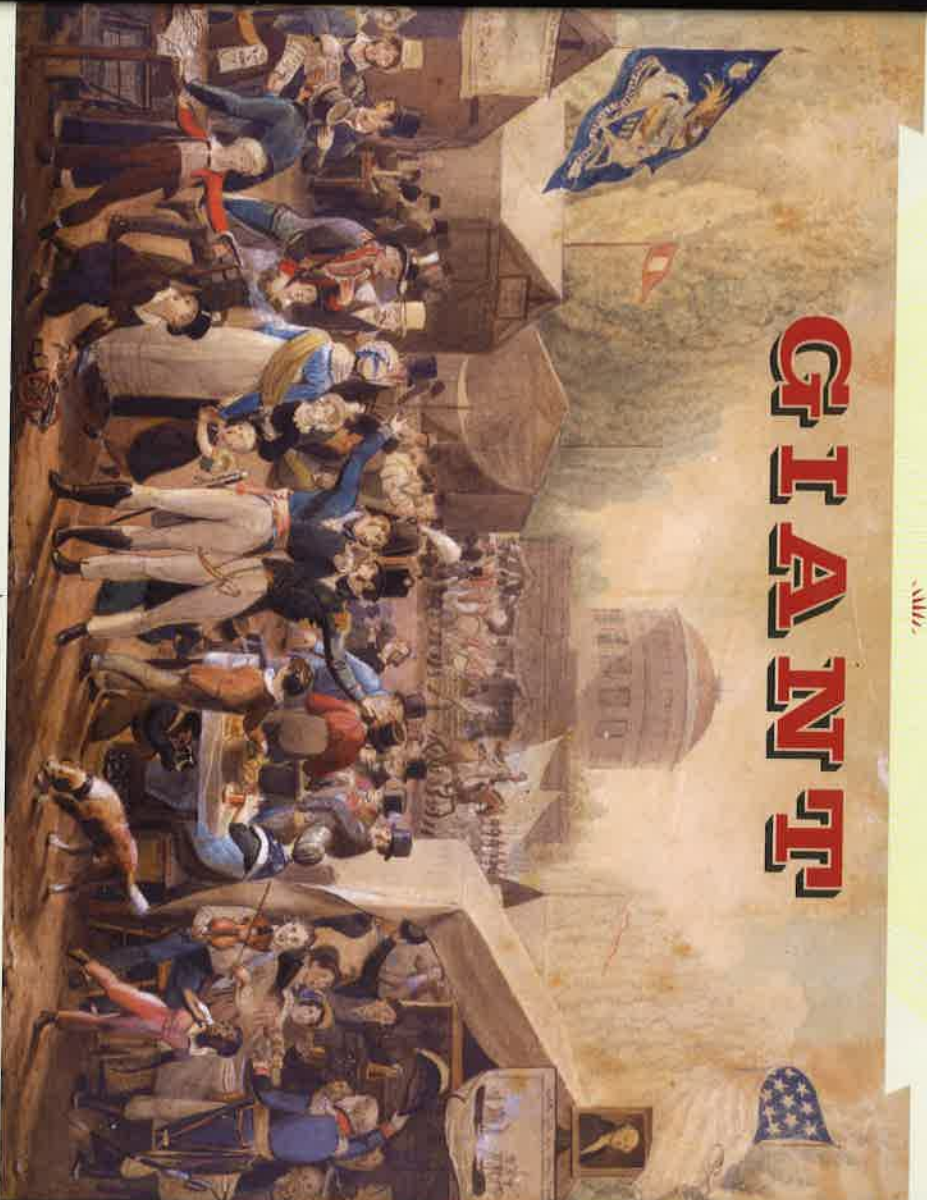


WAR IN  
G

GIANTS



AMERICA IN THE  
AGE OF JACKSON

DAVID S. REYNOLDS

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# Waking Giant

## AMERICA IN THE AGE OF JACKSON

⇒ David S. Reynolds ⇐



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*To my wife, Suzanne Nalbantian Reynolds*

By 1848, with its victory in the Mexican War, the United States stretched from sea to shining sea. Over the previous four decades it had witnessed the rise of large cities, vibrant religious and reform movements, original thinkers and artists—as well as a popular, if controversial, president, whose policies, leadership, and emerging democratic outlook would properly give the era its name.

But the nation was left with a giant problem that only a devastating war would resolve.

# 1

## Forging a National Identity

The United States emerged from the War of 1812 battered but confident. “The Star-Spangled Banner,” written late in the war by the poet-lawyer Francis Scott Key, caught the nation’s mood of cockiness in the face of ordeal, with its words about the American flag waving proudly in “the rockets’ red glare, the bombs bursting in air.”

The war had been hard militarily for America but had produced its share of stars, including William Henry Harrison, who had defeated British and Indian forces in the Northwest; Oliver Hazard Perry, with his inspiring victory on Lake Erie; and, above all, Andrew Jackson, who had overwhelmed rebellious Indians in the South before rebuffing a British invasion of New Orleans in January 1815.

Jackson at New Orleans boosted the nation’s morale, reviving the spirit of 1776. His ragtag army compensated for America’s lackluster performance through much of the war by defeating the world’s greatest military power. Jackson himself, already known as Old Hickory for his toughness in battle, earned another nickname as well: The Hero. At forty-seven, Jackson cut an imposing figure in the saddle. Wiry and ramrod straight—he never weighed more than 145 pounds despite his six-foot frame—he had a look of severe earnestness, with gray hair that formed a V on his forehead and swept upward from his gaunt, weather-beaten face.

The son of Scotch-Irish immigrants, Jackson had been raised in

the backcountry of South Carolina, where he received a haphazard education. During the Revolution he joined the patriots in the Battle of Hanging Rock and was taken captive. A British officer whose boots he refused to polish slashed him with a sword, leaving his head and his left hand scarred for life. He inherited money from his grandfather but wasted it on loose living. Impoverished, he studied the law—without reading a law book completely through, it was said—and was admitted to the bar, moving west to serve as a public prosecutor in Tennessee. He was married in 1791 to Rachel Donelson Robards, who mistakenly believed she had won a legal divorce from her first husband. Two years later a divorce was finalized, and he and Rachel were remarried; but they never escaped insults about allegedly having lived in adultery.

Jackson served briefly as Tennessee's first congressman and then as a U.S. senator, but, disillusioned by the Washington scene, he abandoned politics, opting for a career in the law and the military. Financial success allowed him to establish the Hermitage, a plantation near Nashville on which he raised cotton and bred racehorses. He had bought his first slave in 1788 and in time owned 150 chattels. He treated his slaves with paternal kindness but responded savagely to disobedience, as when he ran a newspaper ad offering \$50 for a runaway slave "and ten dollars extra for every hundred lashes any person will give to the amount of three hundred."

Level-headed but tempestuous, Jackson followed the South's code of honor, answering insults with violence. He attacked one enemy with a cane, battered another with his fists, and participated in a street gunfight that left him with a lead ball in his shoulder.

He also engaged in three duels. His 1806 duel to the death with the Nashville lawyer Charles Dickinson typified his attitude of Southern machismo. The duel originated in an obscure affront to Jackson involving a horse race and an insult about Rachel. Jackson challenged Dickinson to a duel with pistols, and the two met on a field, standing eight paces apart. Dickinson, an expert marksman, fired first. His bullet en-

tered Jackson's chest, shattering two ribs and settling close to the heart. Because of Jackson's loose overcoat, Dickinson did not see the wound and, astonished, assumed that he had missed his foe. Although Jackson was bleeding profusely under his coat, he fired back. "I should have hit him," Jackson later boasted, "if he had shot me through the brain." Jackson's bullet ripped through his opponent's bowels, leaving a gaping wound. Dickinson died in a few hours. Although for the rest of his life Jackson suffered from abscesses caused by the bullet in his chest, he kept the pistol with which he had killed Dickinson, showing it off and recounting details of the duel.

In the War of 1812, Jackson served as a U.S. army colonel and a major general in the Tennessee militia. A competent but not brilliant strategist, he proved himself a potent killing machine. He led a series of strikes on hostile Creek Indians that culminated in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, which resulted in the deaths of some eight hundred Indians. Having defeated the Creeks, he forced on them a treaty by which they turned over to the United States more than twenty million acres of their land, including large sections of Alabama and Georgia.

Jackson next drove allied Spanish and British forces out of Pensacola, Florida, before proceeding to New Orleans, which was threatened by a fleet carrying more than ten thousand British redcoats. He cobbled together a small force of army regulars, militiamen, Choctaw Indians, liberated Haitian slaves, and Baratarian pirates. A series of skirmishes against the British led to the major encounter at Chalmette, Louisiana, on January 8, 1815. Jackson's troops, protected by a wall of earth, wood, and cotton bales, fired at will on the swarming redcoats, who had forgotten to bring the ladders they needed to scale the American ramparts. By the time the battle ended, nearly two thousand British had been killed, wounded, or captured, compared to about sixty of Jackson's men.

The American victory at New Orleans had tremendous repercussions. The Treaty of Ghent, ending the war with England, was not finally ratified until February 1815. Had the British won the Battle of New Orleans, they would have been in a position to claim the southern

Mississippi River Valley, which, combined with their holdings to the north, would have given them virtual control over large portions of America's vast western territory.

Jackson's triumph inspired the war-weary nation. "ALMOST INCREDIBLE VICTORY!" crowed a Washington newspaper. "This Glorious News . . . has spread around a general joy, commensurate with the brilliance of this event, and the magnitude of our Victory." Patriotic illustrations of the battle proliferated through the rest of the century, many of them picturing Andrew Jackson on horseback in the midst of battle scenes.

The war had forged a true democratic hero, who went on to become the first American president from a nongentry background, the first not born in either Virginia or Massachusetts, and one who seemed driven by deep passions. "His temperament was of fire," wrote a contemporary, "always more attractive than one of marble."

The war also stimulated democracy by finishing off the Federalist Party. Anglophile and elitist, the New England-based Federalists had opposed the war at every turn. Five New England states sent representatives to a secret convention held in Hartford, Connecticut, from December 15, 1814, to January 4, 1815, to protest the war and discuss the possibility of New England's secession from the Union. The war's end nullified the convention's arguments. Federalism was dead as a national force. The Democratic-Republican Party now stood alone on the political landscape.

Although the war had cost some \$200 million and had resulted in nearly seven thousand American casualties, it renewed confidence that the United States could stand up to a strong foreign power. Sparked in part by War Hawks like John C. Calhoun and Henry Clay, it fed the expansionist impulse by securing the West and winning new territory from Indians. Between 1816 and 1819, the rush to the frontier resulted in the admission of four new states into the Union: Indiana, Illinois, Alabama, and Mississippi. The population of the Mississippi River

Valley nearly doubled in the decade after 1810, as easterners moved west in what was known as the Great Migration.

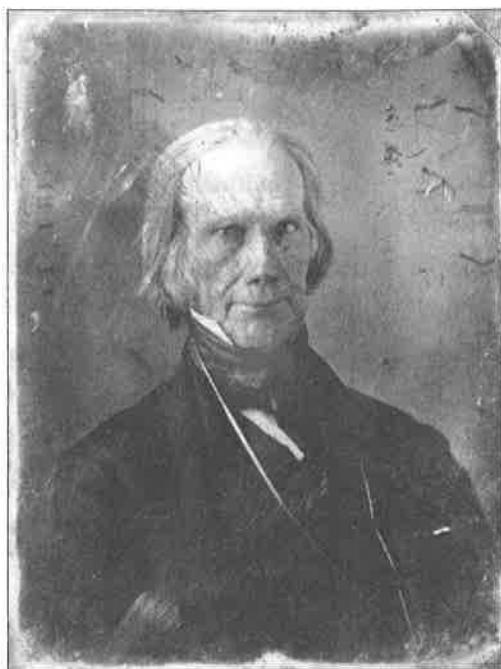
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ALTHOUGH AMERICA WAS STILL mainly agricultural, it was inching toward capitalism and industrialism. Thomas Jefferson had envisaged a nation of self-sufficient yeoman farmers. The agrarian dream was kept alive by a small number of so-called Radicals like Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina and the Virginians John Randolph and John Taylor, who opposed the rising commercial interests. But the pursuit of economic prosperity directed the nation toward business and commerce.

Even the Democratic-Republican Party, founded by Jefferson in opposition to Alexander Hamilton's nationalistic economic program, now supported tariffs, a national bank, and internal improvements. The federal government's active involvement in the economy gave rise to the so-called American System, introduced by the Kentucky statesman Henry Clay.

Few dominated the political landscape of early-nineteenth-century America more than Clay. Born and raised in Hanover County, Virginia, Clay had only three years of formal education but through brilliance and charisma gained early success as a lawyer in Lexington, Kentucky, before moving on to politics. Repeatedly elected either to the U.S. Senate or the House of Representatives, he went on to serve as Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams, and he ran for the presidency three times.

Slender and loose-limbed, with long arms and an ambling gait, Clay had a plain but expressive face, with a broad forehead, curved nose, beady blue eyes, and pale lips that stretched in a long, thin line, making it hard for him to whistle or spit tobacco juice. Although he could be domineering and supercilious, he had a puckish smile and radiated charm. In 1792 he married the Lexington socialite Lucretia Hart, as homely and amiable as he. He enjoyed the company of women and was a shameless flirt, though



*Henry Clay*

there was no evidence to support the oft-made charge that he was unfaithful to Lucretia. He loved gambling, tippling, quick repartee, and off-color stories. His charm was indicated by many of his nicknames, such as Gallant Harry of the West, the Cock of Kentucky, the Western Hotspur, the Mill-Boy of the Slashes, and the Sage of Ashland.

In typical Southern fashion, he engaged in two duels, one that left him with a thigh wound and another that merely damaged the clothing of his opponent.

Clay's mercurial moods contrasted with his consistency of political purpose. From 1815 onward, his economic plan centered on a nationalistic agenda. Prosperity, he argued, depended on the federal government's strong guidance of the economy.

His ideas got an appreciative hearing in the nationalistic atmosphere after the War of 1812. President Madison not only enacted a protective

tariff (raising duties above what was necessary for government revenue in order to protect certain industries and agricultural producers) but also helped to revive the Bank of the United States and supported internal improvements such as roads and canals.

England inadvertently nurtured American factories with a trade embargo during the war and then threatened them after it by dumping surplus textile and iron goods on the American market. Trying to shield fledgling businesses from foreign competition, the Madison administration in 1816 imposed a heavy duty on many imported goods. Although the Tariff of 1816, America's first protective tariff, seems to have had minimal economic impact, it was symbolically important. It signaled the federal government's intervention in the economy, as did the revival of the Bank of the United States (BUS).

The charter for the First BUS having expired in 1811, Madison in 1816 signed a bill for a twenty-year charter for the Second BUS, headquartered in Philadelphia. Attitudes toward the BUS had reshuffled due to the changing economy. Because the war had created runaway inflation in the South and West by draining specie (silver and gold) reserves and flooding those regions with paper notes, the formerly antibank spokesmen Clay of Kentucky and Calhoun of South Carolina now promoted the BUS, which they thought would stabilize currency there. Meanwhile, the New Englander Daniel Webster opposed the bank he had once endorsed, because of the relatively healthy economy of his section.

The other plank of Clay's American System, internal improvements, got a boost during the Madison administration. Madison and his successor, James Monroe, praised such projects, which they saw as crucial to national growth and unity. Both hoped for constitutional amendments that would broaden the federal government's scope in funding beneficent improvements. Madison emphasized in 1815 "the great importance of establishing throughout our country roads and canals which can be best executed under national authority," noting that new transportation would succeed in "binding more closely together the various parts of our extended confederacy."

Transportation improvements occurred in three main phases: The period between 1790 and 1810 brought construction of common roads that continued in later years. Robert Fulton's steamboat voyage in 1807 and the beginning of work on the Erie Canal in 1818 triggered steamboat progress and canal building from 1811 to 1830. And John Stevens's demonstration in New Jersey of a steam locomotive in 1826, followed by the opening of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, initiated three decades of railroad growth.

Transportation changes fed the movement toward a capitalist economy, which gained momentum in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. The subsistence economy of the past, in which most Americans lived on what they produced on their own land, shifted toward a market economy, in which goods were produced, sold, and bought outside the home. Economic development and westward migration were closely linked to transportation of goods and people.

Early roads in America were little more than wide dirt paths that became mud in the winter and spring and dust in the summer and fall. But by 1815 a number of major road projects were under way. The Cumberland Road, soon called the National Road, was the nation's first federally funded road and the first to use the new surface developed by the Scottish engineer John Loudon MacAdam. Consisting of stones compacted for toughness and graded for drainage, this surface, known as macadam (or, when tar was later added, tarmac), dramatically increased the long-term usability of roads.

Construction of the National Road began in Washington, D.C., in 1811 but was interrupted by the war, resuming in 1815. Soon the road stretched to Cumberland, Maryland. By 1818 it reached Wheeling, Virginia, and eventually it ran all the way to Vandalia, Illinois. So many towns sprang up along it that it became known as the Main Street of America, celebrated in popular songs, paintings, and poems. At first a mail route, the National Road became a major artery for trade and travel, fed by other roads from north and south. The federal government

funded the road until 1835, when the states took it over. Its eastern section became a turnpike, or toll road.

Turnpikes, usually state-chartered and privately funded, flourished before 1825. Pennsylvania's Lancaster Turnpike, connecting Philadelphia and Lancaster, opened in 1794, initiating a craze for toll roads. By 1816 turnpikes linked the major cities in the Northeast and formed a roughly continuous line from Maine to Georgia. The state of New York led the way in toll-road construction, followed by Pennsylvania and New England. Although turnpikes were sometimes macadamized, they were usually crude roads, dotted with tree stumps, that forded swamps with so-called corduroy, or sawed logs connected to form a firm but bumpy surface. Every six to ten miles was a tollbooth that charged between ten and twenty-five cents.

Investor optimism fed the turnpike boom. Before 1830, turnpike companies evidently won more state corporate charters than any other kind of private business. But few turnpikes paid off in the long run. They were expensive to build and costly for their users, who frequently avoided paying tolls by traveling when collectors were off duty or by following "shunpikes" around tollbooths. With the rise of canals and railroads, turnpikes became increasingly unattractive for carriers of freight.

More crucial to early commercial development than roads was water travel. Steamboats and canals developed simultaneously, creating a water network that linked America's coasts and oceanic commerce with the ever-growing settlements to the interior. What is now called economic globalization began with advances in water transportation during the two decades after 1815.

Steamboats simplified the movement of both passengers and freight. Introduced on the Delaware River by James Rumsey and John Fitch in 1787, the steamboat became commercially successful in the hands of the American engineer Robert Fulton and his business partner Robert R. Livingston. On August 17, 1807, Fulton sailed a steamboat from New

York City to Albany, 150 miles up the Hudson River. This historic voyage launched the era of steam transportation.

Improvements in steamboats brought increases in speed. The same voyage that Fulton had made in thirty-six hours took a quarter of that time in 1840. Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked, "The Americans would sail in a steamboat built of Lucifer matches, if it would go faster." In the East, steamboats were used mainly for passenger travel. Fulton and Livingston established ferry lines on the Hudson, on the Raritan, in New York Harbor, and on Long Island Sound. In the West, they stimulated commerce by introducing steam travel on the Mississippi River.

Shipping freight on rivers had previously been arduous, limited to sailing vessels or pole-driven flatboats and barges. Upstream passage was especially difficult. Steamboats met the challenge of river currents. As the ease of transporting consumer goods increased, prices began to equalize in different parts of the country.

Although Robert Livingston had helped found steam transportation, a historic legal decision against him created a host of new opportunities for others. In *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824), the Supreme Court, under Chief Justice John Marshall, ruled that Livingston's monopoly of the ferry business between New York and New Jersey was unconstitutional. By giving federal sanction to competing interstate steamboat companies, this ruling, as one judge commented, "released every creek and river, every lake and harbor in our country from the interference of monopolies." The decision, followed by a series of antimonopolistic state laws, is sometimes referred to today as the Emancipation Proclamation of American Commerce. Movement of people and freight by steamboat increased dramatically.

To be sure, steamboat travel had its problems. Accidents and breakdowns were common. Eastern steamboats averaged ten to fifteen years of active service, and Western ones a mere four to five years. As Mark Twain would record in *Life on the Mississippi*, navigating rivers involved unending vigilance for snags and sandbars. By 1840, nearly a third of America's steamboats had been lost to accidents. Gamblers and thieves

infested the western steamboats, so that most passengers felt compelled to arm themselves with bowie knives or other weapons. (Herman Melville's portrait of crime and chicanery aboard a Mississippi steamboat in *The Confidence-Man* had roots in real life.) Tobacco juice was sprayed in all directions, and excessive drinking was common on board.

Still, steamboats were hugely successful, and America excelled at building them. Rival companies tried to outdo each other by creating gilt-decorated "floating palaces," with elegant berths, dining areas, and saloons. As one foreign traveler noted, "The finest [steamboats] we have in Europe are much inferior to the smallest, the wretchedest ferry-boat over here."

The economic impact of steamboats was amplified by the rapid expansion of the nation's canal system. As late as 1816, America had just one hundred miles of canals. By 1840, over three thousand miles of canals created a vast transportation network among many settled parts of the country.

By far the most successful canal was the Erie Canal, variously called the Eighth Wonder of the World, the \$7 Million Bet that Made America, and the Granary of the World. The idea of a canal to improve east-west commerce had been around a long time. In 1784 George Washington opened the Patowmack Company, aimed at connecting the Potomac River with the West, but the firm went bankrupt.

Building a canal between the Hudson River and the Great Lakes meant hacking through over 360 miles of dense forests that rose through rocky hills. Thomas Jefferson found the idea "little short of madness," declaring that so daunting a project would have to wait a century. Neither he nor his immediate presidential successors were about to commit federal funds to this improbable enterprise.

It was left to the New York politician DeWitt Clinton to make the dream of the great canal a reality. The well-heeled, Columbia-educated Clinton, whose uncle, George Clinton, was James Madison's vice president, was himself a four-term governor of New York, a U.S. senator, and a presidential candidate in 1812. Clinton thought that building a

canal to the Great Lakes was crucial to America's prosperity and unity. He rallied support for it, persuading enough New Yorkers to sign a memorandum that the state legislature allocated seven million dollars to the project.

Construction began on July 4, 1817, near Rome, New York, in a flat region chosen to insure speedy progress in order to silence those who dismissed the canal as "Clinton's Big Ditch" or "Clinton's Folly." Laborers, many of them German or Irish immigrants, toiled for less than a dollar a day. They chopped, cut, and dug their way westward, creating a channel that was twenty-eight feet wide at the bottom and forty feet at the top. A short stretch near Lockport, with cliffs that had to be blasted away, took several years to cross. Many locks, or enclosed sections where water could be raised and lowered, were built at steep places. Aqueducts with waterproof sides carried rivers above the canal.

The Erie Canal opened to tremendous fanfare on October 26, 1825. Dignitaries gathered at Buffalo, where booming cannons and cheering crowds orchestrated the launching of the first fleet of boats headed east through the canal. Aboard one of the boats was DeWitt Clinton along with kegs of Lake Erie water that on November 4 he poured into New York Harbor, celebrating the new passageway between distant continents and America's heartland. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote of the canal, "In my imagination, De Witt Clinton was an enchanter, who had waved his magic wand from the Hudson to Lake Erie, and united them by a watery highway, crowded with the commerce of two worlds, till then inaccessible to each other."

The canal triumphantly filled its promise. It sharply reduced shipping costs between Albany and Buffalo. Within a year of its opening, more than thirteen thousand boats plied the canal's waters. The canal went on to become the nation's most profitable trade route. Heavily laden barges, hauled by mules on towpaths bordering the canal, transported manufactured goods and farm produce west and east. Wheat production in the West, fueled by the sudden access to eastern markets, grew exponentially. Towns and cities mushroomed along the canal,

whose waters, Hawthorne commented, "must be the most fertilizing of all fluids." Existing communities expanded rapidly. Europeans and New Englanders used the canal as a principal emigration route to the Old Northwest. The population of four northwestern states—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio—quadrupled between 1820 and 1840.

The canal helped New York City become the financial capital of the world. The city also benefited from the creation of a stock exchange in 1817 and, the next year, the founding of the Black Ball Line of sailing ships, which made scheduled voyages to and from Liverpool. Stimulated by the new trade that passed through it, New York's population grew from 126,000 in 1820 to over 800,000 on the eve of the Civil War, when nearly two thirds of America's exports passed through it.

Many other new canals were constructed. New York State soon had, in addition to the Erie Canal, the Oswego, the Chenango, the Cayuga-Seneca, the Champlain, the Delaware and Hudson, and several smaller canals. Other canals nourished the economies of other states. There were two great canals in Ohio, one running between Cleveland and Portsmouth, the other between Cincinnati and Toledo. Pennsylvania's impressive Main Line of Public Works linked Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Canals were also built in Virginia, Indiana, New Jersey, Maryland, Illinois, and elsewhere.

In time, many canals became losing propositions because of poor choice of sites, strained state budgets, and inefficient construction. Costs of building a canal soared. Many canal projects were ill conceived and did not pay off. Others fell victim to the railroad. But the Erie Canal, enlarged three times and renamed the New York State Barge Canal, continued to prosper, carrying millions of tons of freight as late as the 1950s. Only the building of the New York State Thruway and the St. Lawrence Seaway made it dwindle to what it is today: mainly a recreation area.

The cumulative effect of canals, steamboats, and roads was not only to stimulate the economy but also to enhance national unity. Many viewed internal improvements as a means of binding together a geographically divided nation.

DeWitt Clinton thought the Erie Canal would help save the American Union. "Dismemberment of the Union," he predicted, would not come from "collisions between the north and the south" but from an east-west division, since "the most imminent danger" is "that a line of separation may eventually draw between the atlantic and western states, unless they are cemented by a common, an ever acting and powerful interest." Clinton feared that the western states, as they became autonomous with settlement, might secede from the Union. In order to "avert this awful calamity" of "a dissolution of the union," Clinton argued, "the people should be habituated to frequent intercourse and beneficial inter-communication, and the whole republic ought to be bound together by the golden ties of commerce and the adamantine chains of interest." His canal would "bind the union together by indissoluble ties."

Similarly, John Calhoun, in an 1817 congressional speech on internal improvements, asked, "On the subject of national power, what can be more important than a perfect unity in every part, in feelings and sentiments? And what can tend more powerfully to produce it, than overcoming the effects of distance?"

\* \* \* \*

THE ELECTION OF THE Virginia statesman James Monroe as president greatly bolstered this feeling of national unity. In his first inaugural address in March 1817, Monroe affirmed that "the improvement of our country by roads and canals" would "bind the Union more closely together." The new nationalism sprang not only from improved transportation but from the condition of society and politics as a whole. Monroe noted "the increased harmony of opinion which pervades our Union," declaring, "Discord does not belong to our system." Three months later a Boston newspaper announced that Monroe had ushered in "an era of good feelings."

Monroe looked and behaved very differently from the president he succeeded. Whereas Madison (the smallest president in American history) stood five feet five and weighed only a hundred pounds, Monroe

was over six feet tall, with broad shoulders and a massive frame. Monroe, who had frank gray-blue eyes, was plodding and pragmatic, as opposed to Madison, known for his rapid mind and wide-ranging intellect.

Both presidents suffered from physical and psychological debilities. Madison was an arthritic hypochondriac with a vocal impairment and periodic seizures that may have been mental in origin. Monroe, who had a bullet in his shoulder from his days as a Revolutionary soldier, was beset by recurrent malarial fever and some undefined, seemingly stress-related illness.

The two were similar politically. Both had been crucial to the cause of liberty, Madison as an intellectual architect of the Constitution, Monroe as an officer in the American Revolution and a political leader after it. Like two previous Virginian presidents, Washington and Jefferson,



James Monroe, by Gilbert Stuart

they not only owned slaves but did so while in office. Both had helped Jefferson shape the Republican Party. Given their political affinities, it is understandable that Madison had chosen Monroe to serve twice in his cabinet, first as secretary of state and then as secretary of war.

Courteous and shy, Monroe was the picture of respectable mediocrity. "Turn his soul wrong side outwards," Jefferson said, "and there is not a speck on it." He was the plain Virginia farmer, likable in his averageness.

Even his odd habit of wearing old-style clothing for public events had a consoling effect on many Americans. Shortly after assuming office, he went on a four-month meet-the-people tour through the North, dressed in his Revolutionary costume of a blue coat trimmed in red, doeskin knee-breeches, buckle-top boots, and a three-cornered soldier's hat with a black ribbon cockade. He left Washington on June 2, 1817, on a barge lined with crimson velvet and propelled by rowers dressed in scarlet vests and white sleeves.

Everywhere he went on his tour—New York, New England, west to Michigan, and back through the mid-Atlantic states to Washington—he was welcomed by dignitaries and crowds. Bland and friendly, he was a soothing holdover from an earlier time. As an observer noted, "He was not a star, but a member of the company, a stock actor, one of themselves. . . . For the first time, the people met their Chief Magistrate as such, and they felt that they were a nation."

Monroe helped lift the nation's self-image by speeding the rebuilding of its capital, which had been destroyed in the war. The executive mansion, a red sandstone structure blackened when the British burned it in August 1814, became known as the White House when refurbished and painted white in 1817 under the direction of a Monroe appointee, the Irish-born architect James Hoban. Monroe selected another architect, James Bulfinch of Boston, to redesign the Capitol building, which was completed in 1826.

Monroe's two terms as president ran from March 4, 1817, to March 4, 1825. Because of the lull in party conflict, he won his second term with

all but one electoral vote. He created a stellar cabinet consisting of erstwhile or future political rivals, among them Secretary of Treasury William H. Crawford, the Georgian states-rights advocate who had competed against him for the presidency in 1816; Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, the improvement-minded ex-Federalist from New England; Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, the proslavery Southerner; and Attorney General William Wirt, the brilliant lawyer from Maryland.

It was long held that this cabinet of prima donnas was mainly responsible for the achievements of Monroe's administrations. Each of them outshone the president in intelligence and talent, and each made important contributions, especially Adams in the area of foreign policy. But recent historians have shown that Monroe was an activist president, directing affairs with methodical steadiness.

Monroe's presidency strengthened nationalism and expanded democracy but also planted seeds of future conflict. Under his watch, America expanded its territory, solidified its position in the world community, and abolished restrictions that had prevented certain white males from voting. At the same time, however, it waged a cruel war against blacks and Indians in Florida, suffered a devastating economic depression, and endured a flare-up over slavery that anticipated the Civil War.

A seasoned diplomat, Monroe had in earlier years been instrumental in securing from Spain navigation rights for U.S. boats on the Mississippi River and in arranging the Louisiana Purchase with Napoléon. In 1816, as Madison's secretary of state, he proposed an agreement with England that would reduce the number of naval vessels left from the war on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain. Early in his presidency, such an agreement, known as the Rush-Bagot Treaty, was reached, starting a process that resulted in a demilitarized zone between the United States and British North America. In 1818 another treaty with England fixed a large portion of the northwestern boundary between the United States and Canada at the 49th parallel, though it left the Oregon Country in limbo. The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819 arranged the purchase of Florida from Spain and defined the border between

Mexican and U.S. territory as running up the Sabine River in Texas, northwestward to the Rocky Mountains, and then west to the Pacific Ocean on the 42nd parallel on the southern border of Oregon Country. Also known as the Transcontinental Treaty, this agreement gave America access to the Pacific and stands as a landmark of world history.

John Quincy Adams, comparing the limited map of the nation in the 1780s to the expansive one of the 1820s, declared that “the change, more than any other man, living or dead, was the work of James Monroe.” This was an exaggeration, but not by much. There was justification for Monroe’s boast in 1821, “The United States now enjoy the complete and uninterrupted sovereignty over the whole territory from St. Croix to the Sabine.”

Given Monroe’s interest in expanding the nation and defining its borders, it is understandable that he took advantage of an international incident to introduce a principle that would become a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

What came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine, demanding non-interference of foreign nations in the affairs of the two American continents, arose from a quarrel with England over how to deal with plans by several European nations—France and Spain, backed by others—to retake South American countries that had rebelled and declared independence from Europe. England wanted to launch a joint operation with the United States to prevent the European incursion. President Monroe, following the advice of Secretary of State Adams, responded by insisting that if any action were to be taken, the United States would take it alone. Neither England nor any other foreign power had any business meddling in the West. As the president announced to Congress in 1823, “The American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” Although the United States would remain neutral on Europe’s existing colonies in the Western Hemisphere, any further European intrusion would be regarded as “the manifestation of an unfriendly spirit toward the United States.”

The Monroe Doctrine later became an important component of the nation’s self-image, contributing both to isolationism and expansionism. It was affirmed at moments when the United States wanted to flex its muscles in disputes with other nations over territory or influence. Theodore Roosevelt expanded on it to justify U.S. intervention in Latin America. John F. Kennedy cited it during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was variously reapplied in the war on communism, the Iran-Contra Affair, and the post-9/11 campaign against terrorism.

One facet of President Monroe’s program—the winning of Florida from Spain—illustrated the violence often involved in U.S. expansion. The War of 1812 had left Spain in charge of East and West Florida and the Seminole Indians inhabiting much of the territory. After the war, Spanish and British settlers were suspected of inciting the Seminoles against whites living in southern Georgia. Raids and counterattacks broke out between the Seminoles and the Georgians. Meanwhile, the Seminole territory, long a haven for Maroons, was increasingly sought out by fugitive slaves from the South, who added their number to a group known as Black Seminoles.

In December 1817, Monroe sent General Andrew Jackson to police southern Georgia. It’s unclear if the president intended Jackson to proceed into Spanish territory, but Old Hickory did so anyway. He crossed the border into Florida with a force of two thousand, the initial federal action in what came to be called the First Seminole War. His army swelling steadily with new recruits, Jackson in April 1818 seized St. Marks and destroyed Seminole and black settlements on the Suwannee River and on Lake Miccosukee. He captured and court-martialed two British traders, Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister, for aiding hostile natives. He then ordered their immediate execution despite questionable evidence against them. This action enraged England, where newspapers spewed saber-rattling rhetoric at the United States. The next month, Jackson took the Spanish capital, Pensacola, establishing an interim government that would reign, he said, until Florida’s fate was decided diplomatically.

Returning home to Tennessee, Jackson left the Monroe administration in a fix. The international community was outraged, and Monroe, along with everyone in his cabinet except Adams, considered Jackson's takeover of Pensacola an act of war against Spain. But American public opinion supported Jackson. Monroe tried to appease Spain by giving Florida back to it, but in 1819 Spain, recognizing its fragile military position, sold Florida to the United States for \$5 million.

A government official restored millions of acres of land to the Seminoles, but the Indians and their black confederates faced a bleak future. In 1821, while Andrew Jackson was serving a brief term as Florida's territorial governor, some of his followers raided a black community near Tampa called Angola. Three hundred blacks were captured; only forty of them were returned to their owners, and the rest disappeared, presumably sold into slavery by their profit-hungry captors. As for the Indians, some retreated to the Everglades, and many others were pushed west to Indian Territories (now Oklahoma) along with other tribes of the American South. It would take two more bloody Seminole Wars to uproot the remaining Florida natives from their ancestral home.

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THE FATE OF THE Seminoles represented the dark underside of the treatment of Native Americans in general. The two decades after 1818 brought both philanthropic efforts to aid American Indians and political or military ones to displace them.

In 1819, as the First Seminole War ended, the federal government extended a hand to Native Americans by offering to educate them, reflecting Monroe's stated desire to foster "their improvement in the arts of civilized life." Thomas L. McKenney, Monroe's Commissioner for Indian Affairs, established forty schools where missionaries would teach Indians, who were expected to absorb Western customs and religion. McKenney said of the Indians, "their whole character, inside and out; language, and morals, must be changed." America's goal, he added, was

"to civilize the whole [Native American population] (I mean the rising generation, of course) *in a single generation*." Religious groups such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions aided the government's efforts, which proved, at best, only partly successful in winning Indians to Western ways. Growing frustration over the natives' failure to adopt mainstream norms contributed to the fraud, betrayals, and violence that would frequently characterize federal Indian policy for much of the century.

During Monroe's eight years as president, voting rights increased dramatically for white males. The stiff property or taxpaying requirements that had formerly restricted the vote to a small percentage of the nation's population had largely disappeared by the mid-1820s. Federalist establishments crumbled before the rising forces of democracy. Connecticut's so-called Standing Order, a Federalist-Congregationalist autocracy that had long imposed suffrage restrictions based on religion and property, dissolved after 1818, when a more tolerant Reform government took power. Similar limitations on the franchise fell three years later in Massachusetts when open-minded Federalists like Daniel Webster won the day over the old-style Federalism of John Adams, who had held that the vote must be based on property. In New York, the so-called Bucktail wing of the Democratic-Republican Party, led by Martin Van Buren, sparked a revolt against Governor DeWitt Clinton's conservative regime that resulted in an 1821 constitutional convention reducing the voting requirements for white males to a modest taxpaying stipulation that was soon dropped altogether.

The end of the caucus system also spurred democracy. Since the late eighteenth century, many state and national political candidates had been chosen by caucus, or congressional committee. Cronies within state legislatures formed tight-knit groups that selected candidates for office. On the national level, a party caucus in Congress nominated candidates for president and vice president. As late as 1816, nine of the nineteen states still used the caucus, as did Congress, where a Democratic-Republican committee nominated Monroe for president.

Monroe was the last candidate chosen by caucus to win the presidency. The suffrage reform that accelerated during his administration fanned the people's abhorrence of "King Caucus." In the presidential election of 1824, the sole caucus-chosen nominee, William Crawford, fared badly. By then, just six states employed the caucus, and by 1832 only South Carolina did. What Lincoln would call a government "of the people, by the people, for the people" began to emerge as the caucus was replaced by the party convention or popular vote.

There were some spectacular holdouts to suffrage reform. The master-race democracy of the South reached the level of caricature in South Carolina and Virginia, where only a select group of rich slaveholders could vote. In Rhode Island, the old charter granting the vote to the propertied elite, once the most democratic system in the British colonies, had become among the least democratic in the United States. It would take the revolt of the Dorr War in 1844 to initiate a process that opened the franchise in Rhode Island to most white males.

Even more disturbing than these isolated exceptions to expanded voting rights was the deliberate negation of these rights for women and blacks. Women had long been excluded from the political process; New Jersey, the one state that had originally given women the right to vote, withdrew it in 1807. Free blacks, facing ever-worsening racial prejudice, experienced the anguish of first having the vote and then losing it.

At the nation's founding, ten of the thirteen states had allowed free blacks to vote. By the eve of the Civil War, only five of America's thirty states—New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, and Rhode Island—did so, and these states contained a tiny fraction of the nation's total free black population. In the interim, one state after another legally excluded blacks from voting. Several states that had originally given blacks the vote, including New Jersey, Maryland, and Connecticut, formally withdrew it before 1820. Other states, such as North Carolina and Pennsylvania, achieved racial exclusion simply by inserting the adjective *white* before *males* in voting regulations. Elsewhere, de facto racial exclusion resulted from harsh new voting requirements for blacks. The same

New York provision of 1821 that rescinded property requirements for white males raised them for blacks, who now had to own at least \$250 in property and reside in the state for three years to vote—an impossible dream for the vast majority of the state's forty thousand blacks. As for new states, they denied blacks the franchise from the start. No state that joined the union after 1819 gave blacks the vote.

If free blacks increasingly lost the vote during Monroe's presidency, they also faced the threat of being relocated abroad. Monroe had long advocated colonization, or shipping free blacks to a colony on the west coast of Africa or elsewhere. Monroe was among a group of political leaders—others included Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, John Randolph, and William Crawford—who met in Washington in January 1817 to found the American Colonization Society. The ACS consisted of two groups from opposite sides of the political spectrum: slave-owners who wanted to solidify slavery by ridding the country of free blacks, who, they feared, might incite slave revolts; and antislavery philanthropists and clergymen who saw colonization as a way of funneling off blacks once they were emancipated from slavery.

Both groups assumed the blacks could not be successfully integrated into American society. One famous slave-owner, Henry Clay, said that because of "unconquerable prejudice resulting from their color, [blacks] never could amalgamate with the free whites of this country." Another, John Randolph, called free blacks "promoters of mischief."

A tenth of the two million blacks then living in America were free persons of color. The prospect of shipping them to Africa was daunting, but the ACS eagerly pursued the goal. At Monroe's urging, Congress in 1819 gave \$100,000 to the ACS. The next year, the society's first ship, carrying eighty-eight blacks and three whites, set sail for Sierra Leone. The deaths of the whites and many of the blacks during the voyage did not discourage Monroe, who sent another ship in 1821. In the next decade, over two thousand blacks were relocated to the newly formed African colony of Liberia, whose capital city was named Monrovia in honor of Monroe's contribution to the cause of colonization.

Over time, the achievements of the ACS proved numerically insignificant. By the end of the Civil War, it had managed to deport only around thirteen thousand blacks, a small portion of the total black population during this period. But colonization had vast symbolic importance. As an idea, it had far greater acceptance among prominent Americans than did the radical abolitionism of William Lloyd Garrison. Among notables who endorsed some version of colonization (besides those already mentioned) were Thomas Jefferson, Daniel Webster, John Marshall, Francis Scott Key, Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry David Thoreau, and Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln typified the anti-slavery side of colonization, which he promoted until the second year of the Civil War. He thought free blacks must be shipped abroad because he thought there was a physical difference between whites and blacks that forbade their enjoying equal rights in America. He explained, "What I would most desire would be the separation of the black and white races."

Blacks were understandably ambivalent about colonization. Many, appalled by racism within the movement, insisted that free blacks should be integrated into American society. In 1817, just after the launching of the ACS, blacks in Philadelphia organized a large rally in support of a petition saying, "We have no wish to separate for any purpose whatsoever." Similar demonstrations followed over the next two years.

Some blacks, however, viewed colonization as a potential source of empowerment. In 1815 Paul Cuffee, a Quaker ship owner of black and Native American ancestry, had led a group of thirty-eight African Americans who relocated to Sierra Leone. Later black separatists such as Martin Delany, the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Alexander Crummell, and Henry McNeal Turner also endorsed colonization, envisaging an independent black state in a spirit anticipatory of Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa movement in the twentieth century. Ironically, Liberia in fact resembled Southern slave society: It had a peonage system like slavery, it profited from the slave trade, and a number of its towns were named after places in the South such as Louisiana and Virginia. Also, racial and class prejudice tainted the relationship between mulattoes

and pure blacks there. Still, Liberia remained a symbol of liberty for both black and white colonizationists in America.

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DURING THE MONROE YEARS, American workers got a harsh lesson in the dangers of capitalism when the economy crashed. The Panic of 1819 initiated the nation's first major depression.

The crash resulted from a confluence of national and international events. In the heady atmosphere after the war, both imports and exports surged. European demand for American goods, especially agricultural staples like cotton, tobacco, and flour, increased. To feed the overheated economy, state banks proliferated, and credit was easy. The federal government offered for sale vast tracts of western lands, fueling real estate speculation funded by bank notes. Reserves of specie, or hard money, plummeted, especially in the West and the South. As early as 1814, Thomas Jefferson warned, "We are to be ruined by paper, as we were formerly by the old Continental paper." Two years later, he asserted that "we are under a bank bubble" that would soon burst.

The Second Bank of the United States was supposed to steady the economy, but gross mismanagement in its early phase sapped its effectiveness. The bank's first president, William Jones, instead of taking steps to regulate the nation's currency, doled out huge loans that fed speculation and inflation. He also kept lax watch over state banks, where fraud and embezzlement created chaos. A congressional committee's proposal to terminate the nearly insolvent BUS had little backing because forty members of Congress held stock in the bank.

The bank's problems arose at precisely the wrong moment, when the economy needed a firm rudder during its postwar expansion. Jones resigned and was replaced by the South Carolina congressman Langdon Cheves and later by the Philadelphia lawyer Nicholas Biddle. Although the bank sharply contracted loans in 1818, the damage had been done. The BUS, far from helping the economy, was among the destabilizing forces that led to the depression of 1819.

At the same time, swelling crop yields in Europe reduced the demand for American farm products, whose prices plunged. An economic contraction in Europe led banks there to reduce credit. The crisis abroad, coupled with the contraction at home, forced American banks to call in their loans as well.

By early 1819, credit, once so easy, was unavailable to many Americans. With specie reserves depleted, many American banks failed, and other businesses followed. Sales of public lands plummeted. Unemployment soared, and in some regions food and other basic necessities were difficult to come by. Especially hard hit were cities outside of New England like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati. Farmers suffered too, though many survived by resuming a subsistence lifestyle. With insolvency rife, prisons were overcrowded with debtors. The depression lingered for two years. It was the first of several severe downturns that would tarnish America's otherwise vigorous economy throughout the nineteenth century.

The Panic of 1819 fostered mistrust of banks, bankers, and paper money. The volatile Tennessee politician Davy Crockett spoke for many when he dismissed "the whole Banking system" as nothing more than "a species of swindling on a large scale." The aging Thomas Jefferson complained that the new generation, "having nothing in them of the feelings or principles of '76, now look to a single and splendid government of an aristocracy, founded on banking institutions, and money incorporations . . . riding and ruling over the plundered ploughman and beggared yeomanry."

This mistrust of corporations was aggravated by landmark decisions handed down in 1819 by the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall. In *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, the Court protected private corporations against interference by the state governments that had created them. In *McCullough v. Maryland*, it ruled that the Bank of the United States, though privately run, was a creation of the federal government that could not be touched by the states.

To Radicals like the Virginia statesmen John Taylor of Caroline and

John Randolph of Roanoke, these rulings were part of a larger movement against states' rights and agricultural interests. In treatises like *Construction Construed* (1820) and *Tyranny Unmasked* (1821), Taylor anticipated John C. Calhoun and the secessionists by laying out the Southern agrarian position. Taylor defended the sovereignty of each state and criticized what he saw as encroachments on individual liberties by commerce and the federal government. Randolph, an outspoken congressman, lambasted all facets of federal control—the tariff, the BUS, internal improvements, and the Marshall court—while taking states' rights to a new extreme. "When I speak of my country," he announced, "I mean the commonwealth of Virginia."

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SOUTHERNERS' DEVOTION TO STATES' rights combined with proslavery ideology in the fierce debate over Missouri's admission to the union. Although the debate was resolved by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, for the first time slavery emerged as an explosive issue.

Slavery in the early republic had been widely viewed as a temporary evil. The founding fathers, shaped by Enlightenment values of human rights and democracy, had generally opposed slavery even when they owned slaves. Washington, who owned over two hundred slaves, nonetheless said of slavery, "There is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it." He freed some of his slaves just after his presidency and manumitted the remainder in his will. Another famous slave-owner, Jefferson, said of slavery, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just." Yet another, Madison, called slavery "the most oppressive domination ever exercised by man over man."

The founders' ambivalence about slavery was reflected in the Constitution, which avoided mentioning slavery while tacitly condoning it in its clauses about three-fifths representation in the South and the return of fugitives from labor. Congress banned the international slave trade in 1808. In many of the original thirteen states, there was a trend

toward abolition. When Vermont broke from England and became an independent republic in 1777, it banned slavery. Within two decades eight northern states had made provisions for emancipation.

Powerful indictments of slavery on moral grounds came from Enlightenment rationalists like Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush, from Quakers like Anthony Benezet and John Woolman, and from orthodox Calvinists like Samuel Sewall and Jonathan Edwards Jr. Even in the South, abolition had a hearing. In 1796 the Virginia lawyer St. George Tucker wrote a pamphlet calling for gradual emancipation. The legislatures of Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia considered abolition bills.

But the invention of the cotton gin, and the ensuing cotton boom, increased the South's dependence on slavery. Cotton production doubled between 1815 and 1820, then doubled again before 1825. By the Civil War, the United States produced two thirds of the world's cotton. Slaves became ever more valuable to the plantation economy, especially in the Deep South. Prices for slaves increased steadily.

Where the economy led, moral argument followed. Some defended slavery on religious and historical grounds, such as a Georgia congressman who pointed out that the Bible supported slavery "from Genesis to Revelation" and that "there never was a government on the face of the earth, but what permitted slavery." Others brought up the racial factor, later essential to the Southern view. In his 1818 tract *Arator*, John Taylor of Caroline insisted that slavery properly kept blacks, by nature vicious and morally inferior, in a dependent position—an argument also developed by the South Carolina doctor Thomas Cooper, who branded blacks as "a permanently degraded people" who merited no legal rights.

The South's growing support of slavery, combined with intensifying antislavery sentiment in the North, fueled the explosion over Missouri. In 1819 a numerical balance existed between eleven slave states and eleven free ones. Discussion arose over admitting Maine as a free state, while the slave-holding Missouri territory had also applied for admission to the Union. Congress decided to consider Maine and Missouri

simultaneously. The New York congressman James Tallmadge raised the stakes of the discussion by proposing that slavery be banned from Missouri. The predominantly antislavery House of Representatives passed his measure but the Southern-dominated Senate voted it down.

Congress debated slavery in arguments that caught fire in cities and towns throughout the nation. "Missouri engulfs everything," an Alabama senator declared. Many of the points about slavery, pro and con, that would later lead to the Civil War were aired. William Pinkney of Maryland described to the Senate the alleged blessings of slavery. "The great body of slaves," he asserted, "are happier in their present situation than they could be in any other, and the man or men who would attempt to give them freedom, would be their greatest enemies." John Randolph of Roanoke laid out the Southern states'-rights position, calling the effort to restrict slavery another example of federal tyranny. Northerners like New York Senator Rufus King answered that slavery not only violated natural and divine laws but also ran counter to the American ideal of equality. Slavery could be tolerated where it already existed, but its spread must be prevented.

Senator Jesse B. Thomas of Illinois offered a compromise admitting Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state, with the key stipulation that slavery would be thereafter banned above latitude 36° 30' in territories west of Missouri. The compromise won enough support to pass Congress and to be signed into law by President Monroe in 1820 over the protests of Southerners like Randolph, who excoriated it as a "dirty bargain" made possible by "doughfaces," a label he coined to describe Northerners who leaned to the South.

Some correctly saw the contest over Missouri as an omen of worse battles to come. The elder statesmen John Adams and Thomas Jefferson peered apprehensively into the future. Jefferson wrote, "This momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the union." Adams confessed that slavery "hangs like a Cloud over my imagination" and predicted "the Calamities which slavery is likely to produce in this Country."

Even more prescient was Adams's son, John Quincy Adams, who in his diary pronounced slavery "the great and foul stain upon the North American Union" that would be eradicated only by "a dissolution, at least temporary, of the Union" followed by a reorganization of the nation "on the fundamental principle of emancipation." Adams wrote prophetically, "A dissolution of the Union for the cause of slavery would be followed by a servile war in the slave-holding States, combined with a war between the two severed portions of the Union. It seems to me that its result might be the extirpation of slavery from this whole continent." Though this war would be "calamitous and desolating," Adams added, "I dare not say that it is not to be desired," since "so glorious would be its final issue."

But most Americans in the early 1820s were not contemplating a civil war over slavery. Buoyed by expansion and economic recovery, they thought that the Missouri Compromise had settled the slavery issue.

Still, the social problems that had surfaced during Monroe's terms in office were not about to disappear. They signaled profound contradictions in the nation's identity. America promised equal rights for all and yet restricted them for marginalized groups such as Indians, women, and blacks. It championed human equality but tolerated slavery. It moved toward prosperity yet could fall quickly into hard times. It had achieved a kind of unity during "the era of good feelings," but by the end of Monroe's term was feeling strains that in time would lead to civil war.

## 2

### Political Fights, Popular Fêtes

John Quincy Adams, who won the disputed election of 1824, should have been a great president. Few have been better qualified for America's highest office than he. Wonderfully educated, raised by the nation's second president and his accomplished wife, he had entered public life at fourteen and never left it for long, gaining prominence as a diplomat, senator, and cabinet member. The prime mover behind President Monroe's nationalistic foreign policy, he was perhaps the most important secretary of state in American history. He also had a sharp understanding of domestic issues. His heart was in the right place on the key social problem, slavery.

His presidency, however, began in turmoil and met with frustration. True, America under him was generally content and prosperous. But Adams failed to implement many of his programs. Congress resisted him at every turn, partly because of internal divisions and partly because of his own shortcomings as a politician. In the end, he was less effective during his presidency than before or after it.

Still, his presidency was more successful than is commonly thought. And if we consider his whole career in light of America's long-term priorities, we realize that he defined the nation as much as anyone in his day.

Subject to bouts of depression, John Quincy Adams nonetheless had remarkable energy. Privately, he could sparkle with wit. Publicly, when orating in his shrill voice, gesticulating and swaying, his bald head