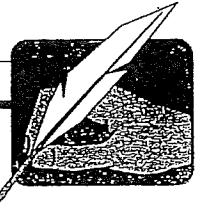


## PRIMARY SOURCE ACTIVITY



## Hamilton and Jefferson

In the early years of the new republic, there was a strong fear of tyranny—whether of a strong national government or of the people themselves. At the Constitutional Convention, popular sovereignty was an overriding and often divisive issue. Two of the most influential officials in President Washington’s administration—Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson—held contrasting views of popular sovereignty.

*As you read, think of why these men held such differing views on human nature.*

**HAMILTON**

All the communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well born; the other, the mass of the people. The voice of the people has been said to be the voice of God; and however generally this maxim has been quoted and believed, it is not true in fact. The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second; and as they cannot receive any advantage by a change, they therefore will ever maintain good government. (1787)

Take mankind in general, they are vicious—their passions may be operated upon. . . . Take mankind as they are, and what are they governed by? Their passions. There may be in every government a few choice spirits, who may act from more worthy motives. One great error is that we suppose mankind more honest than they are. Our prevailing passions are ambition and interest; and it will be the duty of a wise government to avail itself of those passions, in order to make them subservient to the public good. (1787)

**JEFFERSON**

Men . . . are naturally divided into two parties. Those who fear and distrust the people. . . . Those who identify themselves with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the most honest and safe . . . depository of the public interest. (1824)

Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers . . . alone. The people themselves are its only safe depositories. (1787)

I have such reliance on the good sense of the body of the people and the honesty of their leaders that I am not afraid of their letting things go wrong to any length in any cause. (1788)

Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government; whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights. (1789)

I have great confidence in the common sense of mankind in general. (1800)

**QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS**

- (a) How did Hamilton and Jefferson view the common people?  
(b) How did they each view government?
- Demonstrating Reasoned Judgment** How do you think Hamilton and Jefferson viewed Shays’ Rebellion?