

NAME _____ DATE _____

Performance Task – Unpack Arguments: The Origins of Party

Goal of task

Target Concept: I can evaluate why, despite President Washington’s warnings in his Farewell Address, political alignments formed during the period of the early republic. I can evaluate a secondary source to unpack historians’ arguments.

For this task you will be evaluated on your ability to:

- Analyze historical evidence to evaluate why, despite the ongoing distrust of political parties throughout Washington and Adams’ presidencies, political parties formed.
- Unpack a historian’s argument, including explaining how the argument has been supported through the analysis of relevant historical evidence,

Task summary

The activities in this task will help you understand the views of political parties and factions during the early republic and why political parties formed. You will also learn to unpack an historian’s argument, identifying the claims and evidence he or she uses to support his or her thesis.

Activity 1: Defining Faction (small groups)

Following is an excerpt from President Washington's Farewell Address. Before you read the excerpted speech, define what the founders meant by the term political factions. In your group, write a group definition on a piece of paper. Next, identify and explain two reasons why President Washington was concerned about the formation of political parties at the end of his time in office.

Now, read the following excerpt. As you read, identify and explain in your own words what Washington means by the "Spirit of Party." Give at least two examples from the time period that could explain Washington's warnings.

Excerpt from George Washington's Farewell Address, 1796

... I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the State, with particular reference to the founding of them on geographical discriminations. Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally.

This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but, in those of the popular form, it is seen in its greatest rankness, and is truly their worst enemy.

The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty.

Without looking forward to an extremity of this kind (which nevertheless ought not to be entirely out of sight), the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it.

It serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, fomenting occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another.

There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the administration of the government and serve to keep alive the spirit of liberty. This within certain limits is probably true; and in governments of a monarchical cast, patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favor, upon the spirit of party. But in those of the popular character, in governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched, it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming, it should consume.

Source: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp

Check your understanding

- Looking over your response to the definition of political faction, does your answer talk about how factions and political parties are related, yet distinct?

As you read your response to Washington's concern over the formation of political parties, underline or highlight where you cited and explained a variety of reasons for his concern.

In addition to your cited evidence from Washington's speech, underline or highlight where you included the evidence.

Activity 2: Unpacking a Historian's Argument (small groups)

Following is an excerpt from historian Richard Hofstadter's, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*. During this activity, you will be furthering your understanding of the rise of political parties by working on the historical thinking skill of interpretation. More specifically, you will be analyzing the argument Hofstadter is making about the rise of political parties by identifying and explaining how he supports his argument with evidence. As you read the excerpt, use a different colored highlighter to indicate each of the following:

1. What specific evidence does Hofstadter use in this excerpt? Highlight these examples in one color.
2. What claims does Hofstadter support with this evidence? Highlight these examples in a different color than the one used in question 1.
3. Compare your highlighting with other members of your group. Discuss any discrepancies and try to come to a common understanding of which parts are evidence and which are claims. You may use the check for understanding to help you.
4. As a group, write out no more than three sentences that summarize Hofstadter's entire argument. If you use language directly from the article, even in only part of your sentence, be sure to use quotation marks.

Excerpt from Richard Hofstadter's, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*.

"The creators of the first American party system on both sides, Federalists and Republicans, were men who looked upon parties as sores on the body politic. Political discussion in the eighteenth-century England and America was pervaded by a kind of anti-party cant...Madison and Hamilton, when they discussed parties or factions (for them the terms were usually interchangeable) in *The Federalist*, did so only to arraign their bad effects. In the great debate over the adoption of the Constitution both sides spoke ill of parties...George Washington devoted a large part of his political testament, the Farewell Address, to stern warning against "the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party." His successor, John Adams, believed that "a division of the republic into two great parties...is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution..." If there was one point

of political philosophy upon which these men, who differed on so many things, agreed quite readily, it was their common conviction about the baneful effects of the spirit of party. That the anti-party thought and partisan action of the Founding Fathers were at odds with each other is not altogether surprising. ..The situation of the Americas in their formative years was unusually complex, and perhaps quite unique. The Founding Fathers had inherited a political philosophy which also denied the usefulness of parties and stressed their dangers. Yet they deeply believed in the necessity of checks on power, and hence in freedom for opposition, and were rapidly driven, in spite of their theories, to develop a party system.”

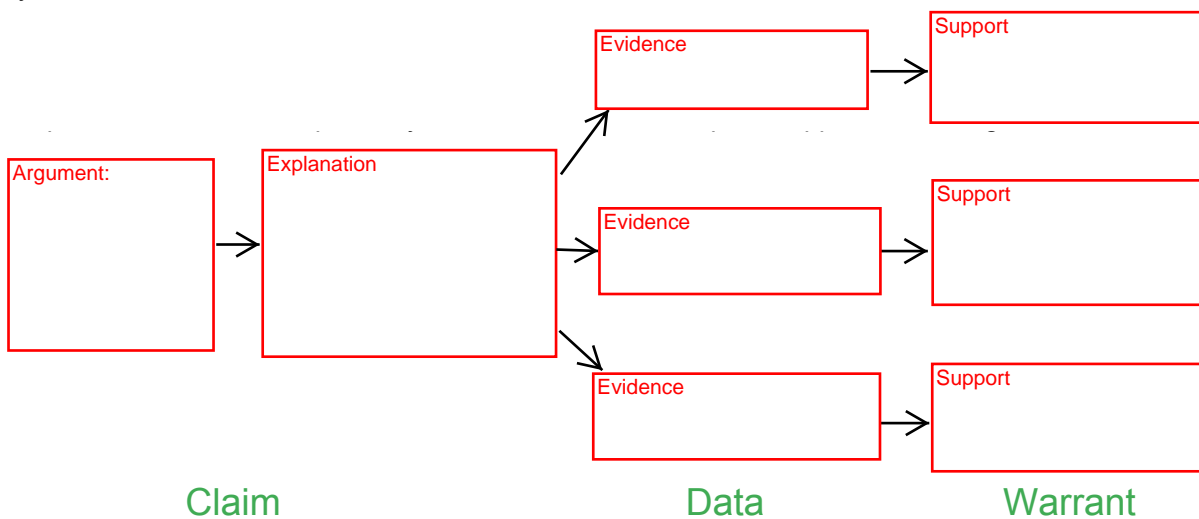
Check your understanding

- Review the portions of the article that you highlighted as evidence. Are they terms or descriptions of terms? In other words, are they fairly uncontroversial historical statements about events, people, or places?
- Review the portions of the article that you highlighted as claims. Do they contain fewer historical terms and more of an evaluation of what the terms mean? How they relate to another concept? Are they debatable? In other words, might another historian have a different interpretation?
- Does your rewriting of Hofstadter’s argument cover the arc of the article? In other words, have you addressed every part of Hofstadter’s claim?
- In your sentences summarizing Hofstadter’s argument, you should have avoided using any specific evidence. Were you able to? If you did use evidence, is it possible to cut the evidence and still understand the argument? If so, go back and revise your summary.

Activity 3: Apply your understanding (individual)

Now or at home tonight, read the excerpt from the article by historian Joseph J. Ellis, “Adams and Jefferson: Intimate Enemies” and answer the following questions.

1. Write what you would consider Ellis’s argument in the appropriate box of the concept web below. You can quote from the article but be sure to use quotation marks and explain your understanding of the argument to supplement the quote.
2. Write a brief explanation defending your selection in the next box.
3. Explain three ways Ellis supports his argument and provide a specific piece of evidence from the article or from your studies that substantiates this.



Excerpt from “Adams and Jefferson: Intimate Enemies” by Joseph J. Ellis

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American democracy is sometimes equated with the “two-party system.” This linkage is not unreasonable. If a minority is to function as an effective opposition, it must have an ongoing institutional structure: paid leaders to monitor government policies and actions; newspapers and magazines to disseminate the opposition viewpoint; and a fund-raising apparatus to maintain it all. The opposition must become, in other words, a political party. As historian Joseph Ellis observes, however, the Founding Fathers had not anticipated this development. They imagined that political disputes would be articulated spontaneously, according to ethical principles embodied in classical notions of right and wrong. The emergence of a two-party system was chiefly the work of Alexander Hamilton, a Federalist who favored a strong central government, and of Thomas Jefferson, a Democrat who opposed it. Ellis shows that Adams is an interesting figure because, thought a member of the Federalists, he repudiated the notion that a president should also lead a political party. He thought of the president as kind of a “patriot king” who ruled on behalf of all. Adams was heroic, Ellis insists, but also slightly ridiculous, attempting to hold back the inevitable development of partisan political parties. Ellis’s most recent books include *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (1997) and *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (2000).

[...] Perhaps the most historically significant development during the Adams Presidency was the emergence of party-based politics. This was the historical moment, in short, when the outlines of our modern system first began to congeal, the time when American politics began to move from then to now.

At the beginning of the story, however, no one envisioned the changes that were about to occur, and neither the institutions nor the vocabulary essential for making the transition were in place. In 1796 there were no political primaries, no party conventions with smoke-filled rooms. True enough, there were two identifiable political camps.... But the chief qualification for the Presidency was less a matter of one's location within the political spectrum than a function of one's revolutionary status. Memories of the hard-won battle for American independence were still warm, which meant that the prospective candidates needed to possess revolutionary credentials earned during the crucial years between 1776 and 1783. Only those leaders were eligible who had stepped forward at the national level to promote the great cause when its success was still perilous and problematic.

[...] And by the spring of 1796 it had become a foregone conclusion that the choice was between [Thomas Jefferson and John Adams].

[...] As political rivals and personal friends, both men realized they were jockeying for position within the tremendous shadow of Washington, who as destiny's choice as the greatest American of the age and therefore inherently irreplaceable. Adams's strategy was to trade on the famous Adams-Jefferson friendship and to suggest a bipartisan administration. If no single leader could hope to fill the huge vacuum created by Washington's departure, perhaps the reconstituted team of Adams and Jefferson might enjoy at least a fighting chance of sustaining the legacy of national leadership that Washington had established. Adams began to float the idea in letters to mutual friends like Benjamin Rush that if elected President, he intended to include Vice President Jefferson as a full partner in his administration.

Much like Adams, Jefferson was also preoccupied with the long shadow of George Washington. As he confided to James Madison: "The President [Washington] is fortunate to get off just as the bubble is bursting, leaving others to hold the bag. Yet, as his departure will mark the moment when the difficulties begin to work, you will see, that they will be ascribed to the new administration...." Jefferson was certain that "no man will ever bring out of that office the reputation which carries him into it." While strolling the grounds of Monticello with a French visitor, he expanded on his strategic sense of the intractable political realities: "In the present situation of the United States, divided as they are between two parties, which mutually accuse each other of perfidy and treason,...this exalted station [the Presidency] is surrounded with dangerous rocks,...and the most eminent abilities, will not be sufficient to steer clear of them all." If Adams was planning for a bipartisan victory in the election, Jefferson seemed to be hoping for a defeat.

Jefferson got his wish. In early February 1797, when the electoral votes were counted, they revealed that in a razor-thin victory, Adams had prevailed, 71-68. The question facing Jefferson now became painfully clear: As the newly elected Vice President, should he join hands with his old friend to establish a bipartisan executive team? As was his custom, Jefferson turned to his most trusted political confidant for advice, and James Madison provided a brutally realistic answer: "Considering the probability that Mr. A's course of administration may force an opposition to it from the Republican quarter, and the general uncertainty of the posture which our affairs may take, there may be real embarrassments from giving written possession to him, of the degree of compliment and confidence which your personal delicacy and friendship have suggested." In short, Jefferson must not permit himself to be drawn into the policymaking process of the Adams administration, lest it compromise his role as leader of the Republican opposition.

The decision played out in a dramatic face-to-face encounter. On March 6, 1797, Adams and Jefferson dined with Washington at the presidential mansion in Philadelphia. Adams learned that Jefferson was unwilling to join the cabinet; Jefferson learned that Adams had been battling with his Federalist advisers, who opposed a vigorous Jeffersonian presence in the administration. They left the dinner together and walked down Market Street to Fifth, two blocks from the very spot where Jefferson had drafted the words of the Declaration of Independence that Adams had so forcefully defended before the Continental Congress almost twenty-one years earlier. As Jefferson remembered it later, "We took leave, and he never after that said one word to me on the subject or ever consulted

me as to any measure of the government.”

[...] Beyond the daunting task of following the greatest hero in American history, Adams faced a double dilemma. On the one hand, the country was already waging an undeclared war, called the Quasi-War, against French privateers in the Atlantic and Caribbean. Should the United States declare war on France or seek a diplomatic solution? Adams, like Washington, was committed to American neutrality at almost any cost, but he coupled this commitment with a buildup of the American Navy, which would enable the United States to fight a defensive war if negotiations with France broke down.

On the other hand, the ongoing debate between Federalists and Republicans had degenerated into unrelenting ideological warfare in which each side sincerely saw the other as traitor to the core principles of the American Revolution. The political consensus that had held together during Washington’s first term and had then begun to fragment into Federalist and Republican camps over the Jay Treaty broke down completely in 1797. Jefferson spoke for many of the participants caught up in this intensely partisan and nearly scatological political culture when he described it as a fundamental loss of trust between former friends. “Men who have been intimate all their lives,” he observed, “cross the street to avoid meeting, and turn their heads another way, lest they should be obliged to touch hats.”

[...] At the domestic level, then, Adams inherited a supercharged political atmosphere every bit as ominous and intractable as the tangle on the international scene. It was a truly unprecedented situation in several senses: His Vice President was in fact the leader of the opposition party; his cabinet was loyal to the memory of Washington, which several members regarded as embodied now in the person of Alexander Hamilton, who was officially retired from the government altogether; political parties were congealing into doctrinaire ideological camps, but neither side possessed the verbal or mental capacity to regard the other as anything but treasonable; and finally, the core conviction of the entire experiment in republican government—namely, that all domestic and foreign policies derived their authority from public opinion—conferred a novel level of influence on the press, which had yet to develop any established rules of conduct or standards for distinguishing rumors from reliable reporting. It was a recipe for political chaos that even the indomitable Washington would have been hard pressed to control.

[...] [Adams] regarded the role of party leader of the Federalists as not just unbecoming but utterly incompatible with his responsibilities as President, which were to transcend party squabbles in the Washington mode and reach decisions like a “patriotic king” whose sole concern was the long-term public interest. As a result, the notion that he was supposed to manage the political factions in Congress or in his cabinet never even occurred to him. Instead, he would rely on his own judgment and on the advice of his family and trusted friends.

[...] All the domestic and international challenges facing the Adams Presidency looked entirely different to Jefferson and Madison. Once they decided to reject Adams’s overture and set themselves up as the leaders of the Republican opposition, they closed ranks around their own heartfelt convictions and interpreted the foreign and domestic crises confronting Adams as heaven-sent opportunities to undermine the Federalist party, which they sincerely regarded as an organized conspiracy against the true meaning of the American Revolution. “As to do nothing, and to gain time, is everything with us,” Jefferson wrote to Madison, the very intractability of the French question and the “sharp divisions within the Federalist camp” worked to their political advantage. For the Republican agenda to win, the Federalist agenda needed to fail. Although Adams never fitted comfortably into either party category and seemed determined to alienate himself from both sides, as the elected leader of the Federalists he became the chief target of their organized opposition.

[...] There are only a few universal laws of political life, but one of them guided the Republicans during the last year of the Adams Presidency—namely, never interfere when your enemies are busily engaged in flagrant acts of self-destruction. As soon as the Federalists launched their prosecutions of Republican editors and writers under the Sedition Act—a total of 14 indictments were filed—it became clear that the prosecutions were generally regarded as persecutions. Most of the defendants became local heroes and public martyrs. Madison quickly

concluded that “our public malady may work its own cure,” meaning that the spectacle of Federalist lawyers descending upon the Republican opposition with such blatantly partisan accusations only served to create converts to the cause they were attempting to silence.

What Jefferson had described as “the reign of witches” even began to assume the shape of a political comedy in which the joke was on the Federalists. In New Jersey, for example, when a drunken Republican editor was charged with making a ribald reference to the President’s posterior, Republican commentators argued that the jury could return a verdict of not guilty, on the ground that truth was a legitimate defense. (In the end, the editor pleaded guilty and paid a fine.)

[...] Adams’s string of bad luck or poor timing, call it what you will, persisted to the end. The peace delegation he dispatched to France so single-handedly negotiated a treaty ending the Quasi-War, but the good news arrived too late to influence the election.

Given this formidable array of bad luck, bad timing, and the highly focused political strategy of his Republican enemies, Adams did surprisingly well when all the votes were counted. He ran ahead of the Federalist candidates for Congress, who were swept from office in a Republican landslide. Outside of New York, he even won more electoral votes than he had in 1796. But thanks in great part to the deft political maneuverings of Aaron Burr, all twelve of New York’s electoral votes went to Jefferson.

[...] When Madison declared that the Republican cause was now “completely triumphant,” he meant not only that they had won control of the Presidency and the Congress but also that the Federalist party was in complete disarray. Though pockets of Federalist power remained alive in New England for more than a decade, as a national movement it was a spent force. But no one quite knew what the Republican triumph meant in positive terms for the national government. It was clear, however, that a particular version of politics and above-the-fray political leadership embodied in the Washington and Adams administrations had been successfully opposed and decisively defeated. The Jefferson-Madison collaboration was the politics of the future. The Adams collaboration was the politics of the past.

What died was the presumption, so central to Adams’s sense of politics and of himself, that there was a long-term collective interest for the American Republic that could be divorced from partisanship, indeed rendered immune to politics altogether, and that the duty of an American President was to divine that public interest while ignoring the partisan pleadings of particular constituencies. After 1800, what Adams had called the classical ideal of virtue was dead in American political culture, along with the kind of towering defiance that both Washington and Adams had harbored toward what might be called the morality of partisanship. That defiance had always depended upon revolutionary credentials—those present at the creation of the American Republic could be trusted to act responsibly—and as the memory of the Revolution faded, so did the trust if conferred. The “people” had placed the “public” as the sovereign source of political wisdom. No leader could credibly claim to be above the fray. As Jefferson had understood from the moment Washington stepped down, the American President must forever after be the head of a political party.

Neither member of the Adams team could ever comprehend this historical transition as anything other than an ominous symptom of moral degeneration. “Jefferson had a party,” Adams observed caustically, “Hamilton had a party, but the commonwealth had none.” If the Adams brand of statesmanship was now an anachronism—and it was—then he wanted the Adams Presidency to serve as a fitting monument to its passing. He would leave office in the knowledge that his discredited policies and singular style had actually worked. As he put it, he had “steered the vessell...into a peaceable and safe port.”

[...] Abigail managed to have the last word on the thoroughly modern and wholly partisan political world that Jefferson’s Presidency inaugurated. In 1804, after he attempted to open a correspondence with her and, so he hoped, with her husband, Abigail cut him short with a one-sentence rejection: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

