Content Reading: The Antebellum Era (1781-1860): The New Nation of the USA Part 1

The Judiciary Act of 1789 created the Supreme Court of the USA and federal courts. To assist the president, three cabinet departments were also made to assist the leader of the Executive Branch, the President. These were the leaders George Washington chose for each department, Thomas Jefferson (State), Alexander Hamilton (Treasury), and Henry Knox (War). These men became known as Washington’s “Cabinet” to support his endeavors.

There were different opinions within the Cabinet. Hamilton felt the super-rich should lead a strong, federal government. Jefferson believed the state governments should be strong to favor common people, like farmers. Alexander Hamilton had his own economic plan. He wanted the debts, especially from the American Revolution, paid off quickly and called for a Federal Bank to help in this area. James Madison argued the Constitution did not allow for the creation of a Federal Bank. Hamilton had a loose interpretation of the Constitution. Madison had a strict interpretation. According to a loose interpretation, you can pursue actions not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, as long as the Constitution does not prohibit them. According to the strict interpretation, you can only do what the Constitution specifically mentions is allowed.

Alexander Hamilton’s views of a strong federal government started the Federalist Party and favored the rich. Thomas Jefferson’s views of strong state governments started the Democratic-Republicans and favored the common man and was supported by many in the South. This led to political parties competing for power to control political offices in the United States.

In the 1790s, Alexander Hamilton placed a tax on whisky. In 1794, whiskey producers in western Pennsylvania attacked tax collectors and 13,000 troops were sent to force their rebellion to cease. While this Whiskey Rebellion was a setback for the country, the incident proved the federal government had the power to use the military to maintain order.