

FOUNDING BROTHERS: EPISODE II

Act I - Federal vs. State Power

1. Alexander Hamilton argued, "A new government, constructed on free principles, is always weak, and must stand in need of the props of a firm and good administration." Jefferson demurred, claiming "That government is best which governs the least." Which perspective do you think was best for the nation at the time of its birth? Explain.
2. In the debate over how much power to give the central government, James Madison seemed to switch side. In the 1780s, Madison argued for a strong central government and sided with Hamilton and the Federalists against the Antifederalists. By the 1790s, Madison was arguing against a strong federal government and supporting Jeffersonian Republicans against Hamilton, Washington, Adams, and the Federalists. Was Madison inconsistent? How did his apparent switch relate to the tremendous change in federal power from the Revolution to Washington's second administration?
3. Examine the words of Patrick Henry at the Virginia constitutional ratifying convention: "What right had they to say, 'We the people'? My political curiosity, exclusive of my anxious solicitude for the public welfare, leads me to ask -- Who authorized them to speak the language of 'We, the people,' instead of 'We the states'? States are the characteristics and the soul of a confederation." Do you agree with Henry? Do you see merit in other historical arguments for states' rights?

Act II - Mudslinging and the Political Press

4. In the video, historian Joanne Freeman explains that "Since politics is about reputation and character in this period, when you plunge into the newspaper and attack someone's reputation and character, that is an extremely savage act." Why so? Give examples from the film.

Act III - Foreign Policy

5. Do you think the position George Washington took in the 1793 Neutrality Proclamation was good or bad policy? Explain why or why not.
6. The Jay Treaty gave the following concessions in favor of American interests: the British promised to evacuate forts on U. S. soil and consented to pay damages for seizures of U. S. ships. As concessions to the British, Americans agreed to pay pre- revolutionary debts owed to British merchants, gave the British an upper hand in trade policy, and accepted British silence on future seizures of U. S. ships and British arming of Native Americans on the U. S. frontier. Why did Republicans explode in rage at discovery of the terms of the treaty?

Act IV - Washington's Farewell

7. In crushing the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794, Washington denied the rebels' claim that they were acting against tyranny just like the patriots had against the British. The president pointed out that the rebels had representation in Congress. Nevertheless, Washington pardoned three men condemned of treason and sentenced to death. In what way can this be considered a display of political skill?