

Document 2

Background Information Reading Thomas Jefferson

Personal Background

Jefferson was born in Virginia to an old and respected family. One of ten children, he was gifted with many talents. As a boy, he learned to ride, hunt, sing, dance, and play the violin. Later, he carried a violin with him in all his travels.

With land inherited from his father, Jefferson set himself up as a Virginia tobacco planter. Once he was established as a planter, Jefferson entered Virginia politics. As a politician, he lacked the ability to make stirring speeches. Instead, Jefferson spoke eloquently with his pen. His words in the Declaration of Independence and other writings are still read and admired today.

View of Human Nature

Jefferson's view of **human nature** was very hopeful. He assumed that **informed** citizens could make good decisions for themselves and their country. "I have so much confidence in the good sense of men." Jefferson wrote when revolution broke out in France, "that I am never afraid of the issue [outcome] where reason is left free to **exert** her force."

Jefferson had great faith in the goodness and wisdom of people who worked the soil - farmers and planters like himself. "State a problem to a **ploughman** and a professor," he said, and "the former will decide it often better than the latter."

Best Form of Government

Democratic-Republicans had no patience with the Federalists' view that only the "best people" should rule. To Democratic-Republicans, this view came close to monarchy, or rule by a king.

Democratic-Republicans believed that the best government was the one that governed the least. A small government with limited powers was most likely to leave the people alone to enjoy the blessings of liberty. To keep the national government small, they insisted on a strict construction, or interpretation, of the Constitution. The Constitution, they insisted, meant exactly what it said, no more and no less. Any addition to the powers listed there, was **unconstitutional** and dangerous.

Ideal Economy

Like most Americans in the 1790s, Jefferson was a country man. He believed that the nation's future lay not

human nature - human behavior that does not change over time

informed - having enough knowledge to understand something

exert - to make a strenuous physical or mental effort

ploughman - farmer

unconstitutional - not allowed by the Constitution

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manufacturing - to make something into a product using raw materials

with Federalist bankers and merchants, but with plain, Democratic-Republican farm folk. "Those who labor in the earth," he wrote, "are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people."

Democratic-Republicans favored an economy based on agriculture. They opposed any measures designed to encourage the growth of business and **manufacturing**.

Differences between the First Political Parties

Federalists	Democratic-Republicans
Leader: Alexander Hamilton	Leader: Thomas Jefferson
Favored: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule by the wealthy class• Strong federal government• Emphasis on manufacturing• Loose interpretation of the Constitution	Favored: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rule by the people• Strong state governments• Emphasis on agriculture• Strict interpretation of the Constitution

Student Handout 4

Thomas Jefferson's ideas about Government and the Democratic-Republican Party

Directions: Write three important ideas from Document 2 in each bubble.

The handout features a central portrait of Thomas Jefferson. Five thought bubbles are arranged around the portrait, each containing a topic for note-taking. The bubbles are: 'View of Human Nature' (top left), 'Best Form of Government' (top center), 'Ideal Economy' (top right), 'Personal Background' (bottom right), and 'What he might say about Hamilton' (bottom left, in a speech bubble shape). Below the portrait is a large rectangular box for 'Additional Notes'.

View of Human Nature

Best Form of Government

Ideal Economy

Personal Background

What he might say about Hamilton

Additional Notes