

Hamilton vs. Jefferson

A Debate during the Washington Administration

A classroom play by Team HOPE

Cast List

Thomas Jefferson (JEFF).....Secretary of State

Alexander Hamilton (HAM).....Secretary of the Treasury

Elijah Lovejoy (ANCH).....anchor of “The History News Report”

Margaret Fuller (R1).....reporter for “The History News Report”

Nellie Bly (R2)reporter for “The History News Report”

Ernie Pyle (R3).....reporter for “The History News Report”

TEACHER NOTES

SETTING: A contemporary classroom. It is advised to set up the anchor in the front of the room facing the class, in front of some sort of background with “The History New Report.” You may choose to set up the different reporters conducting the interviews around the classroom and have the historical figures come to them. This way it gives the appearance of different locations. A name plate in front of each cast member is highly recommended. A 5x8 index card folded in half works great for this purpose.

COSTUMES: Although not necessary, any period costumes for the historical figures are a great addition. Even a simple hat or wig is excellent.

MASKS: Masks are an easy addition that will add to the drama and make the entire event more fun for the students. First, go to www.google.com and click on “image search.” Type in the historical figure’s name and find an image of the person. Copy and paste the picture in a Word document. You may need to crop and then enlarge the photo so you get a picture large enough to be used as a mask. Portraits obviously work best for this use. Print out the picture and paste it onto a cardboard backing. You can tape a plastic spoon or popsicle stick to be used as a handle. You may decide to make masks for the student correspondents as well, using pictures of television news personalities for the masks.

Note: If there is a historical person you cannot find a picture for, don’t despair! Almost any random “period” person’s picture (as long as it not someone easily recognizable) would work as a mask.

ROLES: Encourage students to act out the roles with as much energy as possible. Do not be too terribly concerned that the sex of the historical figure matching with the sex of the student.

The teacher may decide to take a part in the play, role-modeling one of the historical figures. It is recommended that five copies of the scripts are specifically set aside for each character in the play. For each character, *highlight all their lines* in order to facilitate a faster pace of dialogue. All other students should receive an unmarked copy of the play to read as the play is performed.

ANCHOR AND REPORTERS: In order to facilitate the historical discussions that exist in the plays, actual famous journalist names have been used in the plays. Teachers should point out that these journalists come from different times in American history and do not necessarily reflect the period they report on. It is as if they can travel in time to deliver “The History News Report.” A teacher may also decide to substitute the names given in the script for student names if desired. A brief description of the journalists is as follows:

- **Elijah Lovejoy** (1802-1837) A minister and journalist for the *St. Louis Observer* and later editor of the abolitionist newspaper the *Alton Observer* of Alton, Illinois. In 1837, pro-slavery forces attacked his warehouse in order to destroy his printing press and he was murdered on the scene.
- **Margaret Fuller** (1810-1850) An early woman rights activist, Margaret was the first female journalist to work on the staff of a major American newspaper, *The New York Tribune*. She was a widely read literary critic who was also sent on overseas assignments to Europe.
- **Nellie Bly** (1864-1922) After a writing a fiery rebuttal to a sexist column in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Nellie was hired by a very impressed editor at the newspaper. She went on to become a famous investigative journalist on the plight of working women, and gained further fame for having faked insanity in order to investigate the treatment of the mentally ill.
- **Ernie Pyle** (1900-1945) An American journalist who was a roving correspondent for Scripps Howard newspaper chain. His articles were read in over 200 newspapers. He is most famous for having been a war correspondent during World War II. He led the charge for Congress to give soldiers “battle pay” while in combat. He died under heavy fire from a Japanese machine gun nest in the Pacific on April 18, 1945.

DISCUSSION: Use the accompanying worksheet to facilitate discussion before and after the play. Students who are not directly involved in the play can attempt to write preliminary answers as the play is performed. The audience should be told that they will be the primarily responsible for the discussion questions at the end of the lesson.

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NOTE: All responses by historical figures reflect actual events and beliefs as closely as possible.

CAST ABBREVIATIONS

Thomas JeffersonJEFF
Alexander Hamilton.....HAM
Elijah LovejoyANCH
Margaret Fuller..... R1
Nellie Bly.....R2
Ernie Pyle.....R3

ANCH Welcome to the History News Report, I am your anchor Elijah Lovejoy. During the first term of George Washington, a lively debate has emerged over two competing visions for the future of the United States. On one side stands Alexander Hamilton, Washington's Secretary of the Treasury, who joins us in studio. On the opposing side is Thomas Jefferson, Washington's Secretary of State. Secretary Jefferson joins us via satellite from his home at Monticello. (short pause) Thank you for joining us gentlemen.

HAM My pleasure.

JEFF I appreciate it.

ANCH Secretary Jefferson, let's start with you. What is your vision for the United States?

JEFF My goal is that the United States would be a permanent feature in the world and remain a city upon a hill. To do this, I think it is necessary for us to safeguard our agrarian lifestyle.

R1 And Secretary Hamilton, your vision differs in what way?

HAM I believe my vision for America is one that places our country at the forefront of modern commercial republic, one where investment, industry and manufacturing drive our economy.

R2 What is so dangerous about his views Secretary Jefferson?

JEFF His focus on manufacturing will inevitably lead to our citizens being occupied at a workbench! Let our workshops remain in Europe!

R3 Why do you say this?

JEFF Creating the republic that Hamilton proposes will surely lead to great cities and with that the mobs will come. These mobs of the great cities destroy the manner and spirit of our people. Such degeneracy is a canker that will soon eat to the heart of our laws and constitution.

R2 So you fear that Hamilton's vision will lead to degeneracy of our culture?

JEFF Exactly. It will indeed.

R3 Secretary Hamilton, how do you respond to such an accusation?

HAM I think what Secretary Jefferson fears most is that the culture of the southern states, based on slavery, is much more at risk than our culture ever will be with my vision!

R3 How so?

HAM An agrarian republic sustained by small landowners, ultimately and unavoidably is based on slavery. It is the very fabric of an agrarian society! My financial system will make slavery obsolete.

R1 How does President Washington feel about this clash of visions?

HAM He has inevitably come down on my side.

R2 But Washington is a slaveholder himself!

HAM True, but even he has recently said that "nothing but the rooting out of slavery can perpetuate the existence of our Union..." Therefore he supports a system that will not depend on it.

R1 Do you have a response Secretary Jefferson?

JEFF Hamilton forgets that history has no example of a large urban republic where democracy remains strong! Eventually the mobs have taken over and soon tyranny reins!

ANCH Let's redirect this debate over a couple of specific issues. First was the "assumption" and "residence" questions. Secretary Hamilton, what was your position on the "assumption" question?

HAM The issue revolved around whether the United States would fund the debt incurred under the Articles of Confederation and whether we would also assume the debts of the states.

R2 You mean the debt incurred by the United States during the American Revolution?

- HAM** Yes. I felt we had to preserve the currency so that monied men would cooperate with our government. No plan could succeed which does not unite the interest and credit of rich individuals with that of the government. For that I knew we had to agree to *fund* the debt of \$55 million, otherwise creditors would have no faith in our government. It would be a horrible way to start a new nation.
- R1** And you disagreed with this Secretary Jefferson?
- JEFF** What Hamilton leaves out is that much of the debt was funded by holders of government bonds. However, most of the original owners of the bonds had sold them because the Confederation Congress had issued worthless money. These hard pressed farmers, soldiers, and small merchants ended up selling these bonds to “speculators,” who would benefit greatly from Secretary Hamilton’s plan!
- R3** This issue also revolved around whether the federal government would assume war debts incurred by the individual states?
- HAM** I was quite clear that the federal government should pay off the \$25 million in outstanding war debt incurred by the states. It would bind the states to the new government and it would be an act of justice since the war had been fought for the union, not for any single state.
- R2** I assume you saw the issue differently, Mr. Jefferson?
- JEFF** I sure did. Not only would Hamilton not recognize the original bond holders and give a windfall profit to the entire class of speculators, he wanted to use federal tax money to pay off state war debts. I might remind him that some states have already met their obligations to creditors in a timely fashion. Now he wants them to pay extra tax monies to pay off the debt of mostly northern states!
- ANCH** Two very different opinions that don’t seem like they could be easily resolved. How did it end?
- HAM** A compromise. We also were dealing with the “residence” question.
- R1** You mean where to place our permanent capitol?
- HAM** Correct. I wanted it to remain in New York, or at worst between New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This would keep it close to the growing centers of trade and finance.
- JEFF** George Washington, myself, and James Madison on the other hand wanted the capitol between Virginia and Maryland.
- R2** So you basically vote swapped?
- JEFF** Indeed. Hamilton got his debt funding and the southerners were able to get the

permanent capitol close in the South.

ANCH You two also clashed on the issue of the National Bank as well?

HAM Yes, I thought it was necessary for credit and commerce.

JEFF I thought it wasn't necessary and I told President Washington as well.

R3 Madison agrees with you Secretary Jefferson?

JEFF He did and felt that it wasn't even constitutional to create a national bank. There was no constitutional clause that gave Congress the power to create one.

R2 In the end, how did President Washington come down on this issue?

HAM He again sided with my vision. I argued that the Constitution's "elastic clause" permitted Congress to exercise those powers "necessary and proper" to carrying out its enumerated powers. I felt strongly the bank was necessary.

R1 Your financial system has started bearing fruit, has it not Secretary Hamilton?

HAM I think it surely has. The government's credit is "as good as gold." My Revenue Marine, or Coast Guard, are enforcing customs laws and are generating large import duties for the new government. We are meeting our obligations, something Congress under the Articles of Confederation could never do.

ANCH I want to thank both of you gentlemen for being with us today. We can see clearly that the roots of the United States future growth into an industrial power were clearly created in its earliest days as a republic. (*short pause*) For History News Report, I am Elijah Lovejoy reporting.