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Hamilton vs. Jefferson: How Political Parties Began

THE FRAMERS OF THE US CONSTITUTION were well versed in the writings of Aristotle, Locke, Montesquieu, and other democratic thinkers. From their extensive reading of history, they understood the dangers of unchecked ambition and the necessities of free speech and minority protections that are so vital in creating a representative democracy. The tripartite system of government they devised—consisting of a president, Congress, and judiciary—has endured with only modest revisions to the US Constitution. Upon leaving the presidency in 1796, George Washington urged that the Constitution “be sacredly maintained—that its administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and virtue.”¹ Forty-two years later, Abraham Lincoln told the Springfield, Illinois, Young Men’s Lyceum that the Constitution should become “the political religion of the nation.”²

Yet while the Framers realized success in establishing instruments of governance, they struggled over how to organize elections. Popular, democratic elections were a novel experiment that many believed could not happen without widespread turmoil and violence. One Massachusetts delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia contended that the “evils we experience flow from the excess of democracy.”³ Alexander Hamilton agreed: “The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right.”⁴ By the twenty-first century, however, the “excess of democracy” had become universal. In 2017, there were 35,879 cities and townships; 12,880 independent school districts; 3,031 counties; and 38,266 special districts spread across the US, many with elected leaders.⁵

The Constitution’s Framers were skeptical of political parties, thinking of them as factions to be avoided. So, it was to their great astonishment that political parties proved to be the agents that made the document’s provisions and the complex system of elections work. Parties afforded a way of organizing elections, legitimizing opposition, and guaranteeing peaceful transitions of power. Once in office, they often helped elected officials work together and bridged some of

the differences both between and among government institutions. One might assume, therefore, that political parties would be welcome instruments of governance. Quite the contrary. For more than 200 years, Americans have steadfastly refused to embrace party-led government—preferring instead that their leaders act in a nonpartisan manner. In 1956, John F. Kennedy wrote a Pulitzer Prize–winning book, *Profiles in Courage*, which extolled those who placed conscience above party.⁶ Sixty years later, Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump took a different tack, this time underscoring the public’s distaste for both major parties: “We look at politicians and think: This one’s owned by this millionaire. That one’s owned by that millionaire, or lobbyist, or special group.”⁷ Voters rewarded Trump’s Republican Party by giving them complete control of the federal government in 2016. But their investment was fleeting. Two years later, they soured on Trump’s leadership and handed control of the House of Representatives to Democrats. Two years after that, they gave Democrats the White House and Senate as well.

The remainder of this chapter sets the foundation for our discussion of the evolution and role of political parties in America. We start by looking at the love-hate relationship Americans have with parties and how this has influenced party development. Next, we address what roles parties play and how they differ from other players in the political system. The chapter ends with a discussion of the disparate perspectives on political parties held by Hamilton and Jefferson, which will help to structure our understanding of party development.

Political Parties: Institutions Americans Love to Hate

The Founding Fathers were elitists who wanted to minimize the role citizens would play in choosing their officeholders. They were especially fearful of political parties, arguing that it was necessary, in Madison’s words, to “break and control the violence of faction [meaning parties and other special interest groups].”⁸ James Madison, George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson believed that an enlightened citizenry would have no use for parties. Instead of parties, Madison hoped other mediating institutions would “refine and enlarge the public views by passing them through the medium of the chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial conditions.”⁹ Madison believed a multitude of interests would proliferate through continental expansion, thus making the development of large, mass-based parties virtually inconceivable: “You make it less probable

that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and to act in unison with each other.”¹⁰

Madison’s belief that parties were unsuited filters for mass expressions of public opinion was based on his reading of history. He believed human beings were emotional creatures, often embracing different religions and political leaders with a zealotry that usually ended in chaos and violence. Most of Madison’s contemporaries agreed, and they despised political parties as vehicles that would, inevitably, ignite uncontrollable political passions. George Washington was especially critical of partisan demagogues whose objective, he claimed, was not to give people the facts from which they could reasonably make up their own minds but to make them blind followers. In an early draft of a 1792 speech renouncing a second term (never delivered when he had a change of heart), Washington maintained that “we are all children of the same country . . . [and] that our interest, however diversified in local and smaller matters, is the same in all the great and essential concerns of the nation.”¹¹ Determined to make good on his intention to leave office in 1796, Washington issued his famous farewell address, in which he admonished his fellow citizens to avoid partisanship at any cost, noting that the “spirit of party” caused great division and agitated passions that helped divide the nation.¹²

Washington was hardly alone in admonishing partisanship. Six years before Washington’s famous farewell and prior to the end of the Revolutionary War, John Adams bemoaned the country’s elites drift toward party politics: “There is nothing I dread so much as a division of the Republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader and converting measures in opposition to each other.”¹³ Abigail Adams, observing the effects of partisan attacks on her husband during his presidency, wrote, “Party spirit is blind, malevolent, un-candid, ungenerous, unjust, and unforgiving.”¹⁴ James Monroe, the nation’s fifth chief executive, urged his backers to obliterate all party divisions. When Abraham Lincoln sought reelection in 1864 under the newly created National Union banner, half a million pamphlets were published bearing titles such as “No Party Now but All for Our Country.”¹⁵

Today’s party leaders also seem skeptical about a place for parties in the American setting. In the keynote address that launched Barack Obama’s national career at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, the future president spoke of the ills that stem from dividing the country into partisan groups:

The pundits like to slice and dice our country into Red States and Blue States; Red States for Republicans, Blue States for Democrats. But I’ve got news for them. We worship an awesome God in the Blue States, and

we don't like federal agents poking around our libraries in the Red States. We coach Little League in the Blue States and have gay friends in the Red States. There are patriots who opposed the war in Iraq and patriots who supported it. We are one people, all of us pledging allegiance to the stars and stripes, all of us defending the United States of America.¹⁶

Because this message resonates with so many people, political figures often find it advantageous to downplay political labels. Seeking reelection in 1972, Richard Nixon instructed his staff not to include the word "Republican" in any of his television advertisements or campaign brochures. Four years later, Gerald R. Ford was bluntly told by his advisors not to campaign for Republican candidates lest his support erode among independents and ticket splitters.¹⁷ Asking Republicans and Republican-leaning voters in 2020 whether they considered themselves to be more a supporter of Donald Trump, or more a supporter of the Republican party, 52 percent labeled themselves Trump supporters first.¹⁸ Campaigning for reelection in 2020, Trump mentioned the Republican Party only five times in his acceptance speech: twice referring to Abraham Lincoln; twice pledging to keep Americans safe from rioters and looters; and once to promise that the party would protect those with preexisting health conditions should Obamacare be overturned by the Supreme Court.¹⁹ For his part, Joe Biden mentioned the Democratic Party just once and in a bipartisan context, saying: "[W]hile I will be the Democratic candidate, I will be an American president. I will work as hard for those who didn't support me as I will for those who did."²⁰

Students of political parties, however, give them more kudos than the public. In his book *The American Commonwealth*, published in 1888, James Bryce began a tradition of scholarly investigation of political parties by devoting more than 200 pages to the subject. His treatment was laudatory: "Parties are inevitable. No free large country has been without them. No one has shown how representative government could be worked without them. They bring order out of chaos to a multitude of voters."²¹ More than a century later, scores of academicians agree with Bryce. In a 1996 amicus curiae (friend-of-the-court) brief filed with the US Supreme Court, the Committee for Party Renewal, a bipartisan group of political scientists, summarized the views held by most party scholars:

Political parties play a unique and crucial role in our democratic system of government. Parties enable citizens to participate coherently in a system of government allowing for a substantial number of popularly elected offices. They bring fractious and diverse groups together as a unified force, provide

a necessary link between the distinct branches and levels of government, and provide continuity that lasts beyond terms of office. Parties also play an important role in encouraging active participation in politics, holding politicians accountable for their actions, and encouraging debate and discussion of important issues.²²

Three Important Party Distinctions

One topic that bedevils any examination of parties in America is how one defines them. What is a political party? What makes one organization more “party-like” than another? What are the differences among interest groups, campaign consulting firms, political action committees, and political parties? What are the various components of political parties? Are parties member-oriented, or are they simply tools for an office-seeking elite?

Scholars have wrestled with these and other related questions for decades. Many of these topics are discussed in the chapters that follow, but a few clarifications are in order. They center around three questions:

1. How do political parties differ from other organizations, particularly those concerned with the outcome of government activity?
2. What are the various elements that comprise American political parties?
3. What do parties seek to accomplish and how are their activities related to these goals?

These three questions have occupied considerable scholarly attention since the formal study of US parties began in earnest after World War II. But they have a renewed urgency in today’s interconnected, fast-paced world. Even though the Internet allows individuals to access thousands of web pages dealing with politics, and social media gives individuals an ever-greater voice, the major parties still matter. Democrats and Republicans hold positions on a variety of issues and identifying with a particular political party provides vital cues to voters. In 2020, the Gallup organization identified several large partisan discrepancies on the importance of the candidates’ positions on key issues when casting their vote:

- Healthcare: Democrats ranked this issue 32 points higher than Republicans.
- Coronavirus Response: Democrats ranked this issue 32 points higher than Republicans.
- Race Relations: Democrats ranked this issue 27 points higher than Republicans.

- Climate Change: Democrats ranked this issue 65 points higher than Republicans.
- Economy: Republicans ranked this issue 8 points higher than Democrats.
- Abortion: Republicans ranks this issue 8 points higher than Democrats.
- Terrorism/National Security: Republicans ranked this issue 22 points higher than Democrats.
- Crime: Republicans ranked this issue 15 points higher than Democrats.
- Gun Policy: Republicans ranked this issue 16 points higher than Democrats.
- Taxes: Republicans ranked this issue 18 points higher than Democrats.²³

Simply put on nearly every major issue confronting the United States, Democrats and Republicans have different worldviews. In this environment, the strategic objectives of the two major parties matter a great deal because their partisans ascribe great weight to them.

How Parties Differ from Other Organizations

At first glance, strangers to the American party system might find little distinction between parties and interest groups. Indeed, Madison's own discussion of "faction" is vague, and scholars have tangled with this issue for nearly two centuries. So, what, if anything, distinguishes a political party from, say, the American Association of Retired Persons, the Environmental Defense Fund, the National Rifle Association, or the National Association of Manufacturers? We point to four important distinctions:

1. Parties run candidates for office under their own label. Although interest groups may consistently back candidates of one party, such as the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization's (AFL-CIO) support of Democrats or the National Association of Manufacturers' support of Republicans, they do not have a party label and do not officially nominate candidates for office.
2. When it comes to determining policy, parties have a broad range of concerns. The 2020 Democratic Party platform had much to say about the pandemic, restoring the economy, civil rights, LGBTQ rights, immigration, foreign policy, national defense, and climate change.²⁴ Republicans promoted smaller government; education, healthcare, and criminal justice reforms; drilling for more energy resources; and border security.²⁵
3. Unlike political parties, interest groups have a much narrower set of concerns.²⁶ The American Association of Retired Persons, for example,

is keenly interested in policies affecting older Americans but pays scant attention to environmental legislation. The Environmental Defense Fund makes its views plain on modifications to the Endangered Species Act but offers little input on how to combat terrorism. Likewise, the National Rifle Association offers its unadulterated opposition to gun control but has little to say on other issues such as reforming Social Security.

4. Political parties are subject to state and local laws, and the relationship between parties and the states is an intimate one. Interest groups, on the other hand, are private organizations operating under some state and federal regulations and with the aid of constitutional protections of free speech, assembly, and petition.

Interest groups and parties have worked together on numerous occasions. The present-day merging of gun rights, as advocated by the National Rifle Association, with a cooperating Republican Party is one example. The close ties between advocates who support dealing with the effects of climate change and the Democratic Party is another. Today, there are so many overlapping activities between political parties and interest groups that the competition between the two has become especially intense—a development that is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

The Components of American Political Parties

In ancient Greece, when the priestess of Apollo at Delphi made ready to deliver a prophecy, she positioned herself on a special seat supported by three legs, the tripod.²⁷ The tripod gave the priestess a clear view of the past, present, and future. Political scientists in the early 1950s likened political parties to that tripod of so long ago, contending that parties are also supported by three legs: party in the electorate, party organization, and party in government.²⁸

- *Party in the electorate* (PIE) refers to those who identify with a particular party. In some countries, party organizations require active participation to be considered a member, which often means paying a membership fee. In the United States, however, party membership is not nearly as well defined. Here, the “party in the electorate” denotes a person’s psychological attachment to a particular party. Some root for a political party the way others might cheer on their favorite baseball team. Attaching oneself to a political party in this fashion can manifest itself in a range of activities, although party identification can also be weak and not automatically translate into

partisan behavior. Some people will vote exclusively or primarily for candidates of their party, although it is possible to identify with a party and still vote for the opposition, or even not vote at all. Some people choose to register as a Republican or Democrat when they sign up to vote, but formal registration is not a requirement for being included in the party in the electorate. Other formalized party activities may include participation in a party primary, raising money at a party fundraiser, making telephone calls, or advocating for a party on social media to help get out the vote for a party's candidate.

- *Party organization* (PO) refers to the formal apparatus of the party or the party bureaucracy. It encompasses physical assets like the party headquarters, collective activities like quadrennial national conventions, elites and rank-and-file workers, and regulations governing how activities are structured and how leaders and workers are to behave. When party meetings are held, members of the organization show up. When partisans pass out literature during a campaign, the party organization is responsible for delivering the pamphlets. The Republican National Committee (RNC) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC) each have headquarters in Washington, DC, and Democratic and Republican state party committees can be found in every state capital.
- *Party in government* (PIG) refers to those who have captured office under a party label. In 2021, Democrats in the Senate comprised one segment of the Democratic Party in government led by majority leader Chuck Schumer, while Senate Republicans comprised one segment of the Republican Party in government led by minority leader Mitch McConnell. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, Speaker Nancy Pelosi spoke for the Democrats while minority leader Kevin McCarthy represented the Republicans. As president, Joe Biden is the overall head of the Democratic Party in government, a role Donald Trump held for the Republican Party when he was president. Branches of the party in government may be found in any legislative, executive, or judicial body that organizes itself along partisan lines, from the president and Congress down to states, counties, cities, and towns.

In the 1950s, the tripod model of political parties seemed both accurate and parsimonious. Partisanship was broad and fixed as tightly as one's religion. The public was divided between Democrats and Republicans, and they voted accordingly. What few "independents" there were generally did not vote and therefore placed themselves outside the political system. Legislative leaders were

important figures. Party organizations were fixtures in nearly every community and controlled nominations for most elective offices. Citizens were active in party organizations, either for ideological reasons or for the sense of belonging to the larger community that partisan activity engendered. Elected officials carried the party banner openly. In an age of black-and-white television, the tripod model nicely captured how the three party components neatly fit together.

Does the Tripod Model Still Work?

The rise in the importance and availability of information has changed the way parties operate. During the agricultural era, the key to production was land; in the Industrial Era, it was human labor; today, it is trained intelligence. In the early 1970s, sociologist Daniel Bell heralded the coming of a new postindustrial society that placed a premium on the gathering and dissemination of information.²⁹ In the twenty-first century, American life has been transformed by several interrelated developments:

- Most of today's workers are salaried professionals. In 2019, more than sixty-four million workers held management, professional, and related occupations.³⁰ Labor union membership, which peaked in 1954 at 35 percent of the workforce, fell to 10.8 percent in 2020.³¹
- A college degree has become a "union card" for employment. Today, the largest portion of the labor force is composed of millennials, and the wage gap between those who have a college degree and those who do not is the highest in history. In 2018, millennials who held a bachelor's degree or higher had a median income of \$56,000, while those who were high school graduates had a median income of just \$31,300.³²
- Social media has reshaped the way Americans interact with each other and has diminished the once restrictive boundaries of time and space. Email, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitter, Parler, Reddit, Tik Tok, and other social media outlets have become established means of social and political interaction. More than 80 million Americans followed Donald Trump on Twitter while he was president (before he was permanently banned from the platform), making it Trump's primary means of communicating with voters. Older forms of communication (e.g., printed newspapers, presidential news conferences, and traditional television network programming) became increasingly outdated and ineffectual.

- New occupational structures, and with them new lifestyles and social classes, are creating new elites, including a self-selected political elite that works to influence political outcomes online through blogs and social networking.

What Do Political Parties Seek to Accomplish?

In one respect, the answer to this question is simple: Parties seek to win elections. Winning means parties can seize power and control one or more branches of the federal, state, or local governments. Seizing power can also have material benefits, as parties collect the so-called spoils of office. Several notable political party definitions follow this logic:

- “A political party is a group organized to gain control of government in the name of the group by winning election to public office” (Joseph Schlesinger).³³
- “A political party [is] any group, however loosely organized, seeking to elect government officeholders under a given label” (Leon Epstein).³⁴
- “Political parties can be seen as coalitions of elites to capture and use political office. [But] a political party is more than a coalition. A political party is an institutionalized coalition, one that has adopted rules, norms, and procedures” (John Aldrich).³⁵

Others argue that a party’s true purpose is to implement its ideology by adopting a particular set of policies. Winning elections and controlling the government are means to changing the course of government. Some definitions of party capture this objective:

- “[A] party is a body of men [*sic*] united, for promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed” (Edmund Burke).³⁶
- “[A] political party [is] an organization that seeks to achieve political power by electing members to public office so that their political philosophies can be reflected in public policies” (Jay M. Shafritz).³⁷

The foremost problems with using the election-policy dimension to capture the essence of parties are that it is static and incomplete, and it discounts the diversity of party structures in the United States. The history of parties is continually evolving as new conditions arise. Suggestions that US parties are “election driven,” “policy oriented,” or searching for the “vital center” are tied to the assumption that it has always been so and that all party organizations scattered

throughout the nation follow a similar pattern. A close reading of US history suggests that party goals and activities have varied over time. As we will see shortly, sometimes parties have leaned toward the election-centered definition; at other times they have been closer to the policy-driven perspective. Therefore, instead of defining party goals in any sort of concrete way, conceivably the best approach is to remain mindful of the dichotomy between winning elections or remaining true to one's principles, then trying to discern when each perspective best fits a given moment in history.

Origins: Hamilton vs. Jefferson

After traveling what was then the breadth of the United States in 1831 and 1832, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked, "All the domestic controversies of the Americans at first appear to a stranger to be incomprehensible or puerile, and he is at a loss whether to pity a people who take such arrant trifles in good earnest or to envy that happiness which enables a community to discuss them."³⁸ During much of the twentieth century, Tocqueville's complaint was echoed in the oft-heard line: "There's not a dime's worth of difference between the Democratic and Republican parties." Today, party polarization had rendered this old adage moot.

Nonetheless, historians have placed much value in the belief that the United States is a special country set apart from its European origins. Announcing his 2020 candidacy for the presidency near Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Joe Biden focused on this notion that the United States is more than a physical location found on a globe: "Folks, America is an idea, an idea that's stronger than any army, bigger than any ocean, more powerful than any dictator or tyrant. It gives hope to the most desperate people on earth, it guarantees that everyone is treated with dignity and gives no safe harbor. It instills in every person in this country the belief that no matter where you start in life, there's nothing you can't achieve if you work at it."³⁹

Such expressions constitute what some have called American Exceptionalism,⁴⁰ which has long held a place in American political culture. Expressions such as "the American Dream" and "the American Way of Life" (along with the damning phrase "un-American") reflect the distinctiveness many Americans have long found in the experiment devised by the Framers. Historians have been struck by the rigidity of the American mind reflected in this attitude. As one observed, "Who would think of using the word 'un-Italian' or 'un-French' as we use the word 'un-American'?"⁴¹

But such ideological rigidity does not mean that partisan disagreements are lacking, either in the history books or in contemporary news accounts about politics. After the Constitution was ratified and George Washington took his place as the nation's first president, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson began to act, as Jefferson recalled, "like two cocks."⁴² The raging battle between these two stubborn and forceful men was personal and political. Both were staunchly committed to individualism, freedom, and equality of opportunity, yet they strongly differed on how these values could be translated into an effective form of governance.

Those disagreements came from the vastly different solutions each man devised to a vexing problem—namely, how liberty could be restrained such that it could be enjoyed. For his part, Hamilton preferred that liberty be coupled with authority: "In every civil society, there must be a supreme power, to which all members of that society are subject; for, otherwise, there could be no supremacy, or subordination, that is no government at all."⁴³ Jefferson, meanwhile, preferred that liberty be paired with local civic responsibility. It was on that basis that the enduring struggle between Hamiltonian nationalism and Jeffersonian localism began.

Hamiltonian nationalism envisions the United States as one "family," with a strong central government and an energetic president acting on its behalf. Addressing the delegates to the New York State Convention called to ratify the Constitution, Hamilton noted, "The confidence of the people will easily be gained by good administration. This is the true touchstone." To him, "good administration" meant a strong central government acting on behalf of the national—or family—interest. Thus, any expression of a special interest was, to use Hamilton's word, "mischievous."⁴⁴ But Hamilton had his own partialities, favoring the development of the nation's urban centers and an unfettered capitalism. His espousal of a strong central government aroused considerable controversy.

Unlike Hamilton, Jefferson had a nearly limitless faith in the ordinary citizen. To a nation largely composed of farmers, he declared, "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever He had a chosen people."⁴⁵ Jefferson's devotion to liberty made him distrust most attempts to restrain it, particularly those of the federal government: "Were we directed from Washington when to sow, and when to reap, we should soon want bread."⁴⁶ In 1825, Jefferson warned of the expanding power of government and wrote that the "salvation of the republic" rested on the regeneration and spread of the New England town meeting.⁴⁷ The best guarantee of liberty in Jefferson's view was to restrain the mighty hand of government. Table 1.1 highlights several additional differences

TABLE 1.1: The Hamiltonian and Jeffersonian Models of American Governance

Hamiltonian Nationalism	Jeffersonian Localism
Views the United States as one national “family.”	Sees the United States as a series of diverse communities.
Prefers a concentration of power in the federal government so that it may act in the interest of the national family.	Prefers to give power to state and local governments so that they can act in deference to local customs.
Inclined to constrain liberty for the sake of national unity by marrying liberty with a strong central authority.	More inclined to favor liberty and wary of national authority. Prefers to concentrate governmental power at the state and local levels.
Trusts in elites to run the government.	Trusts in the common sense of average Americans to run the government.
Prefers a hierarchical party structure populated by “professional” party politicians.	Prefers a decentralized party structure populated by so-called amateur politicians, who often are local party activists.
Sees parties as vehicles whose primary purpose is to win elections and control the government.	Views parties as more ideologically based. Commitment to principles is viewed as even more important than winning elections.

between Hamilton’s and Jefferson’s view of government, with a special focus on how these differences might relate to the party system.

This debate between the political descendants of Hamilton and Jefferson is the touchstone for partisan conflict and party politics in America that continues to this day. Martin Van Buren, among many others, traces the evolution of parties to the factional disputes between Hamilton and Jefferson. According to Van Buren,

The two great parties of this country, with occasional changes in name only, have for the principal part of a century, occupied antagonistic positions upon all important political questions. They have maintained an unbroken succession, and have, throughout, been composed respectively of men agreeing in their party passion, and preferences, and entertaining, with rare exceptions, similar views on the subject of government and its administration.⁴⁸

Over time the two parties, with changing names and roles, recast Hamiltonian nationalism and Jeffersonian localism to suit their evolving interests.

During the Civil War and the Industrial Era that followed, Republicans stood with Hamilton, whereas Democrats claimed Jefferson as one of their own and promoted states' rights. Since the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, Democrats have generally aligned themselves with Hamilton, likening the nation to a family. In a 2020 televised address to high school graduates confined to their homes during the coronavirus pandemic, Barack Obama stressed the need to engage in communal activity:

No one does big things by themselves. Right now, when people are scared, it's easy to be cynical and say let me just look out for myself, or my family, or people who look or think or pray like me. But if we're going to get through these difficult times; if we're going to create a world where everybody has the opportunity to find a job and afford college; if we're going to save the environment and defeat future pandemics, then we're going to have to do it together. So be alive to one another's struggles. Stand up for one another's rights. Leave behind all the old ways of thinking that divide us—sexism, racial prejudice, status, greed—and set the world on a different path.⁴⁹

Whereas Obama, Biden, and their fellow Democrats espouse a reinvigorated Hamiltonian nationalism, the Republican Party, during the New Deal, and especially during the Ronald Reagan years, immersed itself in the values cherished by Jeffersonian localism. Campaigning for the presidency in 1936, Republican Alf Landon assailed the “folly” of Roosevelt's New Deal and denounced the “vast multitude of new offices” and the “centralized bureaucracy” from which “swarms of inspectors” swooped over the countryside “to harass our people.”⁵⁰ Landon promised that his restrained and prudent management of the federal bureaucracy would result in an outpouring of freedom by adherence to a simple dictum: “I want the Secretary of the Treasury to be obliged to say to committees of Congress every time a new appropriation is proposed, ‘Gentlemen, you will have to provide some new taxes if you do this.’”⁵¹

Though our values may be constant, the circumstances in which they are applied are not, and at critical junctures, Americans have shifted between Hamiltonian nationalism and Jeffersonian localism. The whiff of civil war, the onset of a depression, the ravages of inflation, a pandemic, and a violent attack on the seat of government inevitably cause Americans to take stock of their situation, reevaluate their expectations of government, and choose a political party and a course of action in a manner consistent with the enduring values of freedom, individualism, and equality of opportunity. Such shifts in public attitudes are

sometimes influenced by a dominant personality. Abraham Lincoln reasserted Hamilton's vision of a national family to save the Union, and Franklin Roosevelt redefined Hamiltonian nationalism to meet the challenges of the Great Depression. Ronald Reagan revitalized Jeffersonian localism when he called out the federal government as the problem, not the solution to our problems. In 2021, Democrats advocated a reinvigorated Hamiltonian nationalism to address intertwined public health, economic, racial, and climate security challenges that would transform American government much as FDR did in the 1930s. Biden hung side-by-side portraits of Hamilton and Jefferson in the Oval Office, noting the two men were "hallmarks of how differences of opinion, expressed within the guardrails of the Republic, are essential to democracy."⁵²

Sometimes, Americans do not want to choose between Hamiltonian nationalism and Jeffersonian localism. Instead, they want to enjoy the fruits of both. So, for instance, progressive activists engaged online to reform the Democratic Party align themselves with the first three Hamiltonian positions and the last three Jeffersonian positions in table 1.1 without feeling any sense of contradiction. They view the United States as a national "family" (albeit made up of diverse communities), believe concentrated federal power is necessary to bring about a progressive agenda, and are willing to trade off a degree of liberty in exchange for a greater government safety-net. At the same time, they trust the wisdom of average Americans—such as those who have chosen to engage in online political activism—over elite decision-making, oppose Democratic Party professionals, and chafe when they perceive elected Democrats abandoning principle to win elections.

This melding of Hamiltonian nationalism and Jeffersonian localism is not unusual in American history. It reasserts itself during periodic swings from one faction to the other, when the parties test their ideas and battle for dominance amidst changing political and social problems. Over time, this enduring battle has produced surprising results. Hamilton would be astonished to learn that his concept of a national family is being used to promote the interests of have-nots, especially women and minorities, or as the basis for universal health insurance. But as this book suggests, political parties cannot escape the vineyards tilled by Hamilton and Jefferson, whose ideas give expression to American ideological impulses and serve as instruments to implement the constitutional designs of the Framers in a world they never could have envisioned.

Today, political parties remain an important part of the democratic process. For all their many deficiencies, parties afford average Americans the best avenue for speaking their minds and being heard. As you read the chapters to follow,

you are invited to assess for yourself the role and consequence of political parties in our system. You will find that despite the changes political parties have experienced through the centuries, it is still possible to find Hamilton's and Jefferson's fingerprints on the parties that dominate today's politics. Culturally, economically, geographically, and demographically, the United States has been a fluid work in progress since those two men fashioned organizations that formalized the political divisions of post-Revolutionary War America. That these organizations would somehow evolve into the groups that continue to function in a world where information is transmitted at the speed of light is a testament to the enduring nature of a set of institutions that were not even imagined by the Constitution's authors. As they face each other across a widening ideological divide, today's Republicans and Democrats continue a dialogue with deep historical and institutional roots.