

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

FREEDOM AND POWER Reading

Directions: Please read the following passages and answer the questions.

Freedom and Power: The Enduring Debate

Striking the right balance between freedom and power is the essential paradox of governing. One could select any point in American history and find a vigorous debate between those who want a stronger government and those who believe that individual freedom is endangered by an encroaching state. This debate was a central feature of the early struggle to establish a permanent, stable, yet limited national government in America.

Thomas Jefferson was an eloquent spokesman for a government of sharply limited powers. He laid his trust in majority will and personal freedom. In fact, he considered regular revolts by the people to be healthy for a democracy, not unlike the way the physicians of his time viewed bloodletting. "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants."

Opposing him was Alexander Hamilton, an avowed elitist, who recognized the failings of weak government (which the country had experienced under the Articles of Confederation). Hamilton argued that the national government had to possess the power to enforce its decisions in order to ensure the political and economic well-being of its citizenry.

JEFFERSON

I own, I am not a friend to a very energetic government. It is always oppressive. It places the governors indeed more at their ease, at the expense of the people. The late rebellion in Massachusetts [Shays's Rebellion] has given more alarm, than I think it should have done. Calculate that one rebellion in thirteen States in the course of eleven years, is but one for each State in a century and a half. No country should be so long without one. Nor will any degree of power in the hands of government, prevent insurrections. . . . And say . . . whether peace is best preserved by giving energy to the government, or information to the people. This last is the most certain, and the most legitimate engine of government. Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them. And it requires no very high degree of education to convince them of this. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty. After all, it is my principle that the will of the majority should prevail.¹

HAMILTON

If it be possible at any rate to construct a federal government capable of regulating the common concerns, and preserving the general tranquillity, it must be founded . . . upon the reverse of the principle contended for by the opponents of the proposed Constitution [that is, a confederacy]. It must carry its agency to the persons of the citizens. It must stand in need of no intermediate legislations, but must itself be empowered to employ the arm of the ordinary magistrate to execute its own resolutions. The majesty of the national authority must be manifested through the medium of the courts of justice. The government of the Union, like that of each State, must be able to address itself immediately to the hopes and fears of individuals; and to attract to its support those passions which have the strongest influence upon the human heart. It must, in short, possess all the means, and have a right to resort to all the methods, of executing the powers with which it is entrusted, that are possessed and exercised by the governments of the particular States.²

¹Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, 20 December 1787, in *Jefferson's Letters*, arr. by Willson Whitman (Eau Claire, WI: E. M. Hale, 1950), p. 85.

²Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961), No. 16, p. 116.

1. What is the essential paradox (inconsistency) of governing?
2. Do you agree with Jefferson or Hamilton on the size of the government? Why?