Chapter 11 Lesson 3

Unity and Sectionalism

National Unity:

How did the country change after the War of 1812?

With the end of the War of 1812 the intense divisions that once split the country seemed gone. In their place a feeling in unity existed. In the 1816 presidential election, James Monroe, the Republican candidate, faced no serious opposition. The Federalists, weakened by doubts about their loyalty during the war, barely survived as a national party. Monroe won the election by an overwhelming majority.

A Boston newspaper called this time the Era of Good Feelings. The new president was a living, breathing symbol of this mood. Monroe had been involved in politics since the American Revolution. He wore breeches, or knee-length pants, and powdered wigs – styles no longer in fashion. Yet he had a sense of dignity that represented a united country free of political strife.

Outgoing President James Madison’s last message to Congress in 1817 expressed America’s growing nationalism, or strong loyalty to the nation. The War of 1812 had made clear that Jefferson’s ideals of a limited central government could not meet the needs of a nation in times of crisis. Sounding more like a Federalist than a Republican, Madison urged the federal government to guide the growth of trade and industry. The large Republican majority in Congress agreed. The Republicans, who had once strongly supported states rights, now promoted federal power.

Henry Clay’s American System

Henry Clay, a Republican and speaker of the house, proposed a nationalist program to help the nation grow. Clay’s American System aimed to help the economy in each section of the country and increase the power of the federal government. Calling for higher tariffs, a new Bank of the United States, and internal improvements, including the building of roads, bridges and canals.

Not all congressional leaders agreed with Clay, and they did not accept all of his ideas. Congress did not spend much money on internal improvements, but other parts of the American System did become law.

The Second Bank of the United States

The charter for the First Bank of the US expired in 1811, and Congress let the bank die. In 1816 the Republican majority in Congress brought the national bank back to life. President Madison signed the bill creating the Second Bank of the US.

After the First Bank had closed, many state banks acted unwisely. They made too many loans and allowed too much money into circulation, leading to inflation. As prices rose, American families could buy less and less with each dollar. The absence of a national bank also meant the federal government had no safe place to keep its funds. The 2nd Bank of the US restored order to the money supply, helping American businesses grow.

Competition From Britain

A flood of British goods following the War of 1812 was a challenge the economy faced. British factories often had more advanced technology and methods than American factories. The British turned out goods of higher quality and at a lower price than the Americans. Naturally, buyers preferred these goods. By flooding the US with these goods, the British hoped to keep American businesses from competing.

New tariffs

American manufacturers called for higher tariffs to protect their growing industries. To address this, Congress passed the Tariff of 1816. Unlike earlier revenue tariffs, which were meant to provide income for the federal government, this tariff was designed to protect American manufacturers from foreign completion by placing high taxes on imports. They made imported items more expensive for consumers and encouraged them to buy cheaper, American-made goods.

When Congress passed protective tariffs in 1818 and 1824 that were even higher than the Tariff of 1816, some Americans protested. Southerners were especially angry. They felt that the tariff protected Northern manufacturing at their expense. The South had few factories, so people there so few benefits from the high tariffs. What Southerners did experience were higher prices for the goods they had to buy.

Growing Sectionalism

The tariff dispute highlighted a growing sectionalism – differences in the goals and interests of different parts of the country. Such differences had existed since colonial times. Now, it seemed, they were growing sharper. In fact, they soon brought an end to the Era of Good Feelings.

In the early 1800’s, 3 distinct sections developed in the US – the North, the South, and the West. The North included New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. The South covered what is now the Southeast. The West included the area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. Geography, economics, and history all contributed to sectional differences and differing ways of life in the US. As the differences grew deeper, however people began to wonder whether sectionalism might divide the nation.

Each of these sections had strong voices in Congress in the early 1800’s. Henry Clay of Kentucky represented the West. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina spoke for Southern interests and Daniel Webster of Massachusetts protected the interests of New England. Each leader, though nationalistic, remained concerned with protecting the interests of his own section of the country.

Nationalism and the Supreme Court

In 3 decisions in the early 1800’s, the Supreme Court backed the powers of the national government over the states. During this time, Chief Justice John Marshall provided strong leadership.

Case of Fletcher v. Peck in 1810, the Court ruled that courts could declare acts of a state government void if they violated provisions of the Constitution. In 1819, the Court decided the case of McCulloch v. Maryland. It said that the state of Maryland could not tax the local office of the Bank of the US because it was the property of the national government. Allowing such a tax would give states too much power over the national government.

The Court also ruled that the national bank was constitutional, even though the Constitution did not specifically give Congress the power to create one. Marshall observed that the Constitution specifically gave Congress power to issue money, borrow money, and collect taxes. Congress could also, he reasoned, do whatever was “necessary and proper” to carry out those powers.

In 1824 the Court ruled again in favor of federal government power in Gibbons v. Ogden. The state of New York had granted a monopoly – sole control of an industry – to a steamship operator running ships between New York and New Jersey. Under New York’s law, no other operator could run steamboats on the same route. The Supreme Court said that only Congress had the power to make laws governing interstate commerce, or trade between states.

Missouri Statehood

In 1819 the Missouri Territory asked Congress for admission as a state. Most Missouri settlers had come from Kentucky and Tennessee, which had allowed slavery. They thought slavery should be legal in Missouri as well.

Rep. James Tallmadge (NY) proposed that Missouri gradually abolish slavery in order to be admitted to the Union. The House passed this plan but the Senate blocked it. At the time the population in the North was slightly larger than the population in the South. So the North had 105 members and the South had 81. In the Senate representation was balanced 11 to 11. The addition of Missouri as a free state would put the South in the minority in both houses of Congress.

The Missouri Compromise

Debates in Congress heated to the boiling point. Fearing a split in the Union, Henry Clay suggested the Missouri Compromise. Clay proposed that Maine, in the Northeast, enter the Union as a free-state and Missouri could enter as a slave state. This would keep the balance of power in the Senate – 12 free- states and 12 slave states.

The Missouri Compromise also addressed the question of slavery in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase Territory. The compromise drew a line west from the southern boundary of Missouri – at 36 degrees and 30 minutes N latitude. The compromise blocked slavery north of the line but permitted it south of the line.

The Missouri Compromise offered a temporary solution, it did not address the basic problem. Americans who moved west took their different ways with them, if you were from the South you wanted an economy based on slavery. Northerners wanted an economy based on labor by free people. It was a disagreement which seemed to have no peaceful solution.

Foreign Affairs

How did the US define its role in the Americas?

Foreign Affairs

The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 doubled the size of the US. Questions about the territory’s boundary lingered for years. Some Americans believed the purchase included West Florida, a strip of land between present day Louisiana and the Alabama-Florida border. Spain however continued to govern this region after the purchase.

In 1810 a group captured Spain’s Fort San Carlos in present day Baton Rouge, LA. They declared the independence of the “Republic of West Florida.” That same year Madison claimed Florida from the Mississippi River to the Perdido River as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Spain criticized the action against the US. In 1813 the US took another piece of West Florida by annexing the land between the Pearl and Perdido Rivers.

Spain continued to hold the rest of Florida. This was a source of anger and frustration for white Southerners. Enslaved African Americans from the South often fled to Florida. They knew that Americans had no authority to capture them in Spanish Territory. In addition, many Creek had retreated to Florida as American settlers seized their lands. These Creeks united with enslaved people who had run away and took a new name for themselves – Seminole, meaning “runaway.”

The Invasion of Florida

The Seminoles and Americans in Georgia staged raids against each other. Spain was unable to control the border. In 1818 John C Calhoun, now Secretary of War, ordered US troops under General Andrew Jackson to stop the Seminole raids. In spring of 1818, Jackson entered Florida and seized St. Marks and Pensacola.

The Spanish officials were furious with Jackson’s actions. They also knew they could not hold Florida against the Americans. In 1819 they agreed to the Adams-Onis Treaty, in which they gave up control of Florida, or ceded it to the US. Two years later (1821), the Spanish flag was lowered forever over Pensacola and St. Augustine.

Spain Loses Power

Meanwhile, Spain was losing power in its vast empire. In 1810 a priest named Miguel Hidalgo led a rebellion in Mexico. Hidalgo called for racial equality and the redistribution of land. He was captured by the Spanish and executed but by 1821 Mexico had gained its independence from Spain.

Simon Bolivar, also known as the “Liberator”, led the independence movement that won freedom for the present-day countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Jose de San Martin successfully achieved independence for Chile and Peru. By 1824, Spain had lost control of most of South America.

The Monroe Doctrine

In 1822 4 European nations – France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia – discussed a plan to help Spain regain its American holdings. The possibility of increased European involvement in the Americas troubled President Monroe. There were also concerns about Russia’s intentions for controlling lands in the Northwest.

The president issued a statement on December 2, 1823: The US would not get involved in the internal affairs wars in Europe. It also would not interfere with any existing European colonies in the Americas. At the same time, the statement said, North and South America “are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.” The Monroe Doctrine, as it became known, served as a clear warning to European nations to keep out of the Americas. It became a guiding force in American foreign policy in the decades ahead.