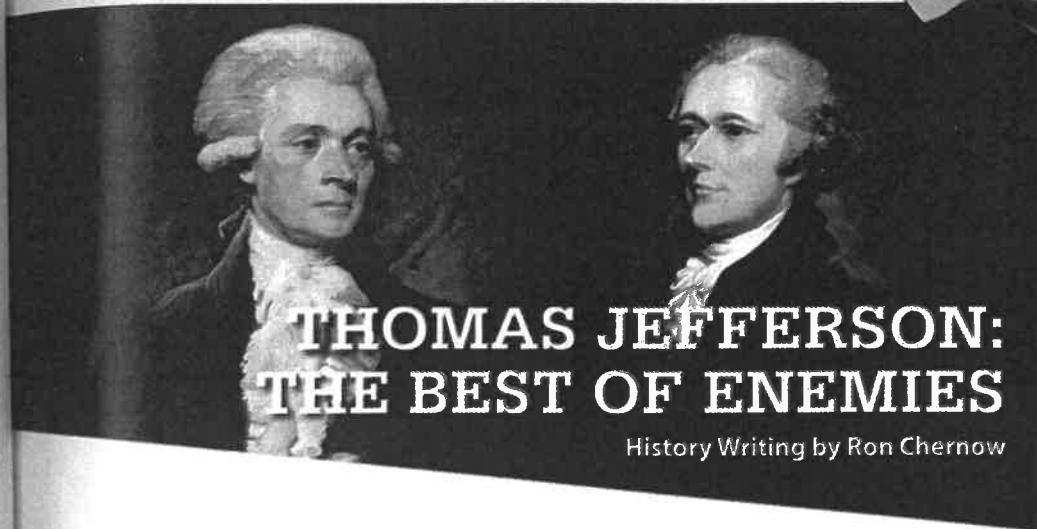




BACKGROUND

Ron Chernow (b. 1949) is an award-winning author of several biographies, including *Alexander Hamilton* (2004) and *Washington: A Life* (2010). In this magazine article from 2004, he explores the ideological differences that brought Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) and Alexander Hamilton (1755/57–1804) into conflict when both served in President George Washington's first cabinet.



SETTING A PURPOSE

As you read, look for clues that reveal similarities and differences between Jefferson's and Hamilton's personalities and beliefs.

1 On March 21, 1790, Thomas Jefferson belatedly arrived in New York City to assume his duties as the first Secretary of State after a five-year ministerial stint in Paris. Tall and lanky, with a freckled complexion and auburn hair, Jefferson, 46, was taken aback by the adulation being heaped upon the new Treasury Secretary, Alexander Hamilton, who had streaked to prominence in his absence. Few people knew that Jefferson had authored the Declaration of Independence, which had yet to become holy writ for Americans. Instead, the Virginian was eclipsed by the 35-year-old wunderkind from the Caribbean, who was a lowly artillery captain in New York when Jefferson composed the famous document. Despite his murky background as an illegitimate orphan, the self-invented Hamilton was trim and elegant, carried himself with an erect military bearing and had a mind that worked with dazzling speed. At first, Hamilton and Jefferson socialized on easy terms, with little inkling that they were destined to become mortal foes. But their clash inside

Notice & Note

Use the side margins to notice and note signposts in the text.

ANALYZE INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Annotate: Mark information in paragraph 1 about the long-term effects of the clash between Jefferson and Hamilton.

Infer: In your own words, state the author's thesis.



NOTICE & NOTE

ANALYZE STRUCTURE

Annotate: Underline words in paragraph 2 that reveal Hamilton's vision of government power. Circle words that tell you about Jefferson's vision.

Analyze: How would you describe the core difference between the men's views? Cite text evidence in your response.

tepid
(tĕp'ĭd) *adj.* lukewarm;
indifferent.

copious
(kō'pē-əs) *adj.* extensive.

George Washington's first Cabinet proved so fierce that it would spawn the two-party system in America. It also produced two divergent visions of the country's future that divide Americans to the present day.

- 2 For Hamilton, the first Treasury Secretary, the supreme threat to liberty arose from insufficient government power. To avert that, he advocated a vigorous central government marked by a strong President, an independent judiciary and a liberal reading of the Constitution. As the first Secretary of State, Jefferson believed that liberty was jeopardized by concentrated federal power, which he tried to restrict through a narrow construction of the Constitution. He favored states' rights, a central role for Congress and a comparatively weak judiciary.
- 3 At first glance, Hamilton might seem the more formidable figure in that classic matchup. He took office with an ardent faith in the new national government. He had attended the Constitutional Convention, penned the bulk of the Federalist papers to secure passage of the new charter and spearheaded ratification efforts in New York State. He therefore set to work at Treasury with more unrestrained gusto than Jefferson—who had monitored the Constitutional Convention from his post in Paris—did at State. Jefferson's enthusiasm for the new political order was **tepid** at best, and when Washington crafted the first government in 1789, Jefferson didn't grasp the levers of power with quite the same glee as Hamilton, who had no ideological inhibitions about shoring up federal power.
- 4 Hamilton—brilliant, brash and charming—had the self-reliant reflexes of someone who had always had to live by his wits. His overwhelming intelligence petrified Jefferson and his followers. As an orator, Hamilton could speak extemporaneously for hours on end. As a writer, he could crank out 5,000- or 10,000-word memos overnight. Jefferson never underrated his foe's **copious** talents. At one point, a worried Jefferson confided to his comrade James Madison that Hamilton was a one-man army, “a host¹ within himself.”
- 5 Whether in person or on paper, Hamilton served up his opinions promiscuously. He had a true zest for debate and never left anyone guessing where he stood. Jefferson, more than a decade older, had the quiet, courtly manner of a Virginia planter. He was emphatic in his views—Hamilton labeled him “an atheist in religion and a fanatic in politics”—but shrank from open conflict. Jefferson, a diffident speaker, mumbled his way through his rare speeches in a soft, almost inaudible voice and reserved his most scathing strictures for private correspondence.
- 6 The epic battle between these two Olympian² figures began not long after Jefferson came to New York City to assume his State

¹ **host:** an army or large group of troops.

² **Olympian:** like a god; one from Mount Olympus.



Department duties in March 1790. By then Hamilton was in the thick of a contentious campaign to retire massive debt inherited from the Revolution. America had suspended principal and interest payments³ on its obligations, which had traded as low as 15¢ on the dollar. In an audacious scheme to restore public credit, Hamilton planned to pay off that debt at face value, causing the securities to soar from depressed levels. Jefferson and Madison thought the original holders of those securities—many of them war veterans—should profit from that appreciation even if they had already sold their paper to traders at depressed prices. Hamilton thought it would be impractical to track them down. With an eye on future U.S. capital markets, he wanted to enshrine the **cardinal** principle that current owners of securities incurred all profits and losses, even if that meant windfall gains for rapacious speculators who had only recently bought the securities.

7 That skirmish over Hamilton's public credit plan was part of a broader tussle over the U.S.'s economic future. Jefferson was fond of summoning up idyllic scenes of an agrarian America peopled by sturdy yeoman farmers.⁴ That poetic vision neglected the underlying reality of large slave plantations in the South. Jefferson was a fine populist on paper but not in everyday life, and his defense of Virginia interests was inextricably bound up with slavery. Hamilton—derided as a pseudo aristocrat, an elitist, a crypto-monarchist⁵—was a passionate abolitionist with a far more expansive economic vision. He conceded that agriculture would persist for decades as an essential component of the economy. But at the same time he wanted to foster the **rudiments** of a modern economy—trade, commerce, banks, stock exchanges, factories and corporations—to enlarge economic opportunity.

8 Hamilton dreamed of a meritocracy, not an aristocracy, while Jefferson retained the landed gentry's disdain for the vulgar realities of trade, commerce and finance. And he was determined to undermine Hamilton's juggernaut.⁶

9 Because we celebrate Jefferson for his sonorous words in the Declaration of Independence—Hamilton never matched Jefferson's gift for writing ringing passages that were at once poetic and inspirational—we sometimes overlook Jefferson's consummate skills as a practicing politician. A master of subtle, artful indirection, he was able to marshal his forces without divulging his generalship. After Hamilton persuaded President Washington to create the Bank of the United States, the country's first central bank, Jefferson was aghast

³ **principal and interest payments:** the amount borrowed and the fees charged by the lender.

⁴ **yeoman farmers:** owners of small independent farms.

⁵ **crypto-monarchist:** one who secretly supports government rule by a king.

⁶ **juggernaut:** an extremely powerful force.

ANALYZE INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Annotate: Mark words in paragraph 6 that show the sequence of events.

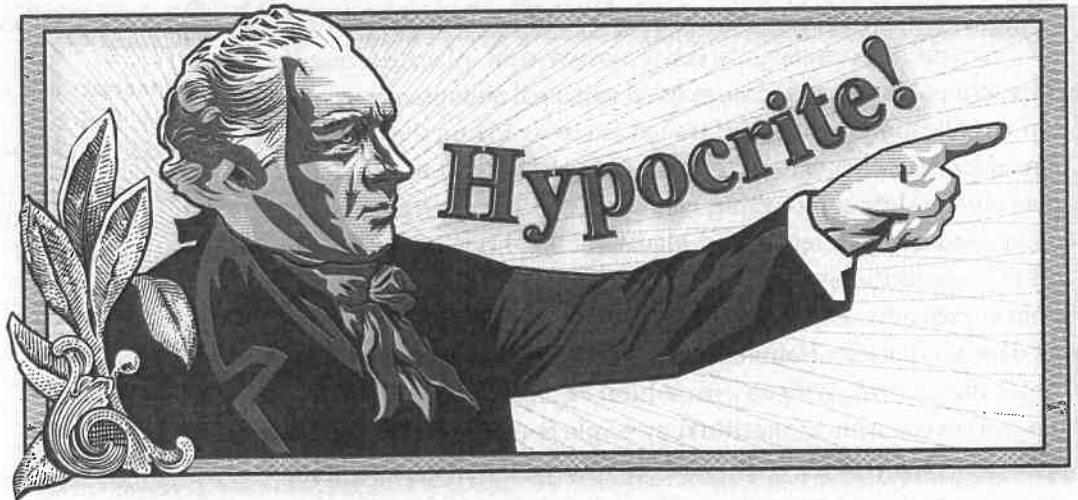
Infer: Why does the author include information about the order of events?

cardinal

(kär' dn-əl) *adj.* most important; prime.

rudiment

(rōō'də-mənt) *n.* basic form.

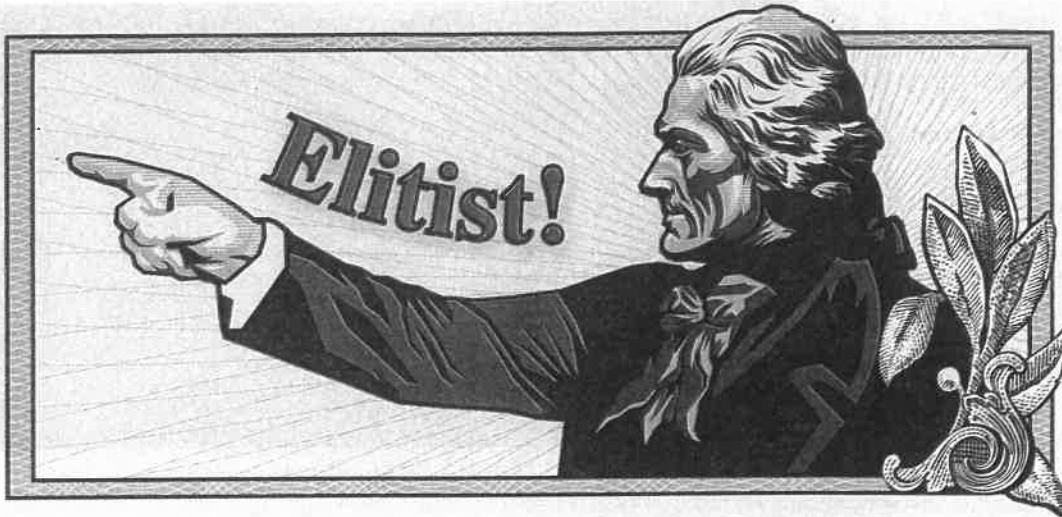


at what he construed⁷ as a breach of the Constitution and a perilous expansion of federal power. Along with Madison, he recruited the poet Philip Freneau to launch an opposition paper called the *National Gazette*. To subsidize the paper covertly, he hired Freneau as a State Department translator. Hamilton was shocked by such flagrant disloyalty from a member of Washington's Cabinet, especially when Freneau began to mount withering assaults on Hamilton and even Washington. Never one to suffer in silence, Hamilton retaliated in a blizzard of newspaper articles published under Roman pseudonyms. The backbiting between Hamilton and Jefferson grew so acrimonious that Washington had to exhort both men to desist.

10 . Instead, the feud worsened. In early 1793, a Virginia Congressman named William Branch Giles began to harry Hamilton with resolutions ordering him to produce, on short deadlines, stupendous amounts of Treasury data. With prodigious bursts of energy, Hamilton complied with those inhuman demands, foiling his opponents. Jefferson then committed an unthinkable act. He secretly drafted a series of anti-Hamilton resolutions for Giles, including one that read, "Resolved, That the Secretary of the Treasury has been guilty of maladministration in the duties of his office and should, in the opinion of Congress, be removed from his office by the President of the United States." The resolution was voted down, and the effort to oust Hamilton stalled. Jefferson left the Cabinet in defeat later that year.

11 Throughout the 1790s, the Hamilton-Jefferson feud continued to fester in both domestic and foreign affairs. Jefferson thought Hamilton was "bewitched" by the British model of governance, while Hamilton considered Jefferson a credulous apologist for the gory excesses of the French Revolution. Descended from French

⁷ **construed:** interpreted.



Huguenots⁸ on his mother's side, Hamilton was fluent in French and had served as Washington's liaison with the Marquis de Lafayette and other French aristocrats who had rallied to the Continental Army. The French Revolution immediately struck him as a bloody affair, governed by rigid, Utopian thinking. On Oct. 6, 1789, he wrote a remarkable letter to Lafayette, explaining his "foreboding of ill" about the future course of events in Paris. He cited the "vehement character" of the French people and the "reveries" of their "philosophic politicians," who wished to transform human nature. Hamilton believed that Jefferson while in Paris "drank deeply of the French philosophy in religion, in science, in politics." Indeed, more than a decade passed before Jefferson fully realized that the French Revolution wasn't a worthy sequel to the American one so much as a grotesque travesty.⁹

- 12 If Jefferson and Hamilton define opposite ends of the political spectrum in U.S. history and seem to exist in perpetual conflict, the two men shared certain traits, feeding a mutual cynicism. Each scorned the other as excessively ambitious. In his secret diary, or *Anas*, Jefferson recorded a story of Hamilton praising Julius Caesar as the greatest man in history. (The tale sounds dubious, as Hamilton invariably used Caesar as shorthand for "an evil tyrant.") Hamilton repaid the favor. In one essay he likened Jefferson to "Caesar coyly refusing the proffered diadem"¹⁰ and rejecting the trappings, but "tenaciously grasping the substance of imperial domination."
- 13 Similarly, both men hid a potent hedonism¹¹ behind an intellectual **façade**. For all their outward differences, the two

⁸ **French Huguenots:** a group of Protestants who were persecuted in Catholic France; many fled to North America.

⁹ **travesty:** an unreasonable distortion or parody.

¹⁰ **"Caesar . . . diadem":** In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the Roman general refuses a crown three times, but republicans believe he really wanted to be named king.

¹¹ **hedonism:** the belief that personal pleasure is the primary goal in life.

ANALYZE INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Annotate: Mark the references to time in paragraph 11.

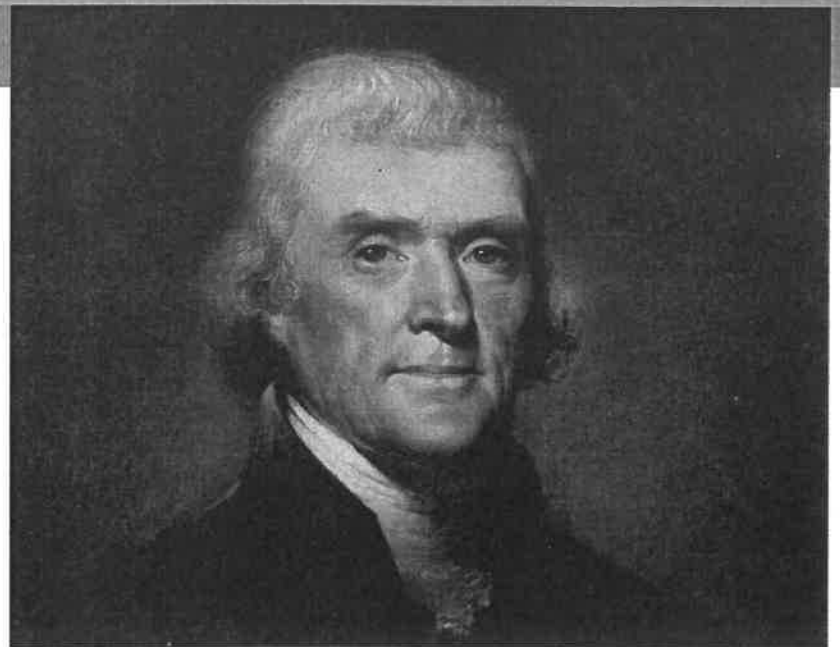
Analyze: How did the men's view of the French Revolution change over time? Cite text evidence in your response.

façade

(fə-sād') *n.* false or misleading appearance.



NOTICE & NOTE



Thomas Jefferson

LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS

Annotate: Mark an example of hyphenation in paragraph 13.

Evaluate: How does hyphenation help make this sentence more concise?

anomalous
(ə-nŏm'ə-ləs) *adj.* unusual.

politicians stumbled into the two great sex scandals of the early Republic. In 1797 a journalist named James T. Callender exposed that Hamilton, while Treasury Secretary and a married man with four children, had entered into a yearlong affair with grifter Maria Reynolds, who was 23 when it began. In a 95-page pamphlet, Hamilton confessed to the affair at what many regarded as inordinate length. He wished to show that the money he had paid to Reynolds' husband James had been for the favor of her company and not for illicit speculation in Treasury securities, as the Jeffersonians had alleged. Forever after, the Jeffersonians tagged Hamilton as "the amorous Treasury Secretary" and mocked his pretensions to superior morality.

14 By an extraordinary coincidence, during Jefferson's first term as President, Callender also exposed Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings. Callender claimed that "Dusky Sally," a.k.a. the "African Venus," was the President's slave concubine, who had borne him five children. "There is not an individual in the neighborhood of Charlottesville who does not believe the story," Callender wrote, "and not a few who know it." Jefferson never confirmed or denied Callender's story. But the likely truth of the Hemings affair was dramatically bolstered by DNA tests published in 1998, which indicated that a Jefferson male had sired at least one of Hemings' children.

15 The crowning irony of the stormy relations between Hamilton and Jefferson is that Hamilton helped install his longtime foe as President in 1801. Under constitutional rules then in force, the candidate with the majority of electoral votes became President; the runner-up became Vice President. That created an **anomalous** situation in which Jefferson, his party's presumed presidential nominee, tied with Aaron Burr, its presumed vice presidential nominee. It took 36 rounds of voting in the House to decide the election in Jefferson's favor. Faced with the prospect of Burr as President, a man he considered unscrupulous, Hamilton not only



opted for Jefferson as the lesser of two evils but also was forced into his most measured assessment of the man. Hamilton said he had long suspected that as President, Jefferson would develop a keen taste for the federal power he had deplored in opposition. He recalled that a decade earlier, in Washington's Cabinet, Jefferson had seemed like a man who knew he was destined to inherit an estate—in this case, the presidency—and didn't wish to deplete it. In fact, Jefferson, the strict constructionist, freely exercised the most sweeping powers as President. Nothing in the Constitution, for instance, permitted the Louisiana Purchase¹². Hamilton noted that with rueful mirth.

¹²**Louisiana Purchase:** France's 1803 sale of its territory west of the Mississippi River to the United States.

CONTRASTS AND CONTRADICTIONS

Notice & Note: Mark a surprising fact that Chernow includes in the concluding paragraph of the article.

Analyze: What contradiction does this fact reveal? Explain.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer these questions before moving on to the **Analyze the Text** section on the following page.

- 1 What event sparked the beginning of the conflict between Hamilton and Jefferson?
 - A Jefferson came back from France.
 - B Hamilton arrived from the Caribbean.
 - C Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence.
 - D Hamilton attended the Constitutional Convention.

- 2 What is a main difference between the economic visions of America held by Jefferson and Hamilton?
 - F Jefferson's vision was urban, while Hamilton's was rural.
 - G Jefferson's vision was modern, while Hamilton's was agrarian.
 - H Jefferson's vision included slavery, while Hamilton's was abolitionist.
 - J Jefferson's vision included government controls, while Hamilton favored the aristocracy.

- 3 How did Hamilton respond to the accusations of illicit speculation?
 - A He confessed to speculating in Treasury securities.
 - B He confessed at length to having an extramarital affair.
 - C He accused Jefferson of having an affair with Sally Hemings.
 - D He accused the Jeffersonians of lying about his financial dealings.