

Nationalism and sectionalism in america



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America was founded by multiple states, from different regions and subsequently different styles of life, which made the possibility of their union unstable and uncertain. But, because they were united by a common goal- to break free of Britain's despotic sovereignty-the American colonies were able to win their independence from Britain and become the United States of America. This dichotomy between the states' different styles of life and their shared goal laid the foundation for the forces of nationalism and sectionalism in the US.

The two opposing forces worked hand-in-hand to manipulate Americans' views of one another and the American political and economic systems, though the force of sectionalism outweighed the force of nationalism in the US. In the nineteenth century especially, there were many events and trends that facilitated the forces of nationalism and sectionalism, including wars, like the American Civil War, institutions, like the First and Second Banks of the US, and eras, like the Era of Good Feelings.

The establishment of the First and Second Banks of the US caused great controversy and sectionalism because their constitutionality were questioned by those with a strict construction of the Constitution and supported by those with a loose construction of the Constitution. The First Bank of the US was proposed by Alexander Hamilton, who had a loose construction of the Constitution, as a part of his Financial Plan. Hamilton wanted to solve America's debt problem, as well as increase the country's economic stability and credibility.

He calculated that the Bank would benefit the economy by helping to facilitate government finances, functioning as a commercial bank, and

lending to businesses as a central source of capital. The federal government owned two million dollars of the Bank, giving it considerable control, and the remaining eight million would be owned by private investors. This gave the federal government a large amount of power over the economy, which angered those who wanted the federal government to be small and weak, like Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson had a strict construction of the Constitution, and was the main voice of opposition to the Bank. He argued that the Bank gave the federal government too much power, and that it favored the upper class because it was owned by wealthy, private investors. Jefferson and Hamilton's fierce debates, though they ended in compromise, created political sectionalism in the US by helping define the two emerging political parties, the Federalists and the Jeffersonians.

The Second Bank of the US was very similar to the First Bank, but it was larger and held large quantities of other banks' notes in reserve so it could discipline other banks that over-issued notes. It was headquartered in Philadelphia, and had thirty-five million dollars in capital, of which the federal government owned seven million dollars. President Andrew Jackson believed that the Second Bank was corrupt because it catered to the wealthy upper class and was difficult to control.

This belief led him to veto the renewal of the Bank's charter in 1832, and also began his campaign to try to eliminate the Bank by transferring funds from the federal government's reserve to smaller state banks. Jackson's personal vendetta against the Bank created sectionalism because people who listened to Jackson and supported him blindly because he was a war

hero rallied against people like Nicholas Biddle, the president of the Bank, who struggled to keep the Bank alive, understanding its important role in preserving the American economy.

As a result of the controversies revolving around the First and Second Banks of the US, the American people were divided by their views of the economy, as well as their views on politics. During the War of 1812, the forces of nationalism and sectionalism were present, though the force of nationalism was prevalent, causing many Americans to alter the way they viewed themselves and their fellow countrymen. The War of 1812 was fought against Britain, and many Americans supported it because they were angered by British impressment of American sailors.

However, there were others that did not support the war, such as the Federalists, believing that America was not ready for war with Britain. The Hartford Convention was a gathering of Federalists that opposed the War and discussed the changes that they wanted made, reintroducing the idea of nullification by undermining federal law. Other Americans called these Federalists traitors because they held their meeting while America was still at war, and also because some Federalists had even threatened to secede. The Hartford Convention, therefore, was a manifestation of the political sectionalism in the US.

Meanwhile, the force of nationalism was counteracting the sectionalism with the composition of “ The Star-Spangled Banner” during the Battle of Fort Mchenry by Francis Scott Key, showing that America was strong and everlasting, even against impossible odds. The Battle of New Orleans was also a contributor to the force of nationalism because of America’s decisive

victory over the British. It showed that America could win against Britain on its own, and gave Americans the sense that they were invincible because they had massively defeated the British. ...nationally the battle bolstered the ego of a young nation. " The War of 1812 allowed the US to break free from its colonial past and emerge as a new player on the world stage, gaining respect as a legitimate nation. This feeling of invincibility and superiority would contribute to the idea of Manifest Destiny and to the Era of Good Feelings because of the nationalism the victory generated. However, the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War, increased sectionalism in the US because it did not resolve the impressment of American sailors, which was one of the main causes of the war.

Overall, the War of 1812 was a huge proponent of nationalism in the US, and that nationalistic feeling carried over into the Era of Good Feelings, bringing about a shift in politics as well as Americans' national identity. The Era of Good Feelings was a product of and contributed to the force of nationalism in America, characterized by many changes in America's politics and internal affairs. The Federalist Party disintegrated because of the widespread criticism of the Hartford Convention during and after the War of 1812, making the Democratic-Republican Party the only political party.

This meant that the old party animosities and tension would disappear, and there would be less political sectionalism in the government. The Democratic-Republicans underwent changes as well, like their party policies. The party became focused on obtaining a monopoly of government patronage, using fundraisers and events to gain support from the people.

During this era, there was an increase in internal improvements, as seen with the American System, an economic plan that consisted of three parts.

The first part was a tariff that would protect and promote American industry, known as the “ Tariff of Abominations” by the Southern states, who were inconvenienced by the tariff. The second part was a national bank that would foster commerce, known as the Second Bank of the US. Finally, the last part allowed for federal subsidies for internal improvements. Initially, the American System created more nationalism, because it unified the country economically, because of the bank, and geographically, because of the improved roads and travel.

For example, the building of the Erie Canal connected the East coast of the US to the more western towns, facilitating commerce between the two regions. However, sectionalism was also created because there were some, like Andrew Jackson, who believed that the federal government should not fund internal improvements because that was the duty of the states. Since the internal improvements involved the internal occurrences of the states, non-supporters of the American System claimed that the government should not be able to decide what internal improvements are made in the states.

More sectionalism was created because of the South’s hatred of the Tariff of Abominations, which favored the North. Henry Clay recommended that the Tariff of Abominations, on foreign goods that did not compete with American products, be abolished. In 1828, John C. Calhoun wrote the South Carolina Exposition and Protest, urging the nullification of the tariff in South Carolina and ushering in the Nullification Crisis. The Crisis ended with the Union intact, though the issue of nullification remained unsolved.

However, the Crisis showed the extreme sectionalism that overtook the country at the end of the Era of Good Feelings, undermining the nationalism of that era and once again dividing the country along regional lines between the North and the South. Manifest Destiny was an idea that created both nationalism and sectionalism in America, and changed the way Americans thought about themselves in relation to foreign countries and peoples. Manifest Destiny was the idea that Americans had the obligation given to them by God to expand and spread democracy to the west.

This idea came from the feeling of superiority that emerged during the War of 1812, and it placed legitimacy on Americans' " insatiable ambition for land. " Adopted by many Americans, Manifest Destiny created nationalism because gave Americans the shared belief that they lived in a great country under a great democracy. But it also created sectionalism because there were some who saw it for what it truly was: a clever excuse to expand and engage in war to take over foreign lands, a "...villainy clad in the armor of a righteous cause. Some also believed that Manifest Destiny was an excuse to spread slavery to the west, increasing the legislative power of the slave states. Manifest Destiny was one of the main causes of the Mexican-American War, which was started over a border dispute between the US and Mexico. The Mexican-American War and its aftermath, like Manifest Destiny, increased both the force of nationalism and the force of sectionalism in America. The conflict emerged from a border dispute with Mexico, and the adding of Texas to the US as a state.

Sectionalism was created because there were people who opposed the War, claiming that America did not need any more land than it already had. The

main political party that opposed the War was the Whig Party because they feared the rise of slave state power, should the US win and slavery be expanded. Defeating Mexico was relatively easy for the US, since Mexico was an even newer country. For example, in the Battle of Sacramento, the US won easily, suffering few casualties. Easy victories such as this added to the feeling of nationalism in America, making more and more people believe in Manifest Destiny and in the US' superiority.

At the end of the Mexican-American War, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war, giving the US a large swathe of land as the victors, including what would become New Mexico, California, Arizona, Texas, Utah, Colorado, Nevada and Wyoming. This addition of more land reawakened the slavery question of whether new states would be free or slave states, creating more political and regional sectionalism. Before the War, the Missouri Compromise had temporarily ended the slavery debate, drawing a line between territories that would be slave states and ones that would be free states in the Louisiana Purchase territories.

Generally, the Mexican-American War was a huge proponent of nationalism, though sectionalism was present, and would be fuelled by the aftereffects of the War. The American Civil War was the largest and most important proponent of sectionalism in US history because it drew permanent lines between the North and the South, and divided the two regions even more politically and socially. The main cause of the War was the fierce debate about whether or not the federal government had the power to decide whether new states added to the Union would be slave or free states.

The free states, mostly situated in the North, wanted more free states and the slaves states situated in the South wanted more slave states, both for the same reason. Whichever side had more states would have more representation in government, meaning the North could potentially abolish slavery, or the South could make slavery legal and protect its slavery institution. This debate created massive sectionalism, and was clearly split by the invisible line separating the North and the South, which were already split economically and socially.

The North had more industry and more immigrants, which meant it had a more stable economy and a rich, diverse population. The South, on the other hand, had a small population, by comparison, of large plantation owners and small farmers. When Abraham Lincoln was elected President in the Election of 1860, his views on slavery prompted the seven Southern states to secede because they did not believe that he would not abolish slavery. The seven states, which included South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas, declared themselves a new country, and formed the Confederate States of America.

Sectionalism in America had reached its peak, and the Union was literally split in two, causing the North to view the Southern secessionist states and people as traitors and to form prejudices against them that would last for generations to come. After the Attack on Fort Sumter, the Civil War began and the two regions irrevocably split, never truly reuniting. The Civil War broke “...the bonds of society...” and created a state of “ open public war” because Northerners openly persecuted Southerners and Southern states, accusing them of treason.

It is possible to argue that the North was united against the South, and the South was united against the North, but it was not true nationalism because the two regions were fighting against one another, even though they were part of the same country. The American Civil War changed the way Americans in different regions, North and South, viewed their country and each other, generating so much sectionalism that some of those biases and stereotypes never truly faded. America was founded on the force of nationalism, on states that united under a singular cause and felt a kinship with each other, but that were also fundamentally different.

This dichotomy created the path for the forces of nationalism and sectionalism, which would both forever be prevalent in America, but would never contribute so much to America's identity as they did in the nineteenth century. America's economy and political parties were shaped by the First and Second Banks of the US, and also by the sectionalist controversies that surrounded them. The War of 1812 and the Era of Good Feelings were large contributors to nationalism, changing the way America was viewed by its own people and by foreign countries, though they also showcased sectionalism with the Hartford Convention and the Nullification Crisis.

The popular idea of Manifest Destiny and the Mexican-American War continued to change the way American's viewed their country, and contributed to both nationalism and sectionalism. Finally, the divide between the North and the South during the American Civil War forever altered the way the two regions saw one another, contributing to sectionalism. Though both the force of nationalism and the force of sectionalism contributed to the

shaping of the country and of the way American's thought of each other, the force of sectionalism outweighed the force of nationalism.