

Hamilton and Jefferson: "Opposite Sides of a Penny"

Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson had very strong views about the role of the federal government and what its powers should be. In their poem "Alexander Hamilton," Rosemary and Stephen Vincent Benét compare the two leaders. In the poem, *H.* stands for "Hamilton" and *J.* for "Jefferson." As you read, think about why the poets compare Hamilton and Jefferson to "opposite sides of a penny."

Jefferson said, "The many!"
Hamilton said, "The few!"
Like opposite sides of a penny
Were those exalted two.
If Jefferson said, "It's black, sir!"
Hamilton cried, "It's white!"
But, 'twixt the two, our Constitution
started working right.
Hamilton liked the courtly,
Jefferson liked the plain,
They'd bow for a while, but shortly
The fight would break out again.
H. was the stripling Colonel
That Washington loved and knew,
A man of mark with a burning spark
Before he was twenty-two.
He came from the warm Antilles
Where the love and the hate last long,
And he thought most people sillies
Who should be ruled by the strong.

Brilliant, comely and certain,
He generally got his way,
—Till the sillies said, "We'd rather be dead,"
And then it was up to *J.*
He could handle the Nation's dollars
With a magic that's known to few,
He could talk with the wits and scholars
And scratch like a wildcat, too.
And he yoked the States together
With a yoke that is strong and stout.
(It was common dust that he did not trust
And that's where *J.* wins out.)
His mind was as clear as crystal.
He dined from a silver plate.
And he died by Aaron's pistol
Before he was forty-eight.
With his face unmarred by the bullet,
They looked at him lying dead—
"There's a comet bright in the skies tonight,"
Betsey Hamilton said.

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Linking Literature and History

1. What was Hamilton able to do that few could?
2. Why did the poets say that Jefferson wins out?
3. **Critical Thinking** Do you agree with the poets that Jefferson and Hamilton were "opposite sides of a penny"? Explain your answer.

Federalist or Democratic-Republican?

Mark an F next to the statements that describe the Federalist party and R for statements that describe the Democratic-Republican party.

- Wanted a strong federal government
- Believed in states' rights
- Did not want a National Bank
- Frightened by the violence and bloodshed of the French Revolution
- Believed in a strict construction of the Constitution.
- Wanted a weak federal government
- The party of Thomas Jefferson
- Favored a National Bank
- Pro-agriculture
- Pro-France
- A strong federal government would suppress individual, states' rights
- Pro-Britain
- The party of Alexander Hamilton
- A strong federal government would discourage rebellions and invasions
- Pro-business
- Fought the Alien and Sedition Acts
- Encouraged by the French Revolution and its push towards the rights of the individual

1. Summarize the ideological difference between the Federalist Party and the Democratic Republican Party.