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Period 5
Jeffersonian Republicans and the Federalists DBQ

George Washington advised against them, for he thought they would be the downfall of America. Political parties arose from the differences of opinion in regards to Hamilton's financial plan, and have extremely different ideas on how to interpret the Constitution. At the time of Jefferson's presidency, the two major political parties were the Jeffersonian Republicans and the Federalists. The Jeffersonian Republicans (referred to later as simply Republicans) are characterized as strict constructionists, who took the Constitution at its literal word. In contrast, the Federalists had a broad interpretation of the document. During the presidencies of Jefferson and Madison, the Republicans remained strict on most issues. However they did broaden their view to pass foreign policy concerns, while the Federalist Party became more rigid in their interpretation in order to hold on to what little political power they possessed.

As soon as Jefferson entered office he took his party's strict views and implemented them. He reduced the central government by cutting back on the army, navy, embassies, and the bureaucracy. Along with this he pardoned the people put in jail as a result of Adams's alien and sedition acts. In a pre-presidential letter to a future cabinet member, Jefferson encouraged state's rights by stating, "Our country is too large to have all its affairs directed by a single government... The true theory of our Constitution is surely the wisest and best that the states are independent as to everything within themselves, and united as to everything respecting foreign nation," (Doc A) a fundamental principal of Republicans. The Republicans are also very strict when Madison vetoes the Internal Improvement Bill. In his message to Congress he explains why he vetoed a bill that would create roads and canals for commerce between states. "But seeing that such a power is not expressly given by the Constitution, and believing that it can not be deduced from any part of it without inadmissible latitude of construction... I have no option but to withhold my signature from it. (Doc H)" In layman's terms, the only reason that he won't sign the bill is because it's not in the Constitution. Throughout Jefferson's and Madison's presidencies the Republican Party remained a party of strict constructionists.

However strict the Republican Party may have seemed, they took a much broader view to pass bills in the realm of foreign affairs. Nowhere in the Constitution does it say that land can be bought; so Jefferson doubles the size of the United States with the Louisiana Purchase. In that it was not expressly allowed in the Constitution, the deal was placed in a treaty with France as a loophole around the strict views now being held by the Federalists. Jefferson also implemented an international trade embargo that soon plagued the nation. In a cartoon entitled ograbme (embargo spelled backwards) Alexander Anderson captured the nation's feelings toward the embargo. In the cartoon it has Jefferson with the embargo, represented by a snapping turtle, biting the rear of a merchant wanting to trade with Britain. The merchant is pictured saying, "Oh! This cursed Ograbme," showing how the embargo his hurting the nation and how Jefferson is controlling commerce, which the Republicans had implemented through a broad

interpretation of the Constitution (Doc C). In a document to Samuel Kercheval, Jefferson calls for necessary amendments to the Constitution with the change in the times. "That laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made... institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times." These beliefs are rarely or never typically seen in a Republican. Changing times, the advancements of war, and foreign policy realities, caused the Republicans to take a much broader view of the Constitution.

While the Republicans loosened their views, the Federalists tightened theirs in order to try to combat the changing opinions of the Republicans. In a speech to the House of Representatives, Daniel Webster shows how the Federalists are interpreting the Constitution strictly to try to stop a bill that will allow a military draft. "Where is it written in the Constitution, in what article or section is it contained, that you may take children from their parents, and parents from their children, and compel them to fight the battles... Congress has the power to create a dictator. (Doc D)" A group of Federalists came together at Hartford (known as the Hartford Convention) to discuss many of the bills being passed by the Republicans and ideas of secession. Here they discussed the issues of the embargo, state admittance, and international commerce. "Congress shall not have the power to lay any embargo on the ships of vessels of the citizens (Doc E)." While the Republicans passed many broad bills, the Federalists became strict constructionists to try to block the Republicans.

During the times of Jefferson and Madison, the two parties show a great deal of irony with their political ideals. The Jeffersonian Republicans, usually characterized by taking the Constitution literally, adopted many broad ideas held by Federalists. At the same time, the Federalists let go of their broad interpretation to take up the principals of strict constructionists. In the areas of foreign affairs, land purchases, and commerce, the Republicans loosened their views, while on these very same issues, to oppose the growing party's power the Federalists took up the strict policies previously held by the Republicans. Overall, the Republicans remained moderately strict, but taking on broad ideals to pass certain bills, while the Federalists became stringent to fight against the changing Republican views.