

# Jacksonian promise



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Daniel Feller's book titled Jacksonian Promise is a perfect introduction to the major themes and topics that highlight the social and political landscape of the United States of America during the period between 1815 and 1840. This book attempts to divert its attention from the negative claims that concern this period. The author views the Jacksonian Era through the eyes of the people that lived in the period and makes a basic claim that this period was characterised by experimentation and innovation (Fellers, 1995). He also claims that the period also had extreme optimism about the potential of the United States of America. The author captures the optimism that filled the Americans after the 1812 war. This optimism is highlighted in terms of economics, advances in technology, religious experimentation, scientific development and political innovation. The emphasis on the confidence of the Americans challenges the historians who depict the Jacksonian period negatively. This book opens with the jubilee anniversary of American independence in 1826 a time when the people of the United States of America celebrated their national birthright of freedom and immense opportunities. Indeed, the people of the United States of America believe that they are blessed with abundant resources and that they had the best government in the world. The people believed that they could accomplish anything in the world and they could remake themselves, their country and the whole world. Daniel Feller traces the impact of this enterprising spirit across a broad range of Jacksonian activities. To start with, he highlights how innovations flourished as the Americans built canals and factories. This was a time when Americans also formed trade unions, campaigned to eradicate social ills, fought to purify their law and politics, mounted moral crusades and religious revivals. In short, they were working for a utopian America. However despite the fact

that the Americans had the same goal, they created programs that competed with each other and they soon clashed. This means that as the citizens were pursuing their hopes for a better future of their country, many divisions curtailed this hopes and these divisions pointed towards the civil war.

Yet despite their common source, competing programs of progress soon clashed with each other. As citizens organized to pursue their hopes for America's future, divisions arose among that pointed ultimately toward civil war. David Feller asserts that that the energy and the exuberance of the Jacksonian era soared to unparalleled heights and they have not been matched by any generation since the collapse of sectional discord in mid 19th century. It is easy for the modern day Americans to criticize these years but the author maintains that these are the years when America first emerged as a nation and also gained a unique character. It is true that there were many other negative things going on in United States of America. These include brutal slavery, female subjugation and intolerance from non Protestants. The book asserts that these issues should have been the centre of the egalitarian ideals of America revolution. The sudden coercion of eastern tribes to desert their ancestral land led to the Trail of Tears as well as the vagaries of the industrial revolution on countless Americans who worked in the exploitative factory systems and the capricious distant markets. However, Daniel Feller, who is an associate professor at the University of Mexico, does not believe that Americans of this period should be judged sing modern standards. He asserts that every era has its glooms

and that subjective judgement of this era would be unfair to the Americans who lived in the era.

A deeper look into the book will reveal that Feller has treated the Jacksonian America rather thematically and not comprehensively. He chooses to look at the causes of events instead of looking at their reverberations down generations. Most historians approach the Jacksonian history from a subjective perspective focusing on the negative things that happened during the period but Feller draws from modern scholarship and secondary sources to construct a retell of the Jacksonian history from the point of view of the people that lived in that period. This results in a neat book with an upbeat tone that reflects and echoes the immense optimism of the Jacksonian Era. This book makes a succinct summary of events and culture of a period that flourished for a short time before it degenerated into sectional strife. However, the main weakness of the book is that the author spends insignificant time on African Americans and the only thing that he tackles comprehensively is the brutal slavery. The book also over-celebrates the Jacksonian era, relegating its unsavoury aspects to the periphery. All in all, Jacksonian promise is one literary masterpiece that one can read time and over again. The author, Daniel Feller seems to have seen and ingested contemporary secondary literature and interesting things to tell. He not only tells them, but he tells them with unassuming eloquence. The author retells familiar events anew, wrapping them in a new, brighter and more compelling package.

At this point I compare this book to three more books that look at the 18th century history of America. The first book is Seneca Falls and the Origin of <https://assignbuster.com/jacksonian-promise/>

the Women rights movements in America by Sally McMullen which looks at the Seneca Falls convention which influenced women movements throughout the 19th century. This book unlike the Jacksonian Promise illustrates the evils that were there during the Jacksonian period. It looks at the legal injustices that women suffered and their disenfranchisement (McMullen, 2001). It looks at the gender inequality that existed during this period like unequal pay and inability to own property. The author discusses religion as an obstacle and impetus to reforms. However, just like the Jacksonian promise that looks at how the enthusiasm of the American broke down in the years prior to the civil war, the Seneca falls and the origins of the women's rights movement also highlights how the women's movement broke down due to internal wrangles, racisms and class differences. These divisions are the same ills that led to the breakdown of America and acted as an impetus to the Civil War as illustrated in the Jacksonian promise. However, it is worth noting that the women's movement survived the civil war only to breakdown during the reconstruction period. The second book thatt I will compare to the Jacksonian Promise is Michael Holt'sThe Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War.

Unlike the Jacksonian Promise which over celebrates the achievements of Americans during the Jacksonian period, the latter is a critical analysis of America during the height of slavery and it asserts that slavery extension played a role in dividing the north and the south setting the stage for the civil war. Jacksonian promise touches on the civil war claiming that it was created by divisions but Michael Holt's book manages to zero in on one of these divisions. The book has some extensive debates about slavery

extension and the issue of extending slavery into the territories created tensions between sections of united states of America that have been at odds with others quite often in the past. Unlike Jacksonian promise which gives a thematic analysis of the Jacksonian period, this book offers a comprehensive analysis of the years just before the civil war giving insight into one of the problems that actually incited the civil war. This was the insistence of slavery extension into territories which was a means for the south to save face. The subject of slavery extension became symbolic of the differences between north and the south creating more controversies such as tariffs and internal government legislations. Holt is not implying that slavery played no role in the coming of the civil war; he only tries to clear some issues that have been misunderstood. He does a good job by supplying the reader with evidence and the historical information that aids in understanding the context in which the slavery debate took place . He makes a conclusion that irresponsible politicians, incited by their own partisan advantage exploited the issue of slavery extension for their own demagogic purposes and the consequences were tragic (Holt, 2005). Unlike the Jacksonian Promise that shies away from criticism of the people and the period it focuses on, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* by Michael Holt spews criticism on politicians whom he feels were responsible for the tragic consequences of slavery extension

The final book that I will compare with the Jacksonian Promise is *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* by Charles Sellers. Unlike the Jacksonian Promise, this book looks at both the negatives and the positives

of the Jacksonian Period. The book starts with the triumph of republicanism in 1815 but zeroes in on the eruption of popular politics and the discontent that arose during the 1819 crisis. However it also looks at the Landmarks of Andrew Jackson's Presidency, the nullification crisis, the bank war and the egalitarian political campaigns (Sellers 1995). Unlike Feller, Sellers frames the Jacksonian issues giving them symbolic and practical force. Seller's book is more balanced than Feller's Jacksonian promise because it celebrates the achievements of the Jacksonian period while at the same time spews criticism on the negative aspects of the Jacksonian period unlike Feller who over-celebrates the Jacksonian period while attempting to sweep its evils under the carpet.