

# Era of good feelings essay sample



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The War of 1812, often regarded by historians as the second American Revolution brought about significant changes. With the end of the war, the United States became less involved in European affairs and devoted more energy into its internal development. This period of internal development led to the emergence of nationalism and sectionalism. Contrary to what many historians refer to it as, the period from 1815 - 1825 was not an "Era of Good Feelings," rather it was plagued by underlying issues that would jeopardize the future of the United States. Though the time from 1815 to 1825 looks like a period of substantial growth at face value, the period is marked by conflicting interests between the North and the South, political disunity and conflicting nationalist ideas. Though the United States experienced a relative period of peace from foreign conflicts, it was threatened by a force even more dangerous - sectionalism.

Sectionalism was characterized by the geographic diversity of the United States. The different geographic characteristics of each region led each region to have conflicting interests. For example, the North, having more of an industrial economy than the South, supported the placement of tariffs on imported goods because it made foreign products more expensive and thus, less appealing. By doing so, the companies in New England could eliminate foreign competition and acquire larger profits. On the other hand, the South opposed tariffs which were seen as indirect taxes. Before the emergence of manufacturing centers in the North, the South relied on cheap manufactured goods from Britain. These goods were made more expensive by tariffs and so, spending increased and profits decreased.

This, in turn, caused the South to believe that the government was “aggravating the burdens of the people for the purpose of favoring the manufacturers.” (Document A) The disparity in population density further reflects on the disunity of the nation. While the North contained a number of urban centers, the South remained predominantly rural. (Document E) The difference in population density shows how different their lifestyles are, how different their economies are, and how different their interests are. Rather than seeming like one unified nation, the North and the South seem like two separate nations. Furthermore, the Missouri Compromise was not a victory for nationalists; rather it was just a makeshift postponement of the rising issues between the North and the South. The South feared that the North would abolish slavery and thus, it made it a priority to maintain enough power in Congress. If Missouri entered the union as a free state, it would upset the balance of powers.

The South was dependent on slaves for agriculture and in particular, the cotton economy that had developed with the invention of the cotton gin. The conflicting commercial interests of each geographic region contributed to the misnomer, “the Era of Good Feelings.” Jefferson described this disunity as “a geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.” (Document F) Therefore, Jefferson claims that the disparity between the North and the South would fuel the growth of sectionalism for years to come. Politics was just as fiercely divided as the commercial interests of each geographic region.

The Presidential Election of 1820 and the President Election of 1824 shows just how divided Americans were in politics. While James Monroe overwhelmingly won the Presidential Election of 1820, the Presidential Election of 1824 was less decisive. That is, no candidate won over the other candidates substantially. A trend that emerges among the voters is that the Southerners were inclined to vote for candidates from the South, such as William Crawford, Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay. Likewise, states in New England were inclined to vote for John Quincy Adams from Massachusetts. (Document I) This further reflects on the political disunity of the United States and the conflicting interests of each corresponding geographical region.

Each geographic region voted for the candidate they felt would serve their region the best, rather than who would serve the country the best. Furthermore, the conspiracy between John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay, referred to as "corrupt bargain," by the Jacksonians shows how politically divided the United States was. In this event, Henry Clay gave John Quincy Adams his endorsement and by doing this, made John Quincy Adams the president. In response, John Quincy Adams made Henry Clay his secretary of state, and thus, in a way, set Henry Clay up to be the next president of the United States. Another issue that further heated the political atmosphere was the issue of strong central government or decentralized government. The Northern States that were formerly headed by the Federalists supported a strong centralized government.

They believed that a strong centralized government was needed to advance economic development through the funding of public works projects and

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tariffs. In contrast, the Southern States maintained that a decentralized government would better represent the values of democracy. One of the most notable Supreme Court cases that debated Congress's authority was *McCulloch v. Maryland*. (Document D) This Supreme Court case in some ways embodied the battle between desire for strong central government versus weak central government and North versus South. The case dealt with the power of Congress to legally establish a national bank. The Northern States supported it because the bank would offer economic benefits such as uniform currency rates, and more government control over the economy. The Southern States felt that the bank served to benefit the rich at the expense of the poor.

This wide range of political conflicts shows how different American nationalism was from region to region. Following the emergence of the new market economy, a period of economic turmoil took place. The Panic of 1819 further shows why the period from 1815 - 1825 was not an "Era of Good Feelings." The Panic of 1819 reversed the trend of strong economic growth that the United States had experienced during the war. The Panic of 1819 was the product of several underlying causes stemming from the War of 1812. With both the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars over, Britain focused on recovering its lost markets. Britain "dumped" manufacturing goods onto the United States and drove many businesses out of business as tariffs were not high enough to make American goods more appealing. New England's economy fell into a six year depression.

This not only lowered Americans' confidence in their country's economy but it also showed how immature American manufacturing still was. It also

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showed them how unstable their economy was. However, although European agriculture recovered, the agricultural economy in the South did not decline as sharply as the economy in the North. The South was less affected because demand for cotton was high internationally. The textile industries had an almost insatiable need for cotton.

This caused the South to develop a nationalistic belief that the agricultural economy was industrial economy. The North and the South would continue walking along diverging paths towards different economies. Ultimately, the period from 1815 - 1825 was not an "Era of Good Feelings." Sectionalism, nationalism and political disunity emerged during this time and it would cause greater disturbances in the future. The Missouri Compromise, the Presidential Election of 1824 and the Panic of 1819 are examples of underlying issues that would eventually lead to a larger conflict.