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Companions to Combatants:
Tracing Shifting Perceptions of American Identity
From the War of 1812 to the Civil War

Jude Horning Capstone II Thesis

April 28th, 2023

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The Narrative of Sumner

On May 22nd, 1856, Representative Preston Brooks of North Carolina stormed into the Senate chamber intent to settle a score. He was enraged, insulted even, on behalf of his distant relative and fellow statesman Andrew Butler. Representative Brooks entered the room, hesitated just long enough for it to empty out a bit, and proceeded over to the desk of Senator Charles Sumner, the Republican senator from Massachusetts. Upon reaching him, Brooks calmly and quietly declared, “Sir, you’ve libeled my state and slandered my white-haired old relative, Senator Butler, and I’ve come to punish you for it.”¹

Then Brooks raised his short cane, which he used after sustaining injuries in a proper political duel some 15 years before, and began mercilessly beating Sumner. The first strike to the head was so powerful that Sumner immediately lost his vision. For one long and grueling minute, Sumner received blow after blow from Brooks and his gold-tipped cane. Trapped by the bolted-down desk, Charles Sumner had nowhere to run. Brooks used this to his advantage, continuously beating the man over the head, shoulders, and back. Other senators who had not yet left the chamber couldn’t get to Sumner and stop the assault; they were blocked by Preston Brooks’ co-conspirators.

While such outward violence in the Senate chamber was shocking, it wasn’t without motive. Earlier that week, Senator Butler and another pro-slavery Democrat had been called out in one of the most divisive monologues to be heard on the Senate floor: Charles Sumner’s “*Crimes Against Kansas*” speech. In this speech, which was delivered over the span of two days, Sumner proclaimed, “[Butler] has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course he has chosen a mistress to

¹ As heard and later retold by others in the Senate Chamber, among those being Brooks’ co-conspirators, representatives Laurence Keitt and Henry Edmundson

whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight—I mean the harlot, Slavery.”² Calling out specific political opponents was certainly not unheard of, but Sumner’s accusations, coarse language, and mocking tone evidently went too far. Butler wasn’t even present at the Senate that day. But word traveled to the House of Representatives, so Brooks and a few of his allies hatched a plot of revenge, resulting in bloodshed in the Halls of Congress.

² Sumner, Charles. “The Crime Against Kansas.” Speech. Washington D.C., May 19, 1856. Digital History-University of Texas.

Introduction & Terminology

Why did Representative Brooks choose to assault Sumner? It is known that at such a time in American history, personal disagreements and affronts to honor were settled by duels.³ However, the caning of Charles Sumner showed something previously subdued beneath the surface; the conflict between two camps surrounding issues of American identity and nationalism. According to the southern code of honor, a duel could be fought only between two equals. Whippings, canings, and other forms of physical chastisement were reserved for social inferiors.⁴ Therefore Brooks' method of assault held meaning in a symbolic way. It was a moment in time that signified a point of no return, as the partisan issues of the day had spilled over into the general public. But was the caning of Charles Sumner a natural response to an affront to Butler's character? Or was it the culmination of tensions rising beneath the surface of the nation during the years following the War of 1812?

The answers to these questions lie buried within nearly fifty years of American history. This gap between the War of 1812 and the American Civil War fits into the historic demarcation of the "Antebellum". While many understandings of the term "Antebellum" are often placed in the geographic setting of the American South, it actually extends temporally, rather than physically. For the purposes of this research, Antebellum refers to the 50 year period in which the United States of America experienced deep change and polarization, bubbling under the surface of the "Era of Good Feelings" which eventually culminated in the outbreak of the Civil War.

³ "Code Duello: The Rules of Dueling." Reprinted from 'American Duels and Hostile Encounters,' Chilton Books, 1963." *Public Broadcasting Service*, 2017.

⁴ Sinha, Manisha. "The Caning of Charles Sumner: Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 245

It was during this time that American identity became politicized. In the early 1800s, with the American Revolution still a recent memory, the new nation was once again threatened by Great Britain. The War of 1812 is often overlooked because of its awkward placement in the timeline of the United States, but it has huge implications for how American ideas of patriotism and loyalism developed and spread across the nation. Loyalism in this context does not refer to those in the 13 colonies who supported the British. Instead, it should be understood more broadly as maintaining devotion to a cause, being faithful to a leader, or being dedicated to a community.

Likewise, in order to use the term patriotism, it needs to be placed in proper context. Patriotism is most notably defined as having deep devotion or duty to one's country, especially in times of war. However, as the topic of this research includes the buildup to the American Civil War, it is inappropriate to use such a definition due to the conflict within one single nation. For this reason, patriotism must be defined not as devotion to country, but as an attachment to ethnic, cultural, or political homeland. Using homeland rather than nation opens the possibility for patriotism on both sides of a civil war, no matter which side is being referred to.

Nationalism, the act of identifying with one's own nation and supporting the interests of said nation, may be understood as an extension of patriotism. Whereas patriotism may be specific to times of war or conflict, nationalism stretches beyond this and into times of peace as well. Because of the slight differences among these terms, there may be instances in which it is appropriate to use any. With this in mind, it is important for readers to have a broad sense of how these words are similar and also different in their meanings.

It could be argued that these are merely surface level definitions of these terms, but such definitions are necessary to understand the limitations and arguments of this research. Language such as patriot, nationalist, loyalist, and others holds a certain gravity that requires clarification

in order to be used correctly when making large-scale arguments. By providing this, the intention is not to limit understanding to fit within my own argument, but to place my research within the expansive work done by other historians and to properly orient the reader.

Additionally, it is important to note that these definitions shifted and changed as the landscape of the United States did. Stagnancy in history is rarely observed, which is why we need to accept the flexibility in using terms that may shift based on any number of factors. Identity, nationalism, and patriot are terms that will be used throughout with some flexibility in order to provide appropriate context.

During the Antebellum period, American citizens experienced a separation of beliefs based on geography, social and executive leadership, and collective historical memory. Northern and southern societies held differing perceptions of nationalism, patriotism, and American identity. What it meant to be an American was no longer one universally held truth. Instead, different factions determined some aspects of American identity to be more important. These differences, as seen through the lenses of presidential action, national and state newspaper stories, and social thought, contributed to a deep schism which, among other influences, led to the outbreak of the American Civil War. Just after it had been unified through the struggles of the revolutionary period, American identity was beginning to splinter into the complex fractures that we see today.

Unified Nationalism of 1812

The Antebellum period is set precariously between two of America's biggest milestones, yet it is often overshadowed by the significance of both the Revolutionary era and the Civil War era. During this time, thirteen presidents served in the executive branch of government. The role of the president, as well as the political powers that were held by him, changed and evolved. While much of the period is known for its seemingly stable political climate, there were periods of great shift. Throughout the 1800s, a few administrations took center stage as being "the powerful presidents of the nineteenth century", including Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Abraham Lincoln.⁵ These four presidents were considered powerful because they had the larger influence on shifting the American perspective of the presidential role. For the purpose of providing thorough context in this research, a few presidents have also been selected, with some overlap. The presidential administrations of James Madison, James Monroe, and Andrew Jackson stand out in the context of this project's focus on American identity and political patriotism throughout the 1800s.

James Madison was one of the last "founding fathers" to serve as president, and as such his administration is a relatively clean starting point. Before his presidency, Madison served on President Thomas Jefferson's cabinet as secretary of state. Madison was a supporter of the controversial 1807 Embargo Act, which closed ports of the United States to all exports and blocked British imports.⁶ The Embargo Act was the Jefferson Administration's way of dealing with ongoing French and British interference on the Atlantic Ocean as neutral U.S. ships attempted maritime trade. Madison's steadfast disapproval of naval impressment by Great Britain

⁵ Finkleman, Paul. "The Presidency as an Institution". *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.

⁶ "James Madison." Washington D.C. White House Historical Association, n.d.

as the Napoleonic wars raged in Europe was an indication of rising tensions between the new American nation and the expansive British empire.

When James Madison was elected president in 1808, it seemed impossible for conflict with foreign powers to be avoided. The British Royal Navy regularly engaged in impressment, the seizure of American seamen under the claim of taking British deserters⁷, which was essentially a recruitment by force. Targeting neutral trade vessels or other American ships, Great Britain attempted to replenish her dwindling navy during the conflicts between Britain and France.

For good reason, this was not seen favorably by many American political leaders. However, the politics leading up to the War of 1812 include some fracturing along party lines as well. Thanks to Jefferson and the two party system, America was always semi-divided, especially along the lines of economy, war, and territorial expansion. The question of war with Great Britain became a party issue.⁸ The Democratic Republicans were inherently opposed to Great Britain, and saw war as an opportunity to “appeal to the popular imagination”, thus becoming supportive of the conflict.⁹ Conversely, the Federalists opposed war, as they were worried about the commercial and economic wellbeing of the nation and knew that these domains would be hit hardest in wartime.

When it seemed that tensions between the United States and Great Britain could grow no more, the House Foreign Relations Committee released their report, calling for an immediate appeal to arms.¹⁰ Led by the “War Hawks” in Congress, the committee concluded that war was

⁷ Updyke, Frank A. *The Diplomacy of the War of 1812*. The Albert Shaw Lectures on Diplomatic History. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965. Page 11

⁸ Updyke, Frank A. *The Diplomacy of the War of 1812*. The Albert Shaw Lectures on Diplomatic History. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965. Page 126

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Hickey, Donald R. *The War of 1812: Writings from America's Second War of Independence*. New York: The Library of America, 2013. Page 10

inevitable, and would not only be a great unifier among Americans, but would be necessary for American prosperity. Leaning heavily on Revolutionary-era emotions of patriotism, they wrote, “Americans of the present day will prove to the enemy and the World, that we have not only inherited that liberty which our Fathers gave us, but also the will & power to maintain it. Relying on the patriotism of the Nation, and confidently trusting that the Lord of Hosts will go with us to Battle in a righteous cause, and crown our efforts with success, your Committee recommend an immediate appeal to Arms.”¹¹ This call to action kept the feeling of freedom hard-earned from the American Revolution on center stage, both as an emotional tool to gain support and a reflection of the realities of British interference in American affairs at the time.

In providing the context for the War of 1812, it is important to note that this is by no means an in-depth chronology of the period. Limited by time and the specificity of this research, much of the content about the war and its specific battles has not been omitted. The lens this research has taken in regards to the War of 1812 focuses on American identity, unity under duress, and patriotic loyalism, as defined in the introduction.

The War of 1812 is often associated with Madison’s administration, so much so that it is sometimes called “Mr. Madison’s War” among its other names. Madison officially declared war on June 19th, 1812, some two weeks after the House Foreign Relations Committee released their statement. In this proclamation of war, the president informed the nation that America was engaged in an effort to “obtain a speedy, just and honorable peace”¹² against Great Britain. Expectations did not reflect reality, however, and the War of 1812 continued for the next several years with little gained on either side.

¹¹ Hickey, Donald R. *The War of 1812: Writings from America’s Second War of Independence*. New York: The Library of America, 2013. Page 10

¹² Ibid. Page 37

One of the reasons why the War of 1812 is so often overlooked is its insignificance on the global stage. At a time when Britain and France were engaged in seemingly endless conflict, the War of 1812 was nothing more than a small skirmish. Indecisive leadership from all sides led to a messy conflict with very little progress. Even the reasons for Madison's proclamation of war can be boiled down to hurt feelings. Impressment, blockades, and other forms of trade embargo led to feelings of humiliation, insecurity, and anger. However, even these resentments from American political leaders were significant. "In post-revolutionary America, where men still engaged in duels over individual affront, an affair of honor with another nation was not easily overlooked."¹³ America had to prove to the world that she was a force to be reckoned with, and her people would come together under that claim again.

Regardless of its causes, Mr. Madison's war was waged, and while it may not have had clear winners or losers, it did have an effect on the United States. Particularly, the conflict gave Americans an opportunity to express patriotism, often prompted by a political or military leader. Politically, this appeared in letters like the one that the state representative of North Carolina, Israel Pickens, sent to his constituents in July of 1812. Mirroring President Madison's call to arms, he wrote, "Honest difference of political sentiment has existed among us, as has been the case in every free nation; and in ordinary times this difference has proved a useful check against the abuses of power; but now, having arrayed our country in arms, we have but one cause to support. 'He that is not for his country is against it.' Every patriot hand will be raised together against the common enemy: One heart and one soul will breathe the nation's spirit; and one united nerve will brace the national arm."¹⁴ While acknowledging the differences in party beliefs,

¹³ Finkleman, Paul. "The War of 1812". *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.

¹⁴ Hickey, Donald R. *The War of 1812: Writings from America's Second War of Independence*. New York: The Library of America, 2013. Page 71

Pickens was attempting to unify all Americans to the cause. Fostering a strong sense of national pride was an important step in gaining the support of the people. Those who were devoted to the cause and faithful to their leaders were true patriots in the eyes of Pickens and many other political representatives.

In the 19th century, newspapers were the engines of information. From the very beginning, starting with Madison's declaration of war, the American people were kept in the loop by their local news outlets. All around the nation, newspapers were publishing stories, opinion editorials, and calls to volunteer. In New York, *the Evening Post* published an article seeking everyday Americans to engage. "Volunteers! I esteem your generous and patriotic motives. You have made sacrifices on the altar of your country! and to cover yourselves in glory. Every man who performs a gallant action shall have his name made known to the nation. Rewards and honors await the brave."¹⁵ Many American citizens took to these words, ready and willing to prove loyalty to the new nation in which they lived. If the somewhat coercive voices of the federal government weren't effective in gaining the peoples' support, the more persuasive voices of the local community were.

With the American Revolutionary War still in recent memory, gaining support for another war required careful execution. The people needed to want to fight, so that such a request for support was not seen as an oppressive demand. The media had an important role in not only representing the view of the common folk, but also in gaining support for the actions of the legislative and executive branches of government. The messages were clear and concise; one article from *The Washingtonian* declared, "It is our duty as citizens, to yield due obedience to all the lawful requirements of the government of our choice. We will support our government and country in the present contest in all things which the constitution and laws of our country

¹⁵ Smyth, Alexander. "Call to Arms." *The Evening Post*. November 30, 1812.

require.”¹⁶ Though many publications often blurred the line between editorial and opinion, claims such as this were not uncommon in many cities and towns across the country in order to drum up public support for the war.

Additionally, military leadership was a huge influence for American interpretations of the war. The American military was fighting on several fronts. From the Canadian territory in the North to the newly acquired regions in the Southwest, the Army and Navy were spread quite thin. Not only were there several theaters, but also many different opponents on the battlefield. While Great Britain was coming from the east over the Atlantic, many indigenous tribes were fighting for their territories, hoping that a war between Great Britain and the United States would slow the ceaseless expansion of the U.S. Among these indigenous groups were the Creek, Shawnee, and the Iroquois nations. Many acts of violence between Americans and these Native American nations took the form of one-sided massacres or raids, where an armed group would swoop into a settlement or camp and lay waste to the inhabitants; men, women, and children. Morality and ethics aside, such maneuvers were dangerous because they were often met with swift and strong retribution.

The massacre at Fort Mims, an attack by a small faction of Creek warriors on a small white settlement in Tennessee, demonstrated the need for American honor to be restored as well as retaliation by force for those who committed the initial violence. After a woman and her five children were scalped and murdered, General Andrew Jackson asked the governor of Tennessee for permission to strike back.¹⁷ Again playing into the emotions of the governor and, by extension, the American public, Jackson sought an opportunity to weaponize American nationalism. He claimed that “A competent force can be raised at the shortest notice; for the

¹⁶ Adams, P. “Citizen’s Duty.” *The Washingtonian*. October 26, 1812.

¹⁷ Hickey, Donald R. *The War of 1812: Writings from America’s Second War of Independence*. New York: The Library of America, 2013. Page 25

spirit of the whole population is on fire. They burn to carry fire and sword to the heart of the Creek Nation.”¹⁸ While his claim that a *competent* force is certainly up for debate, it was clear that American citizens could be convinced to fight should the innocent be at risk.

The War of 1812 was a relatively short war, just over two and a half years long. This could be another reason as to why it is so often overlooked. Both sides began to see the fruitlessness of the conflict; seemingly in a stalemate in which neither side could claim undisputed victory over the other. On the British side, war weariness was draining both the enthusiasm of the soldiers and the economy of the empire. Great Britain’s fatigue from the Napoleonic Wars in Europe “provided salvation for the United States”¹⁹ in the end. On the American side, what was supposed to be a brief conflict in the northern territory became a grueling effort with little to show for it.

Two events contributed to the end of the conflict. Attempts at a treaty or armistice were lengthy. Americans “conceded little and gained nothing other than an end to the war.”²⁰ It took twenty weeks of negotiating, just for each side to settle for an armistice rather than an official peace treaty. Britain denied allegations of impressment and refused to renounce the practice, but there was no real use for impressment anymore since Europe was no longer engulfed in war with France. U.S. and British diplomats finally signed the Treaty of Ghent, terminating the war “at the status quo ante, in December 1814.”²¹ However, it needed to be ratified by the United States government across the Atlantic. And since the peace talks had taken place in Belgium, news of the treaty traveled slowly back to the U.S.

¹⁸ Hickey, Donald R. *The War of 1812: Writings from America’s Second War of Independence*. New York: The Library of America, 2013. Page 25

¹⁹ Finkleman, Paul. “The War of 1812” *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001/

Around the same time that diplomats were sending word to their governments that peace had been decided, the British were mounting an offensive in the south, near New Orleans. General Andrew Jackson was in command of the United States military in the region. Jackson, though surrounded on nearly all sides and without naval assistance, managed to repel the British invasion in an overwhelming and surprising victory for the United States. In his own words to James Monroe, Jackson wrote of the bravery and excellence of the American troops in a letter, saying “I cannot speak sufficiently in praise of the firmness and deliberation, with which my whole line received their approach- more could not be expected from veterans inured to war.”²² The British defeat at New Orleans was one of the worst in history, with nearly 3,000 British casualties compared to a meager thirteen from the United States. The memory of Jackson’s victory entered almost immediately into American mythos in a biblical “David vs Goliath” sense. New Orleans was the place where the “plucky U.S. militia defeated the soldiers who had conquered Napoleon.”²³

News of this victory and of the successful treaty of peace spread throughout the nation. Jackson’s victory was lauded by the general public, as newspapers published the story in an increasingly dramatized and sometimes exaggerated fashion. In some ways, it was as significant a victory as the battles at Saratoga and Yorktown in the American Revolution. A newspaper in New York proclaimed, “Glorious News!- New Orleans is rescued... American valor has again come in contact with the veterans of the old world, and the bloodhounds of England are destroyed... Immortal is the name of JACKSON- immortalized is the city of New Orleans. Let no man hereafter despair of the republic.”²⁴ The nation celebrated, unified under its own victory against such a powerful foe. American rights had triumphed over British wrongs, and the

²² Putnam, Waldo S. *Memoirs of Andrew Jackson*. Hartford, Connecticut: Hartford, Conn., 1818.

²³ Indiana University Libraries. “New Orleans 1815.” *Indiana University*, War of 1812, n.d.

²⁴ Indiana University Libraries. “Great News: Defeat of the British at New Orleans,” February 1815.

Madison administration, which had been previously scrutinized for its weak demeanor, was now showered in success. The government that the people chose had once again “asserted the principles of God and Nature against the encroachments of human tyranny.”²⁵

Following the Treaty of Ghent and Jackson’s victory at New Orleans, it seemed as though America was once again unified by nationalist fervor and deep-set patriotism. Many were proud of the stout-hearted and stubborn American forces who kept Great Britain at bay. Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin observed the boost to American morale when he claimed, “the war has renewed and reinstated the national feelings and character which the Revolution had given, and which were daily lessened. The people... are more Americans; they feel and act more as a nation; and I hope the permanency of the Union is thereby secured.”²⁶ The American people had weathered the storm, even after having played the part of the underdog once again.

²⁵ National Intelligencer. “All the Points Gained.” February 23, 1815, Volume 3, Issue 666 edition.

²⁶ Dangerfield, George. *The Awakening of American Nationalism 1812-1828*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1965.
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Monroe, Good Feelings, and Expansion

A new period of peace was ushered in by an old administration. Madison's presidency ended on a high note, and the general public celebrated him as a guardian of the American nation. He became well-respected, and "seemed to enjoy popularity never before granted to any President at the expiration of his term."²⁷ James Madison had unified the national conscience and given the American people a reason to be patriotic. For such a moderate political figure, he had somehow won the respect of his contemporaries. "Notwithstanding a thousand Faults and blunders," John Adams said, "[Madison] has acquired more glory, and established more union; than all his three predecessors... put together."²⁸ Americans could now move on to bigger and better things with a renewed trust in the executive branch.

Madison left office in the good graces of the American people. The positive feelings continued as the next president, James Monroe, took office in 1817. Monroe was popular and the country was in a time of peace. Prosperity without conflict, territorial expansion, and an "Era of Good Feelings"²⁹ were all marks of the Monroe administration.

The eight year presidency of James Monroe is significant on the subject of American expansion. During his first term, Monroe juggled several domestic issues. Largest among these was the Missouri Compromise. In 1820, two territories, Missouri and Maine, were ready for statehood. However, the issue of slavery had already become a roadblock, holding up the required legislation. A compromise which forbade slavery above Missouri's southern boundary was finally passed in 1820, allowing both states admittance to the Union.³⁰ This decision not

²⁷ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.

²⁸ Ralph Ketcham. "Review: James Madison." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. No. 3 (July 2003): 666.

²⁹ From the words of a Boston newspaper editor. Referenced in: Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.

³⁰ Dangerfield, George. *The Awakening of American Nationalism 1812-1828*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1965.
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only divided the United States into a clear “North vs South” geographically, but it also brought some of the political conflicts more clearly into the limelight. The issue of slavery was becoming exceedingly pressing; instead of Americans unifying against foreign powers, they were beginning to bicker among themselves.

While divisions between party lines were increasing, the nation as a whole was gaining traction and significance as a powerhouse of the West. In early December of 1823, Monroe gave his seventh annual message to congress. Buried within this speech was the most significant foreign policy of 19th century America, which came to be known as the Monroe Doctrine. As both a warning against European powers and an emphasis on American expansion, Monroe’s words represented a common thought at the time: the Western Hemisphere was off limits for future colonization by foreign powers in the East. In time, the doctrine became the bedrock of American foreign policy.³¹ American national image was based off of a unique sovereignty fought for over many years, but since the armistice at Ghent, it no longer seemed like that sovereignty was under threat. Americans had discovered a newfound sense of patriotism, having “rallied around the flag, embraced ‘Uncle Sam’ as a national symbol, and adopted ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ as a national anthem.”³² In the end the United States had survived and never again would Americans feel vulnerable to foreign powers. The Monroe doctrine took this one step beyond.

Monroe’s message declared that “the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”³³ Not only was the U.S. seen as unconquerable, but the entire western world was blocked off from further colonial rule. Of

³¹ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001.

³² Ibid

³³ Monroe, James. “President Monroe’s Seventh Annual Message to Congress,” December 2, 1823.

course, this message had its limitations. But the seventh annual message to Congress was significant because of the precedent it set. Monroe demanded that the old empires of the East take their hands off the American continents and make space for a new empire to form. The American people were behind this claim, and the prospect of territorial expansion united them.

Even with the threat of the Missouri Compromise and the effect it had on partisan politics, Monroe's presidency was civil and unified for the most part. The Monroe Doctrine effectively became the foundation of American foreign policy, and it was widely regarded by Americans as a fair claim to the continent. Thus, James Monroe's eight year tenure as president ended in a similar fashion that it started. The nation was confident, expanding, and growing. The time period was memorable for its political blandness. Partisan bickering was "temporarily brushed aside" as the nation plunged into a new wave of prosperity while most of the world was at peace.³⁴

³⁴ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.

The Shift Towards Localism

The period between Monroe and Jackson saw the most extreme shift. When the Monroe Doctrine was proclaimed, the mission of the United States was to expand west, which came with an inherently internalistic view of the nation. Monroe's rather unified administration stood in staunch opposition to the presidency of Andrew Jackson. The election of 1828 demonstrated a newly expanded franchise in American national politics. Jackson was popular because he was a "man of the people" who didn't have very much experience in office, but had experience in the real world.³⁵ In short, he was an everyday American who represented many of the things that constituents sought after. Suddenly, much like Washington, the head of the executive branch was someone that citizens could relate to, especially in the aftermath of conflicts like the War of 1812. Jackson wasn't a political bigwig, nor was he just another leader from the Virginia dynasty. Jackson was a war hero, a brilliant military mind, and a symbol of the success of American expansion, as he was the first president born west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Jackson's administration came with conflict. As soon as he was elected, winning in a landslide against John Quincy Adams, he was forced to clean up some of the previous administration's failures. Without going in too much detail, the presidency of John Quincy Adams was generally seen as a disappointment. Failure to gain support from both his own party and his opponents led to stagnation while he held office. However, one of the things that Adams did which Jackson had to mend was a result of some bold states-rights politics in the late 1820s. The south at this time was working dutifully to expand, which often included taking over native land. In 1825, the Treaty of Indian Springs seized over four million acres of Creek land in Georgia.³⁶ While the signing of the treaty delighted Georgian politicians and citizens, it was seen

³⁵ Dangerfield, George. *The Awakening of American Nationalism 1812-1828*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1965.

³⁶ Ibid. 273

as fraudulent by the Adams administration and thus nullified, even though it was John Quincy Adams' administration that had proclaimed it to begin with. The nullification of the treaty was seen as an abhorrent federal overreach and a violation of states rights. What followed was an incredibly dangerous political wager from Georgia.

George Troup, governor of Georgia from 1823-1827 to rallied the militia and ordered them to be on the watch to repel any hostile invasion from the federal government.³⁷ Additionally, he warned the Secretary of War that any federal interference would be met with violent force. John Quincy Adams' administration did not attempt anything, however, and it seemed that Georgia had secured the states right to remove indigenous populations from their land. This event served as an example of the weakness of John Quincy Adams and his cabinet, as well as one of the key victories for the political debate that was states-rights at the time. Had violence ensued and the federal government intervened with an army of its own, Georgia would have most likely been ostracized by the rest of the American South.³⁸ But the bluff succeeded, and as a result, other states like Alabama and Mississippi began to take a more extreme states-rights position, which showed the beginning of the downfall of a unified nationalism.

The legacy of this treaty and the subsequent solidarity from other southern states is what Andrew Jackson had to deal with as president. At a time when American identity was beginning to unravel at the seams between North and South, Jackson's administration was stuck between advocating for the little guy and keeping the Union intact. As citizens in the South began to replace nationalist pride with more localist tendencies of states-rights, especially centered around the issue of slavery, Jackson was forced to act quickly to maintain control. After Congress passed an economic tariff in 1828 that imposed high duties for raw materials and goods from the South,

³⁷ Dangerfield, George. *The Awakening of American Nationalism 1812-1828*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1965. 273

³⁸ Ibid

South Carolina eventually declared the decision null and void within the borders of the state.³⁹

While Jackson, who had built a political reputation emphasizing the rights of states and advocating for small government, may have agreed that the tariff was out of line, keeping the Union together was more important than a few upset Southern representatives. In 1833, during what became known as the “Nullification Crisis”, Jackson threatened to impose a form of martial law and send federal troops to South Carolina.⁴⁰ A strong push from Jackson kept the threat of civil war at bay, and the nullification crisis ended with the passing of a compromise tariff.

States-rights and nullification ordinances were the Southern safety net, but they also led to extreme divisions in Antebellum America. While Jackson did draw a line against state sovereignty and for the union of states, he also did everything in his power to undermine the ideals of the nation.⁴¹ Refusing to enforce decisions of the Supreme Court and then filling that same court with ardent states-rights men demonstrated an inability to move towards compromise, which was incredibly divisive. Additionally, while George Washington used his popularity to enhance nationalist fervor of the American common folk, Andrew Jackson often fed sectional animosity, not national identity.⁴²

Jackson’s administration demonstrated most clearly the division in American political identity, the failure of his predecessors in unifying the nation ideologically, and the inherent divisions that came with a two party system of government. However, his popularity in the minds of the everyday American citizen contributed to a successful public image. Jackson campaigned as a man of the people, and he maintained this identity throughout his presidency. Part of this came from his ability to rouse the populus against big government, which was certainly unique,

³⁹ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001.

⁴⁰ Dangerfield, George. *The Awakening of American Nationalism 1812-1828*. New York: Harper & Rowe, 1965. 277

⁴¹ Brooke, John L. “Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, No. 1 (Spring 2009).

⁴² Ibid

coming from the head of the executive branch. Party politics contributed as well, and the Democratic party of Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and James Buchanan “viewed each election as a constitutional crisis... in which their role was to rally the people at large against a usurping, consolidating minority.”⁴³ The significance of Jackson cannot be overstated in the context of American identity and perceptions of nationalism. An emphasis on small government, combatting the classism of the social elites, and expanding the franchise of voters were all marks of the successful administration of Andrew Jackson.

⁴³ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001.

A Shift Towards Sectionalism

The social considerations of Jackson's presidency had lasting effects on American citizens, dividing the nation into two distinct camps. There were those who adored the administration, firmly believing that the nation moved forward only when Jacksonian Democrats held office. Conversely, there were many in the North who held the administration under heavy scrutiny due to Jackson's divisive political platform and inability to compromise. Newspaper publications throughout the northern United States pressed for change. One publication in New Hampshire, *The National Eagle*, reminded voters that the presidential election was more than a popularity contest, asking the questions, "What, then, is the duty of every man who has at heart the good of his country? Ought he cling to that individual who is the man of his choice, or display that noble and more expansive patriotism which will sacrifice personal and local considerations for the general interest of the Republic?"⁴⁴

What the journalists at *The National Eagle* wrote in 1835 did more than just pose rhetorical questions for American voters. The newspaper also reminded readers that the presidency was not just a figurehead of the nation, but an institution that should be serving its constituents. Therefore, it was fitting to demand representation. According to those journalists in New Hampshire, the president ought to be a "man of eminent ability, of sterling honesty, of a broad and enlarged patriotism, who will put an end to the reign of abuses and corruptions, which are poisoning the country and undermining her noblest institutions."⁴⁵ Yet Jackson and his party, who demonstrated the exact opposite of many of those aspects, reigned with the support of many in the South as well as the new territories to the West.

⁴⁴ *The National Eagle*. "Politics of the Day." November 27, 1834.

⁴⁵ Ibid

Socio-political divisions in times of peace can be difficult to trace, especially in the Antebellum period when America was split into regions which were often jarringly different. However, the inherent dichotomy between the political parties in the United States was seemingly ever-present. James Madison's administration, while indecisive at times, was able to unify the states against British invasion. Patriots were those brave soldiers and seamen who defended the young nation from being reconquered by Great Britain. In times of peace and prosperity, President Monroe sought to bind the states together and turn toward the future with the mission of territorial expansion. Though brief, the "Era of Good Feelings" proved that the states were capable of being united and civil, as a nation should be. Patriots were those at the bleeding edge of progress, settling new territories and putting aside partisan differences for the betterment of the whole nation.

By the time Jackson came along, the delicate union of states had begun to unravel ideologically. His administration was defined by small government actions, which did little to maintain the collective nationalism of the Union and instead actively pushed for fewer federal intercessions. Patriotism, then, had a different connotation based on location. In the northern states, the issue of slavery and the new push towards industry drew abolitionists and capitalists alike. Conversely, the southern patriots were those who steadfastly held their ground against the forces of the federal government. Neither the nationalist fervor of the War of 1812 nor the good feelings from the Monroe Administration carried into the 1830s and 1840s.

The sectionalism of the later Antebellum period can be clearly understood when reading the newspapers of the day. In a journal published in New Haven, Connecticut, an anonymous author published a piece about the '*National Feeling*' in 1825. They wrote, "Politicians and literary speculators have long been lamenting the want of an *American* feeling in this nation; and

employed all of their resources to find something which should counteract our strong tendency to *localism*.”⁴⁶ While people may have been aware of the virtually nonexistent nationalism that once was present, they had few ideas of how to combat the localist tendencies. As prominent American historian Eric Foner claims, the decades leading up to the Civil War “witnessed the development of conflicting sectional ideologies, each viewing its own society as fundamentally well-ordered, and the other as both a negation of its most cherished values and a threat to its existence.”⁴⁷ This was clearly seen when Jackson utilized his position as a champion of small government to gain support against big government oriented political opponents. Additionally, it is demonstrated in the politics of the Missouri Compromise and the Nullification Crisis. Finally, as seen throughout the narrative of Sumner’s caning, the patriotic national historic memory of the Revolution and the War of 1812 was squandered in favor of personal ideologies.

⁴⁶ Brooke, John L. “Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, No. 1 (Spring 2009).

⁴⁷ Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Conclusion- Sumner Revisited

As referenced throughout, politics and geography existed in close quarters. Northern “progressive” tendencies of abolition opposed the South’s “peculiar institution” of slavery.⁴⁸ The legacy of the Missouri Compromise as well as the drama of the Nullification Crisis led to more extreme and outward contrast. In both the North and South, the new sectional nationalisms reached a defining moment when each side defined the other as illegitimate and outside the nation.⁴⁹ This breaking point is clearly defined when looking at the case of Charles Sumner. The violence against an abolitionist republican by a pro-slavery democrat was an extension of the strain between North and South. Yes, the *Crimes against Kansas* speech was intense and certainly inflammatory, but at the heart of the violence was a nation disturbed, not just hurt feelings. Representative Brooks was defending his southern faction from what they deemed “oppressive northern infringement.”⁵⁰

The event immortalized both men as heroes of their respective camps. Newspapers in the South jumped at the opportunity to praise Brooks’ actions. The *Richmond Whig*, a Virginian newspaper, wrote, “A glorious deed! A most glorious deed! Mr. Brooks, of South Carolina, administered to Senator Sumner, a notorious abolitionist from Massachusetts, an effectual and classic caning. We are rejoiced. The only regret we feel is that Mr. Brooks did not employ a slave whip instead of a stick. We trust the ball may be kept in motion.”⁵¹ Another newspaper from Virginia, the *Richmond Examiner*, declared, “The abolitionists have been suffered to run too long without collars. They must be lashed into submission. Sumner, in particular, ought to have

⁴⁸ Finkleman, Paul. *Encyclopedia of the United States in the Nineteenth Century*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001.

⁴⁹ Brooke, John L. “Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, No. 1 (Spring 2009).

⁵⁰ Sinha, Manisha. “The Caning of Charles Sumner: Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 233–62.

⁵¹ “Southern Newspapers Praise the Attack on Charles Sumner,” Social History for Every Classroom (American Social History Project), <https://shcp.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1548>.

nine-and-thirty [lashes] every morning... Senator Wilson...[is] also dying for a beating. Will not somebody take him in hand?... If need be, let us have a caning or cowhiding [whipping] every day.”⁵² The nation was ideologically torn in two. The divisive politics of Jackson and his successors had come to fruition in the clear example of Sumner’s caning.

The later years of the Antebellum period demonstrated a division, though not always a clear one, in national identity. Geography, social and executive leadership, and collective historical memory muddled perceptions of nationalism. The issues of states-rights as they pertained to territorial expansion and slavery, as well as the distrust of big government in the Antebellum South set the United States on a warpath of differing ideologies. American philosopher and essayist Henry David Thoreau often wrote on the politics and struggles of the day. In his essay *Civil Disobedience*, the staunch abolitionist wrote about the shift that needed to occur in American politics in order to prevent the destruction of the nation. “I heartily accept the motto, ‘That government is best which governs least’; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically... But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.”⁵³ Thoreau had his finger firmly planted on the pulse of American domestic politics at the time, as well as an eerily accurate gift of foresight.

Within just fifty years, the United States had gone from the underdogs fighting an empire to an empire of their own. The nation was forced to deal with the struggles of a two party system in which each side was seemingly bent on destroying the other, showing that the fracturing of American identity began as soon as the revolution was won. Past oversight from executive

⁵² “Southern Newspapers Praise the Attack on Charles Sumner,” Social History for Every Classroom (American Social History Project), <https://shcp.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1548>.

⁵³ Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*. Boston, MA: Ticknor and Fields, 1854.

leadership such as the failure of the Federalist party to commit to nation building in 1800 or the post-Federalist effort at an artificial construction of nationalism demonstrated an unwilling and unsuccessful attempt at unity.⁵⁴ Having examined the early 19th century and having placed Antebellum politics in their proper context, it is clear that the caning of Charles Sumner goes beyond an affront to honor. It was a visual representation of the dangers of localist politics, and a reminder to a young nation that constant compromising and concessions inevitably result in bipartisan dissatisfaction.

⁵⁴ Brooke, John L. "Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis." *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, No. 1 (Spring 2009).

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