

The Founding of the United States of America: Overcoming Division and Adversity

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Introduction

The Founding Fathers have long been a source of inspiration and guidance for American political leaders and the public as a whole. Liberals and conservatives alike invoke the founders in support of their positions on current issues. President Barack Obama affirmed the protection of civil liberties in his 2009 inauguration proclaiming that, “As for our common defense, we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. Our founding fathers faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man, a charter expanded by the blood of generations” (Obama). Former Congressman Ron Paul defended his support for smaller government in noting, “One thing is clear: The Founding Fathers never intended a nation where citizens would pay nearly half of everything they earn to the government” (Dunham).

Americans often believe that the Founding Fathers set a course for the United States with consensus, decisive direction, and a solid foundation. A closer analysis of our nation’s founding leaders and history, however, reveals a much richer story – one of profound problems, deep division, and perilous choices. Historian Gordon Wood noted that America’s modern power makes it “difficult, if not impossible, to appreciate and recover fully the insignificant and puny origins of the country.” (Wood 132)

Exploring those origins is necessary to achieve a full comprehension of the founding era. The decision to seek independence from Great Britain was years in the making, yet notably controversial once embarked. The Constitution’s framers took great risk in developing America’s charter of government, but they did so with many differing views regarding the future of the nation they founded. These alternate ideals would manifest themselves strikingly in the first three

presidential administrations. The decades these events spanned were distinctive in the shaping character of the modern United States.

This is not an attempt to discredit or undermine the status of our founding leaders. On the contrary, understanding the true issues and turmoil faced in our nation's early days is a necessity if we are to properly tackle the polarization and stagnation currently creating gridlock in government. The present inability of political leaders to address such issues as rising government debt, struggling educational achievement, and environmental degradation – leave many with the perspective the problems cannot be managed. A 2014 National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) poll even found that nearly two-thirds of Americans felt the nation was headed down the wrong track (Hart and McInturff). These issues, however, pale in comparison to the much more monumental ones faced by the Founding Fathers.

The Struggle for Independence

Following the Seven Years' War, the British had won a larger empire in North America, yet fell into great debt in doing so. As many British leaders felt the war had been fought on behalf of the Colonists, they expected the Colonies to pay their fair share in recovering this cost. This led to Parliament gradually attempting to assume greater control in the colonies, with colonial retaliation that would eventually spur the War for Independence (Kennedy and Cohen).

In 1765 the British passed the Stamp Act, increasing taxation and the enforcement thereof on the colonists. Nine of the colonies sent delegates to the Stamp Act Congress in response to this act. The Congress resolved that this was a violation of their rights as the tax was passed without colonial consent or representation. (Kelly, Harbison, and Belz 46). The Boston Tea Party of 1773, led by Samuel Adams, was organized as a reaction to Parliament's Tea Act ("Tea"). In

the port of Boston approximately fifty men threw chests of tea into the harbor in defiance of the British endeavor to give the East India Company a monopoly on the colonial tea market. Their actions inspired comparable resistance in other colonial ports (“The Colonies”). Parliament responded and further strained relations with the passage of what the Colonists called the Intolerable Acts. These British actions restricted the port of Boston, permitted British quartering of troops, and other punitive measures (“The Elizabeth”).

In various other instances, colonial leaders voiced their opposition to British action, but the step towards independence was not one that came abruptly or unanimously. An example is provided by the contrast between Governor Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island and attorney Martin Howard. Governor Hopkins was one of very few colonial governors elected by the state assembly and not appointed by the King. He would later sign the Declaration of Independence and was an early advocate that the colonists had rights equal to those of British subjects (Hopkins 84). Howard, also of Rhode Island, disputed this notion, remarking that there was “ingratitude in the colonies” (Howard 92). Gouverneur Morris, a representative in the Continental Congress, feared that revolution would lead to mob-rule of “reptiles” (Morris 111).

The 1770 Boston Massacre further increased discontent in the colonies and resulted in five colonial fatalities from British troops in the midst of a large, public confrontation (“Boston”). The *Boston Gazette* wrote that the British troops attacked “unarmed boys” (*Boston Gazette and Country Journal* 109). John Holt argued that patriots would rally in self-defense (Holt 108). Indeed, within a few short years the once loyal subjects would wage war with the most powerful nation in the world. John Adams represented the British troops in court and thereby dissented from much of the angry colonial passions. He said of his clients that “the law is clear, they had a right to kill in their own defence” (“Summation”).

Religious leaders also disagreed on the best course of action. Presbyterian minister John Carmichael supported the War for Independence and in April 1775 he gave a sermon to colonial militia saying “if God is on our side we need not fear what man can do unto us” (Carmichael 95). However a pamphlet from the Quaker community continued to push for peace, even in 1776, stating that the colonists should be thankful for “our just and necessary subordination to the king” (The Ancient Testimony 94). The split in religious ideology became evident in one of the most monumental political actions in history; independence was not merely a question for the political elite, but for all walks of life in colonial society. Anglican faith leader Charles Inglis went further to say independence “will dismember this happy country, make it a scene of blood and slaughter, and entail wretchedness and misery on millions yet unborn” (Inglis 108). These sentiments would foretell the long future of American religious leaders including Revered Martin Luther King, Jr. and Billy Graham pushing for political reform.

Thomas Paine’s celebrated pamphlet of *Common Sense* was a vital work in support of the revolutionary cause. Notably his opinion earned the opposition of many loyalists, but even other patriots had reservations. Paine advocated not just the independence of the colonies, but a larger ideology of Republicanism and the power of democratic participation (Belchem). John Adams wrote that aspects of Paine’s ideas on what would become the future American government were “flowing from simple Ignorance” and in this way considered him radical (*Autobiography*). Adams preferred a more moderate approach and believed that power should lay with “a few of the most wise and good” (*Thoughts on Government*). The deliberation over how much power the average citizen should have in the government was particularly relevant in early America and is still evident in contemporary considerations on issues ranging from the pervasiveness of money in politics and the power of institutional lobbying.

On June 7th, 1776, Virginia's Richard Henry Lee submitted to the Continental Congress a resolution to formally declare independence. On June 11th a majority of the colonies voted to postpone the decision, pending a smaller committee's work to draft a statement affirming the cause of independence ("Declaration"). Even when the time came to adopt the Declaration of Independence, some leaders still thought revolution was premature. John Alsop refused to sign the declaration "as long as a door was left open for a reconciliation with Great Britain." Following his refusal, he resigned as a delegate ("Letter"). John Dickenson additionally did not sign, instead hoping that tensions between the crown and colonies could be eased ("John Dickenson").

After this courageous decision to declare independence, the Revolutionary War spurred a new struggle. The patriots faced several disadvantages, and the long war was filled with a variety of military victories and setbacks. Estimates reveal that less than one third of colonists were active patriots supporting independence (Rose). While General George Washington did lead the colonies to victory in the war; he actually lost more total battles than he won ("The Revolutionary") Washington also had to deal with a recalcitrant Continental Congress as tensions between him and many political leaders would be a flashpoint through the war. At one point during the army's struggles at Valley Forge, he remarked, "Congress does not trust me. I cannot continue thus" ("Valley Forge")

The case of Benedict Arnold's attempted surrender of West Point in 1780 exemplified the tenuous bonds in the war effort ("Infamous"). Arnold became distrustful of the Continental civilian leaders and disillusioned with a lack of recognition. In charge of West Point, he planned to turn over the strategic fort to the British for £20,000 (Creighton). As the war came to a close, many soldiers grew distressed at their lack of pay from Congress. This culminated with the

Newburgh Conspiracy in which some military officers considered taking action against the civil government. George Washington described the idea “something so shocking [...] that humanity revolts at the idea” (“Newburgh”). The patriot cause would be successful in winning the war, but the greater struggle of building a prosperous and free nation would follow.

Formation of the Constitution

The newly formed United States government under the Articles of Confederation lacked critical powers, including the power of taxation. While the Articles did manage to hold the nation together through the war, the framing document contributed to the instability associated with the Newburgh Conspiracy and Shays’ Rebellion after the war ended (“Independence”). Washington felt that though the British were not actively at war with the U.S., they were now eagerly anticipating that the independent nation would be unable to govern itself and would dissolve on its own accord. Following Shay’s Rebellion, many of the nation’s leaders believed a new Constitution was needed (Washington 115). Noah Webster noted the weaknesses of the Articles in that “so long as any individual state has power to defeat the measures of the other twelve, our pretended union is but a name, and our confederation a cobweb” (“The Strengths”)

Many leaders soon began to call for action to remedy the issues with the weak national government including South Carolina’s Charles Pinckney who wrote in 1786 that the nation needed a “general convention of the states for the purpose of increasing the powers of the Federal government and rendering it more adequate” (“Charles”). Some leaders like Patrick Henry were vehemently opposed to the concept. He did not attend the Constitutional Convention on the premise that he “smelled a rat in Philadelphia, tending toward the monarchy” (Klein). Rhode Island refused to send delegates to the Convention, making it the only state to refuse to do

so and in 1790, the state became the last to officially ratify the new government's charter (Melendez).

Some leaders, such as anti-federalist writer "Brutus", even disputed that the nation could handle a Republican form of government; he felt that the U.S. was too geographically expansive to support a republic (Brutus 120). James Madison said large size would actually work to the country's advantage (Madison 124). These concerns over the most fundamental aspects of American government would be important in defining the future character of the nation. Deep divisions existed in the early American era and a unifying spirit would be hard to attain.

Numerous issues came before the Convention with a series of compromises that continued its precarious forward progress. One of the fiercest debates centered on the organization and representation of the legislative branch. Two competing views emerged, the Virginia Plan, giving large states more power and representation, and the New Jersey Plan, which advocated equal representation for each state, inflating the power of the states with smaller populations. Delegates to the Convention had divided views on the issues. David Brearley of New York felt that representation based on population would leave the small states powerless. Pennsylvania's James Wilson spoke on behalf of large states and deemed equal state representation "unjust" ("The Major"). Future Connecticut Senator Roger Sherman opposed the Virginia plan and spoke out, saying "the smaller states would never agree to the plan" without the upper house having one-vote, equal representation for each state (Kelly, Harbison, and Belz 91). Sherman would later propose the "Great Compromise" that created the modern bicameral legislature, with the lower house based on population and the upper house apportioned with equal representation for each state ("Rediscovering").

The delegates also grappled with the issue of slavery, and while opting not to address the divisive issue directly, the Convention did allow Congress the ability to ban the slave trade by 1808 (“Rediscovering”). Many of the founders personally favored abolishing the institution of slavery, but thought it would collapse of its own accord in time, and chose not to force the issue. Slavery as a political issue also provided some of the context in defining the extent of the national government’s power (Melendez). For decades, the continuing argument over the role of the federal government would often directly relate to this issue and a clear answer to the scope of federal authority in this matter would not be established until the Civil War.

Another important source of debate was the potential inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the Constitution. Many felt that such assurances were essential to prevent a tyrannical government. Patrick Henry wrote that “Human rights were not protected” without a Bill of Rights (Henry 128). Others, including Alexander Hamilton, disagreed as he held that in a government where the people were in charge, a Bill of Rights had “no application” (“The Constitution Does Not Need A Bill of Rights” 129). In the end, a political bargain would be struck as the Constitution would be amended shortly after ratification to include the first ten amendments.

Adoption and Ratification

Without these significant compromises the modern American government could never have developed a strong foundation or been brought into existence. Even with the considerable willingness of many delegates to work towards common ground, many upstanding leaders still found themselves unable to support the final document. These men were not punished for their lack of support once the Constitution was later ratified. In fact, many of them later held some of the most influential posts in state and national government.

Robert Yates and John Lansing both represented New York and once it became apparent that the majority of the Convention was working towards not merely revising the Articles of Confederation, but establishing an entirely new government, they left the Convention. When the ratification process later began, Yates was elected a delegate to the state of New York's convention as an antifederalist (Bielinski). Both of the men would later serve as Chief Justices of the New York Supreme Court ("John Lansing, Jr.").

George Mason of Virginia attended the Convention and voiced a variety of concerns including distress that the Constitution did not contain a Bill of Rights. Mason proposed the addition of a bill of rights at the Convention, but his motion was defeated; this defeat led to his refusal to sign the Constitution (Schwartz). Edmund Randolph favored a strong central government and was the lead proponent of the Virginia Plan. However, he felt the constitution had numerous flaws and did not sign the final document. During the Washington Administration, he would have the honor of serving as the nation's Attorney General and then Secretary of State ("The Founding Fathers: Virginia").

Luther Martin and John Francis Mercer were delegates for Maryland and strong states' rights advocates; they would both leave the Convention early in protest of the overstretching of the central government's power. Martin would later serve as Attorney General of Maryland for twenty-eight years, while Mercer would become a future governor of the state ("The Founding Fathers: Maryland")

Lastly, Elbridge Gerry was one of four men representing Massachusetts. Through the course of the Convention, Gerry grew to believe that the national Congress would be too

powerful and decided not to sign the Constitution, yet he would later become James Madison's Vice-President ("Elbridge").

The vast majority of delegates, on the other hand, were satisfied with the final product and the document was signed on September 17, 1787 ("Observing"). This was certainly not the end of the constitution's journey on the road to final adoption. In fact, the still existing government under the Articles considered censuring the delegates for exceeding their authority. This reservation in the Convention's authority was the same belief that caused Yates and Lansing held to abandon the mission of forming the constitution. In the end it was agreed to let the states go through the ratification process that the Constitution itself outlined, and it would take 9 of the 13 states to approve before the charter of government became the supreme law of the land. Some of the states quickly ratified the document, while others did so on the condition that amendments be made, often relating to assurances of individual rights.

Many of the nation's most important states remained divided in their position on ratification. By a narrow 187-168 final vote, Massachusetts approved the constitution after Governor Hancock introduced a motion requiring the addition of a Bill of Rights, known as the Massachusetts Compromise ("Focus"). After the sufficient number of states voted in approval, the Federalists knew the constitution would still fail without the support of the nation's biggest and geographically strategic states. For the nation's largest state, Virginia, the final vote was very close at close 79-89 ("A Biography"). The final large state, New York, accepted the constitution in a 30-27 vote ("New York"). In both states antifederalist opposition had been strong and the promise of the Bill of Rights was decisive in the success of ratification.

The First Administrations

Even with Independence and a now firm government in place, the first three presidential administrations would face monumental challenges and set time-honored precedents. The leadership of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson each proved instrumental cementing the nation's role as a viable republic.

Washington knew that the actions he took as President would to a large degree define the manner of executive authority. He wrote that, "it is devoutly wished on my part, that these precedents may be fixed on true principles" ("American President: George Washington").

In the 1790's Jay's Treaty was a significant contention of debate for the young republic. The treaty was designed to help resolve tensions between the U.S. and Great Britain, yet many Americans were divided on its approval. Robert Livingston said that the treaty did not provide "adequate compensation" for past offenses (Livingston 138) Representative Fisher Ames felt that rejecting the treaty would be a mistake (Ames 140). On June 24, 1795, the treaty was approved by the Senate with exactly a two-thirds majority, just above the threshold for success ("Jay's Treaty").

One of the most daring aspects of the Washington Administration was Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton's economic plan. A central part of this plan rested on the creation of a Bank of the United States. Thomas Jefferson felt that such an institution was unconstitutional, as the power to create it was not expressly defined in the constitution. He also called Hamilton's economic plan a "machine for corruption" ("Jefferson's Rejection of the Funding Program" 146). Hamilton defended his plan and said such concerns were "ill founded" ("A National Bank Would Not Be Unconstitutional" 134). While the bank ultimately was established, its existence continued to generate controversy, particularly in the later

administration of Andrew Jackson. In another of the multitude of compromises defining the nation's early days, Jefferson offered his support of the assumption of state debts to establish a national credit, and received Hamilton's support in locating the federal capital in between Virginia and Maryland ("American President: George Washington"). The government also raised revenue largely from tariffs and a tax on whiskey to pay for the debt. Many citizens, resistant to this taxation, strongly disapproved. In rural western Pennsylvania, the opposition resulted in armed rebellion that was only dispersed with the threat of 13,000 troops led by Governor of Virginia Henry Lee and Hamilton ("The Whiskey Rebellion").

One of Washington's most monumental precedents was his decision not to run for a third term. This tradition allowed a remarkable peaceful transition of power and would be followed as an example by every single president for over a century and a half ("Amendment"). With the election of John Adams in 1796, the Federalists maintained control over the executive branch. Under his leadership the nation would face another set of defining struggles both internationally and domestically.

As tensions between France and the United States deteriorated, Adams wished to secure peace and good relations with the French. In 1797 he sent three American delegates to Paris on a diplomatic mission. In what came to be known as the XYZ affair, the Americans were asked to pay an exorbitant bribe in order to meet with the French foreign minister Talleyrand ("Presidential"). The American struggle with France arguably spurred more long-term domestic division than international detriment. John Marshall and Charles Pinckney, two of the American representatives, eventually left the fruitless talks. Meanwhile, Elbridge Gerry stayed in the hope that progress would eventually be made ("Presidential"). The Federalist Party itself also became deeply divided on policy towards France. Adams led one faction of the party in pursuit of

keeping peace with France, but Alexander Hamilton led another faction who wished to fan the flames of war. The two sides disagreed so strongly that Hamilton wrote a pamphlet in the election of 1800 urging voters not to support his own party's nominee ("American President: John Adams").

Towards the end of the Federalist era, the Alien and Sedition Acts were passed to limit the Democratic-Republican political strength by restricting the power of immigrants and censoring speech. James Madison dubbed the actions a disgraceful "monster" ("Alien"). The state of Kentucky passed a resolution stating that the Alien and Sedition Acts were "contrary to the Constitution" (Lorence 151). Virginia also passed a resolution affirming that the acts were unconstitutional. Delegate Hay of the Virginia legislature said the Acts were "power fatal to the liberty of the people" ("The Sedition Act Violates the Bill of Rights" 143). The Federalists still differed, and a Majority Report of the Congress wrote that the acts simply "punish those who pervert it [freedom of the press] into an engine of mischief." (5th Congress Majority Report 146).

Thomas Jefferson was very opposed to the Acts and ran against Adams in the election of 1800. The unpopular Alien and Sedition Acts, along with other stances Adams had taken, considerably weakened his popular support ("American President: Thomas Jefferson"). The Democratic-Republican Party went on to win in the election, establishing the first peaceful transition of power to an opposition party in American history. Yet when the Electoral College voted, error in communication and flawed constitutional process led to both Jefferson and his Vice-Presidential running mate, Aaron Burr, being given the same number of electoral votes where Burr should have received one fewer (Hawley). What began as a small mistake of the electors transformed into a national crisis; the election was then to be decided by the lame-duck Federalist House of Representatives. Opposition to Jefferson was strong; one Federalist

newspaper wrote that “happiness, constitution and laws [faced] endless and irretrievable ruin” (Ferling). Many Democratic-Republicans threatened war and began to ready the militia in some states to prepare for retaliation if the Federalists blocked their nominee (Hawley). On the thirty-sixth round of voting the House finally confirmed that Jefferson would take his rightful role as President. This fiasco, unforeseen by the founders, led to the adoption of the Twelfth Amendment, which in part modified the Electoral College and created a separate ballot for the Presidency and the Vice-Presidency (“1800”).

Once Jefferson securely took his place as President, his administration was certainly not one without substance. A major achievement of his first term was the well-known Louisiana Purchase. He sent Robert Livingston and James Monroe to France in the hope of negotiating the purchase of the port of New Orleans. However, with France struggling militarily and monetarily, Napoléon offered the entire Louisiana Territory to the U.S. for the low price of \$15 million (“The Louisiana”). A treaty was written and preparations were made for it to be approved by Congress, yet Jefferson had concerns about the constitutionality of the federal government purchasing vast foreign lands. Adhering to a strict constructionist doctrine, he believed the government did not have the authority to take such action and wrote that “an amendment of the Constitution seems necessary for this” (“Jefferson”). Many American leaders opposed the concept of absorbing such a large tract of land. Delaware Senator Samuel White said the purchase “will be the greatest curse that could at present befall us.” (White 158) Jefferson later relented from his concerns and proceeded forward with the national opportunity. With ratification by the Senate, the French turned over the massive 827,000 square mile territory on December 20th, 1803, almost doubling the size of the United States (“Jefferson”).

International affairs remained a major aspect of the Jefferson presidency. As Great Britain and France entered yet another prolonged war, the two powers drastically attempted to gain advantage over the other by a variety of means including blocking foreign trade and impressing American sailors, both of which damaged the U.S. economy and honor. In an attempt to retaliate without resorting to war, Jefferson and the Congress instated an embargo beginning in 1807. It was hoped that economic pain would force Britain and France to respect American neutrality, but the result was one that did not substantially alter foreign relations and deeply wounded the shipping trade. One year after the Embargo Act passed, export trading fell by nearly 80% (“The Embargo”). The continuing conflict would result in the repeal of the embargo only days before Jefferson left office, and his predecessor Madison would still face struggles internationally, leading to the War of 1812.

Before the Federalists left office, they appointed many of their leaders to judicial posts. This notably angered many Democratic-Republicans and led to tensions between the branches. Initially, the Supreme Court had little substantial power, but this dramatically changed when Chief Justice John Marshall, appointed by Adams, authored the Court’s opinion in the case of *Marbury v. Madison* and established the doctrine of Judicial Review (“War”). Marshall’s Supreme Court was the last long-term source of Federalist power in the national government. Jefferson was therefore opposed to the Court’s influence and went so far as to write, “nothing should be spared to eradicate this Marshallism” (Bellesiles). This struggle led to the impeachment attempt of Justice Samuel Chase, a Federalist, from his position on the Supreme Court (“War”). Marshall’s fight for a strong judiciary was critical to establishing federal supremacy, and some historians argue that his efforts were instrumental in the overall success of the future of the nation (Bellesiles).

One final major incident highlighted the early presidencies was the fall of Vice-President Aaron Burr. Jefferson chose a different running mate in 1804 and in an attempt to keep his political career alive, Burr ran for Governor of New York. In the course of the campaign, Alexander Hamilton was publically at odds with Burr and did not support his candidacy. Burr responded by calling for a duel that killed Hamilton, arguably the last strong Federalist leader, and left Burr physically alive, but without any hope of future electoral success. He moved west and shortly afterwards became entangled in a treason conspiracy. Here he was accused of having worked to raise a small army in defiance of U.S. authority to establish an independent nation ("Alexander"). President Jefferson said that Burr wanted the "severance of the Union of these states." ("Jefferson's Rejection of the Funding Program" 154). According to his indictment, Burr acted "with force and arms, unlawfully, falsely, maliciously and traitorously" in attempt to wage war with the U.S. (*The Indictment* 156). In trying him for treason, insufficient evidence was available, leading Burr to be acquitted. He went on to lead a long life, yet one of obscurity (Linder).

Conclusion

Contrary to much of our modern viewpoint, the founding era was far from one of stability or concrete unity. It was not simply a time of brave leaders installing a vision; the struggles, issues, and decisions all had uncertain ramifications and success was not predetermined. This analysis is intended not to cast a shadow on the works of the founders, but to dig deeper into the adversity they faced and overcame. From the courageous step of declaring independence to President Adams' later work to keep peace with the British, from the Constitutional framers creation of a stable government by surpassing of their mandate to Washington's restraint in running for only two terms, and from the impassioned debates on the ratification of the

constitution to its interpretation during Jefferson's election and decision on the Louisiana Purchase, the founding generation faced the issues of their day in stride.

It is not unforeseeable that the thirteen colonies could have remained a part of the United Kingdom for generations. Alternatively, without strong leadership, the U.S. after independence could have easily split into a series of regional republics constantly at odds with another. Failure to ratify the constitution could have left the nation paralyzed with an indecisive government incapable of action. The path the United States has taken was by no means inevitable. The nation's ascension to be the world's greatest superpower was fraught with opportunities that could have been missed or unrecognized.

In few other nations could leaders refuse to initially support the formation of the government and go on to occupy some of the highest positions of power within it. The government established by the founders precipitated the peaceful transition of power from leader to new leader, an occurrence not at the time seen in nearly any other country across the globe. The changes brought by American self-government are made all the more remarkable in the full scope of the hardship faced during the nation's founding years.

Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and the other renowned leaders of the age were unique, but as was the entire generation. It was an extraordinary time that created men like John Dickenson, one of the earliest adversaries of British control over the colonies who nevertheless refused to sign the Declaration of Independence in the hope that peace could be reached (Robertson). Leaders like Elbridge Gerry, who refused to sign the constitution, stayed in France when the rest of the American delegation had left in the XYZ affair, and would later hold the second highest office in the nation's government as Vice-President. The era gave rise to

Gouverneur Morris, who at first feared the concept of revolution, became a key ally of George Washington, was a lead author of the Constitution, and in the later War of 1812, advocated that New England split with the rest of the nation and form its own confederacy (“Gouverneur”). Scores of the earliest Americans were noteworthy players in the harrowing journey to create the longest lasting republican form of government in the world.

In the most recent national election, exit polls found that nearly half of all American voters felt that future generations would face a nation worse off than the current (Cillizza). Many doubt the American Dream’s age-old promise of success and feel the brighter days for this nation fading away. The magnitude of decisions in the nation’s early days were much more monumental than those of today. Much as modern Americans dispute the scope of government activity in the economy, Hamilton struggled to convince his fellow leaders that intervention itself through the national bank and other means was even constitutional. Some current political leaders criticize the judiciary for excessive activism, yet without Justice Marshall the power of today’s court system may have been minimal, if practically existent. If the founding generation could craft solutions to the issues of their generation, then surely there can be little doubt that the U.S. is capable of reaching solutions current problems. The challenging mission of creating more sustainable budgets, strengthening the economy, and educating American youth pales in comparison of difficulty to the struggles of the founders. It is through a deeper examination of the leadership of the founding fathers that true insight of their direction for the nation and lessons for current American discourse can be truly gained.

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