CHAPTER 12

The Second War for Independence and the Upsurge of Nationalism, 1812–1824

# Focus Questions

1. What were the main military engagements in the War of 1812 and what was the outcome of each?

2. In what ways did nationalism, inspired by the War of 1812, manifest itself?

3. How did Henry Clay’s American System aim to increase national unity and economic development?

4. What were the circumstances that resulted in the Missouri Compromise?

5. How did Chief Justice John Marshall’s Supreme Court decisions strengthen federal power and defend the Constitution’s economic provisions?

6. What motivated the creation of the Monroe Doctrine and what were its main assertions?

# Chapter Themes

**Theme:** The American effort in the War of 1812 was plagued by poor strategy, political divisions, and increasingly aggressive British power. Nevertheless, the United States escaped with a stalemated peace settlement and soon turned its isolationist back to the Atlantic European world.

**Theme:** The aftermath of the War of 1812 produced a strong surge of American nationalism that was reflected in economics, law, and foreign policy. The rising nationalistic spirit and sense of political unity was, however, threatened by the first severe sectional dispute over slavery.

**Theme:** Chief Justice John Marshall’s Supreme Court strengthened the federal government by supporting a loose construction of the Constitution, asserting the federal judiciary’s power over state courts, and enforcing economic provisions in the Constitution (interstate commerce, sanctity of contracts).

chapter summary

Americans began the War of 1812 with high hopes of conquering Canada. But their strategy and efforts were badly flawed, and before long, British and Canadian forces had thrown the United States on the defensive. The Americans fared somewhat better in naval warfare, but by 1814, the British had burned Washington and were threatening New Orleans. The Treaty of Ghent ended the war in a stalemate that solved none of the original issues. But Americans counted the war a success and increasingly turned away from European affairs and toward isolationism.

Despite some secessionist talk by New Englanders at the Hartford Convention, the ironic outcome of the divisive war was a strong surge of American nationalism and unity. Political conflict virtually disappeared during the Era of Good Feelings under President Monroe. A fervent new nationalism appeared in diverse areas of culture, economics, and foreign policy.

The Era of Good Feelings was soon threatened by the Panic of 1819, caused largely by excessive land speculation and unstable banks. An even more serious threat came from the first major sectional dispute over slavery, which was postponed but not really resolved by the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

Under Chief Justice John Marshall, the Supreme Court further enhanced its role as the major force upholding a powerful national government and conservative defense of property rights. Marshall’s rulings partially checked the general movement toward states’ rights and popular democracy.

Nationalism also led to a more assertive American foreign policy. Andrew Jackson’s military adventures in Spanish Florida resulted in the cession of that territory to the United States. American fears of European intervention in Latin America encouraged Monroe and J. Q. Adams to lay down the Monroe Doctrine.

# developing the chapter: suggested lecture or discussion topics

* Examine the military stalemate of the war, particularly the American failure to conquer Canada and the relative success of American naval forces on the Great Lakes.

REFERENCE: Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812* (1989).

* Examine Madison’s largely unsuccessful role as wartime president, in contrast with his genius as political theorist, constitution-maker, and legislative leader. Indicate the various international and domestic divisions that he proved unable to navigate in the White House.

REFERENCE: Jack N. Rakove, *James Madison and the Creation of the American Republic* (1990).

* Explain the conflict of 1819–1820 about Missouri as the first clear indication of a deep-seated sectional division over slavery. Emphasize the two essential principles of sectional balance enshrined in the compromise: equal Senate representation and the 36°30′ line as the northern boundary of slavery.

REFERENCE: Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy, 1819–1821* (1953).

* Consider the causes and consequences of the Monroe Doctrine. The emphasis might be on the difference between the doctrine’s original context (the monarchist threat to the new Latin American republics) and the controversial ways in which the doctrine has sometimes been invoked in American history. Explain the relationship of the doctrine to the permanent issue of the United States’ interactions with its Latin American neighbors.

REFERENCE: James E. Lewis, *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood* (1998).

# for further interest: additional class topics

* Consider the War of 1812 in relation to American nationalism. Discuss the way that Andrew Jackson’s victory in a battle, fought afterthe peace treaty had been signed, enabled Americans to emerge with flag-waving patriotism after a bungled and divisive war.
* Review the demands made in the Hartford Convention’s final report. Were they reasonable remedies and thoughtful modifications to the federal government or were they simply partisan arguments for sectional self-interest?
* Analyze the Federalist opposition and the Hartford Convention. Consider whether the charge of treason was justified.
* Discuss the war in relation to Canada. Consider how it might look from a Canadian perspective.
* What might have been the official response to the Monroe Doctrine in Britain, in the continental Europe (specifically France and Spain), and in Latin America?
* Analyze one or more of Marshall’s rulings—for example, *McCulloch* v. *Maryland*—to show how he strengthened conservative federal power against the democratizing tendencies of states’ rights.
* Discuss the mixed motives behind the Monroe Doctrine and the ambiguous meanings that could be attached to it. Consider whether its primary purpose was to thwart Britain and the Old World powers, to protect the Latin American republics, or assert American security interests.

# character sketches

## Francis Scott Key (1779–1843)

Key was the author of “The Star-Spangled Banner” during the War of 1812.

The scion of a well-off Maryland family, he was an influential young Washington attorney at the time of the war. Having been sent aboard a British ship to negotiate the release of an American doctor captured during the British attack on Washington, Key spent the night there when the ship began bombarding Fort McHenry. The following morning he was thrilled to see the American flag.

He wrote the poem rapidly on an envelope. A few days later it was printed in the *Baltimore American* and was soon being sung in taverns and theaters in Baltimore and elsewhere in the country to the tune of the English drinking song “To Anacreon in Heaven.” Key may have had the tune in mind when he composed the poem.

He wrote only a few other light verses in his life. He later became the U.S. district attorney for the District of Columbia and carried out negotiations with southwestern Indians.

**Quote:** “Oh, thus be it ever, when free men shall stand

Between their loved homes, and the war’s desolation

Blessed with vict’ry and peace, may the heaven-rescued land

Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation.

Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just

And this be our motto, ‘In God is our trust.’

And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave

O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

(Last verse of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” 1814)

REFERENCE: George Suejda, *History of the Star-Spangled Banner from 1814 to the Present* (1969).

## James Monroe (1758–1831)

Monroe was the last of the Virginia dynasty of presidents who presided over the Era of Good Feelings.

He owed much of his political rise to Jefferson, and in 1788, he purchased a new plantation in order to live closer to Monticello.

Although not present at the Constitutional Convention, Monroe was a delegate to the Virginia ratifying convention, where he opposed the Constitution. He was thus the only Anti-Federalist elected president.

As minister to France in 1794, Monroe was sharply criticized for his excessively friendly remarks to the Revolutionary National Convention. He maneuvered for the presidency as early as 1809 but backed down when Madison became the clear favorite.

He was diligent, persevering, efficient, but rather unimaginative and colorless, especially compared with the other Virginia presidents.

**Quote:** “The Missouri question absorbs, by its importance, and the excitement it has produced, every other.… I have never known a question so menacing to the tranquillity and even the continuance of our Union as the present one. All other subjects have given way to it and appear to be almost forgotten.” (Letter to Jefferson, 1820)

REFERENCE: Harry Ammon, *James Monroe: The Quest for National Identity* (1971).

## John C. Calhoun (1782–1850)

Calhoun was Monroe’s secretary of war, senatorial spokesman for the South, and a brilliant political theorist and defender of slavery.

He was among Clay’s young war hawks, who advocated the War of 1812, and an ardent nationalist in the years following the war. After seeking the presidency in 1824, he settled for the vice presidency under Adams and then under Jackson.

His extended feud with Jackson began when Jackson learned that Calhoun had opposed Jackson’s invasion of Florida in cabinet discussions. It reached fever pitch when Calhoun’s socially conscious wife snubbed Peggy Eaton, forcing Calhoun’s resignation from the vice presidency.

Once he became a purely sectional figure, Calhoun spent much time writing political theory, including his doctrine of the concurrent majority. He also proposed the creation of a dual presidency, with a northern president and a southern president each having mutual veto power.

He died shortly after his last speech was read for him in the Senate during the debate over the Compromise of 1850. His last words were, “The South, the poor South.”

**Quote:** “Our fate as a people is bound up in the question of preserving slavery. If we yield, we will be extirpated; but if we successfully resist we will be the greatest and most flourishing people of modern time. It is the best substratum of population in the world; and one on which great and flourishing commonwealths may be most easily and safely reared.” (Speech, 1838)

REFERENCE: John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union* (1988).

## John Marshall (1755–1835)

Marshall was the chief justice who originated judicial review and established the Supreme Court as an influential branch of government.

Born in a log cabin on the frontier, he was taught primarily by his father. He fought in many Revolutionary battles and served at Valley Forge, remarking that the Revolution made him “confirmed in the habit of considering America as my country and Congress as my government.”

Although he moved in aristocratic Federalist circles in Washington, Marshall was the most democratic of men. He liked to drink whiskey in taverns with ordinary country people, do his own marketing, and play quoits and horseshoes with farmers. When not in his judicial robes, he wore dirty, shabby clothes and even his casual cousin Jefferson considered his appearance unkempt.

**Quote:** “There, Brother Story, that’s the law. Now you find the precedents.” (Comment to Justice Joseph Story, c. 1820)

REFERENCE: Leonard Baker, *John Marshall: A Life in Law* (1974).

# questions for class discussion

1. Is it valid to call the War of 1812 “America’s worst-fought war”? Was the cause of the failure essentially military or was it an inevitable result of the political disunity over the war’s purposes? (One might compare the War of 1812 to other politically divisive conflicts like the Mexican War and the Vietnam War.)

2. Examine the Treaty of Ghent. Did the United States win this peace agreement? What international forces made this peace settlement a reality? Was the United States lucky that Britain had more important priorities than fighting the United States?

3. To what degree was the War of 1812 truly a Second War for Independence? Consider the battles, the politics, and the peace settlement. Compare it with the Revolutionary War. (See boxed quote on page 231.)

4. What was significant about the strong spirit of nationalism that appeared in America from 1815 to 1824? What were its accomplishments?

5. Did the Missouri Compromise effectively deal with the sectional conflict over slavery or merely shove it out of view? (See boxed quotes by Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on page 237.)

6. Did the Supreme Court decisions under John Marshall’s leadership extend federal power too much? Is it appropriate that someone who was not elected should have such tremendous power to shape the government and the law? Is it appropriate that a political party’s ideology be implemented through the judiciary? (See boxed quote on page 240.)

7. Was the Monroe Doctrine a valuable assertion of the principles of liberty and self-determination in the Americas against potential European and monarchical intrusion or was it, in effect, an early manifestation of a patronizing and potentially imperialistic attitude by the United States toward Latin America?

# makers of america: settlers of the old northwest

## Questions for Class Discussion

1. What historical factors worked to make the Old Northwest (today’s Midwest) a distinctive region with its own identity? What perspectives divided the region’s settlers?

2. Was it inevitable that the Old Northwest would eventually align itself with the Northeast in the struggles that led up to the Civil War? Why did even settlers originally from the South tend to dislike the southern plantation elite?

## Suggested Student Exercises

* Trace the patterns of settlement and institution-building across both the southern and northern tier of the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Perhaps contrast the Western Reserve area of northern Ohio, heavily settled by Yankees, with the Ohio River counties of southern Ohio, heavily settled by pioneers from Virginia and Kentucky.
* Use a current religious atlas of the United States to discover how persistent the original patterns of religious settlement remain in the Old Northwest states; for example, are Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ still more prominent in the southern tier and Presbyterians and Congregationalists (United Church of Christ) still stronger in the northern tier? The patterns of denominational sponsorship of colleges in the region might also be examined.

**CONTENDING VOICES: KLEMENS VON METTERNICH VS. COLOMBIAN NEWSPAPER**

**Questions for Class Discussion**

1. How did the Austrian foreign minister view the Monroe Doctrine?

2. Contrast the European reaction to the Monroe Doctine with the Latin American response reflected in the Colombian newspaper. Did this Latin American perspective accurately reflect all the policy motives of President Monroe and Secretary of State Adams in formulating the Monroe Doctrine?