the argument of federal government's power is at play once more.

People value their freedom to choose, but also need a powerful government to effectively achieve their goals. By giving power to the states it lessens the unity of our country and makes it harder to accomplish things. For example,

passing a law that applies to all states gets tricky. That law may be completely welcome by one state, while it strictly goes against the laws already in place in several other states. In Chapter 7 of the text titled “ The American Revolution”, it states “ During the revolutionary era, most Americans identified politically and socially with their local communities rather than with the American nation. People spoke of ‘ these United States,’ emphasizing the plural. The single national community feeling of the Revolution was overwhelmed by persistent localism. The states were the setting for the most political struggles of the Confederation period and for long afterward” (P. 224 Chapter 7.) As long afterward as today. During times of war, we as a nation allow government to express more power over the people than usual.

We do it in times of crisis now and back in the late 1700s they understood that in order for the Revolution against Great Britain to succeed, they had to come together as a nation, a unified country that pushed its differences aside and fought for a common cause. But that didn’t last. Soon after, one of the first post-Revolution debates arose. Which governmental structure would be best? Naturally some chose to believe in a government that kept the “ unthinking many” in check by a strong executive branch and the opposed thought that the ideal form of government was the community or town meetings, where the people decided what was best for them. The information found in Chapter 7 is the most vital in understanding how our country functions and has always functioned. It shows how our country unifies under certain circumstances, but shortly after we return to the turmoil of differing opinions. The information in this chapter is a clear

example of the reoccurring themes throughout history. It is irrefutable that this problem has existed for centuries and that it is probable it will continue for as long as government in America exists. On the other hand, although unity is needed for a nation to succeed, there are instances when small government thrived and was what was best for our country at the time.

A primary example was when Thomas Jefferson came in to office. He wished to “ensure an agrarian republic of virtue” and proposed a plan of “simplicity and frugality” (P. 280 Chapter 9.) Jefferson had a successful presidency due to the fact that federal government, during his term, was diminutive and of little significance compared to the typical government today and the large amount of control and power they have over citizens. In the early 19th century, “power and political loyalty were local, not national.” Jefferson ensured that the national governments primary service to the people was solely mail delivery, a trivial matter these days but it meant a lot to the people that the power to determine law, order, welfare, economic control, road maintenance and education remained with the individual state. Success has been seen in both government structures and that is why from the first appearance of political factions to the political debates that take place currently the same question still remains; big government or small government.

Both are arguably beneficial for our nation. It is just a matter of your view for this country. Americans views have always differed in regards to the distribution of power. One example of how conflicting opinions got in the way of progress is the passing of the Constitution. Their differences were

reflected in the struggle to achieve ratification. In 1786 Washington wrote “ if there exists not a power to check them, what security has a man for life, liberty, or property?” (P. 241 Chapter 8) And so, certain of the need for an increasingly stronger national government, the Philadelphia Convention convened “ for the sole and express purpose of revising the Articles of Confederation.” (P. 241 Chapter 8.) However, the conservatives wanted to do more than just rewrite it. They desired a much stronger government, with bigger influence over the lives of the people. These Americans of 1787 closely resemble the democrats of today. As for the republicans of the 21st century, just like in the 18th century, they believe fully in the notion that “ government must rest on the consent of the governed.” Differing opinions have provided obstacles of progression.

“ The framers of the Constitution envisioned a one-party state in which partisan distinctions would be muted by patriotism and public virtue.” (P. 255 Chapter 8) But factions and parties still arose and were seen as possibly detrimental to the nation. In the section titled The Rise of Political Parties, it discusses how commercial interests were pitted against agrarian interests. These factions soon adopted names. Federalists and Republicans. Federalist wanted order and powerful government while republicans thought the federalists to be “ monarchists at heart” (P. 255 Chapter 8.) Near the end of the 1700s, the United States had ratified a new constitution and established a new government. Their disagreements as separate states transformed into political struggle between members of a nation. In the early 1800s localism and sectionalism were replaced by a more national dispute shown clearly in the two national political parties. On page 369 in Chapter 11 the introductory

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paragraph to the section titled The Second American Party System explains clearly that no matter what name the separate parties take they cannot break away from political struggles.

“... The confrontation between the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Republicans that began in the 1790s had been widely viewed as an unfortunate factional squabble that threatened the common good of the republic. By the 1830s... the political struggles of the Jackson era... created the basic pattern of American politics: two major parties... That pattern, which we call the ‘ Second American Party System,’ remains to this day.”

And although the parties of the 19th century went by the names of the Whigs and the Democrats, they similarly had the same disagreement our Democrats and Republicans have presently, and the Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans did in the 18th century. How much power and control are you willing to allow your government to have over your life? Do you think it right that they decide what is in your best interest or would you rather make that decision for yourself? I learned that there are reoccurring themes in history, such as social order, equality or the role of federal government.

And in my opinion the most important one of them all is the role federal government plays in the average citizen’s life. I think it is crucial we understand the immense impact federal government has on us as individuals. Consider all the things of the past that might not have been if government and it’s certain powers did not exist. It is not definite but it is plausible that we might not have succeeded in revolting against Great

Britain, passing the Constitution, eradicating slavery and many other monumental occasions in America. I am not dismissing the importance of social order, women's suffrage, the civil war era, or any other topics that one may argue its significance. But I am pointing out that though all those are extremely noteworthy, federal government played a part in all of them. The decision of allowing woman to vote was one made by the collective efforts of parties with differing views who came together for the common good of the country.

Crucial decisions as these are made by the peoples government and that is why it is of the utmost importance that are governments structure is in the best position for our nation to prosper. It all comes down to size. Big or small, that is the question. Government has played, and continues to play, such a trivial part of this country's history it is undeniable how important it is. Throughout time we as a nation have seen the rise and fall of factions dividing our people. Their names might have changed but their visions never will. A common ground cannot be found between these two parties and that will lead to the incessant arousal of issues. But America will work it out as we always have and we will continue to see the importance of the role of our government.