

The Legacies of the Federalist Party

After the American Revolution, there was a calling for a new governing document, known as the Constitution. Many people were divided over the ratification of the Constitution, as the document gave power to the federal government. The Federalist and the Anti-Federalist parties soon emerged over the issue of political strength. The Federalists supported a strong central government, while the Anti-Federalists demanded a weak central government that would protect states' rights. The leader of the Federalist party was Alexander Hamilton, who served as Secretary of the Treasury under the first president, George Washington. Since the Constitution had been ratified, Hamilton used his political power to create a tariff that placed an eight percent tax on all imports, and an additional excise tax on several domestic items. As a result of this taxation, the Whiskey Rebellion emerged, as distillers in Pennsylvania became angered over the excise tax that put a tax on whiskey. The rebellion was ended when President Washington sent in federal troops. This event was the first to show that the government would strongly enforce the law. When Washington left office in 1797, he also urged against foreign affairs. The Federalists' views included those of a strong central government, the enlargement of a military, and the idea of isolationism. Even though the Federalists were out of power from 1800 onward, these three ideas were the legacies they left behind. The future presidents to come in the years 1800-1830 may not have been Federalists, but some of the decisions they made definitely reflected the Federalists' views.

The first president to use the ideas of the Federalists was Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson himself

was an Anti-Federalist, so it would seem ironic that he ever used any Federalist ideas. However when pirates in Tripoli started capturing American ships soon after he took office, Jefferson was forced to abandon his hopes of decreasing the size of the military. Instead, he sent a new navy to Tripoli to fight four years in an informally declared war. Jefferson's decision on how to deal with the Tripoli pirates was based on the Federalist idea of having and using a large scale military. Another decision Jefferson made that reflected a Federalist idea was when he avoided war with France and Britain, following George Washington's idea of staying out of foreign affairs. In 1806, England issued a series of Orders in Council that closed European ports under French control to foreign shipping. In return, the French ordered the seizure of all merchant ships that entered into British ports. Britain and France both attempted to get the United States involved in their war, and have America join each of them in fighting against the other. However, Jefferson avoided getting involved with the European countries, and passed the Embargo Act in 1807, which banned the exportation of goods to any country. By doing so, Jefferson chose not to interfere with the rivalry of Britain and France, following Washington's hopes of isolationism.

The next two non-Federalist presidents who also followed Federalist ideas were James Madison and James Monroe. Madison was president when the War of 1812 started. During the war, the military was expanded, which was originally a Federalist idea. However, nine years after the war was put to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, Monroe, the president at that time, wrote his Monroe Doctrine. The document sent a stern warning to European powers, featuring the idea of nonintervention. It warned the Europeans to stay out of the Western Hemisphere, and stated that the United States would remain out of European affairs as well. This event revisited Washington's hope of isolationism for the country, which was also a Federalist idea.

The last president before the year 1830 to make decisions that reflected ideas of the Federalists was Andrew Jackson. In 1828, Congress passed the Tariff of Abominations, a tariff that put an extremely high tax on the value of imports. This tariff was mainly despised by Southerners, especially South Carolina, since they were already having economic struggles and felt that the tariff discriminated against them. The Southerners hated the tariff, but Jackson threatened to send troops to South Carolina to collect the custom duties by force if the taxes were not paid. By Jackson sending a message of federal power, the rebels in South Carolina continued to pay the tariff. This event is similar to the Whiskey Rebellion in that the president used the political power that he obtained in government to enforce the law. As a result, Jackson's decisions about the Tariff of 1828 also supported the original Federalist idea about having a strong central government.

For thirty years after the Federalist party was out of power, multiple presidents of the United States continued to make decisions based on the Federalists original ideas of a strong central government, the enlargement of the military, and isolationism for the country. Some examples of this were Jefferson's decision to meet pirates in Tripoli by force and passing the Embargo Act to stay out of a war with France and Britain, Madison's decision to enlarge the military, Monroe's declaration for nonintervention in his Monroe Doctrine, and Jackson's decision to enforce the law against rebels who did not want to pay their taxes. Each of these presidents were not Federalists themselves, but the choices they made in office were how the ideas of the Federalist Party became a legacy for the future of the United States.