

JAMES MONROE

FROM President Monroe's First Annual Address to Congress (December 1817)

In 1816 the old Federalist Party, with its last gasps, nominated Rufus King to run for the presidency against the Democratic-Republican Party's candidate, James Monroe. It was no contest. Monroe represented continuity to Americans who were grappling with escalating changes. Many, if not most, embraced change, but perhaps in an attempt to control it, they—or more precisely, their electors—seemed to desire stability in the White House. Monroe was another Virginian, following Madison, Jefferson, and Washington, and he had been engaged in public service since the Revolution—as first soldier, then statesman. Monroe, reflecting both his personal as well as his country's history, wanted to ensure national autonomy and power against international pressures even as he acted to restrict the application of that power upon the states. Monroe served for two terms; in the first he reaped the benefits of postwar peace, prosperity, and pride. It was the so-called "Era of Good Feelings."

From Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *The Writings of James Monroe*, vol. VI (1902; New York: AMS Press, 1969), pp. 33–44.

WASHINGTON, December 2, 1817.

*Fellow Citizens of the Senate and
of the House of Representatives:*

At no period of our political existence had we so much cause to felicitate ourselves at the prosperous and happy condition of our country. The abundant fruits of the earth have filled it with plenty. An extensive and profitable commerce has greatly augmented our revenue. The public credit has attained an extraordinary elevation. Our preparations for defense in case of future wars, from which, by the experience of all nations, we ought not to expect to be exempted, are advancing under a well digested system with all the despatch which so important a work will admit. Our free government founded on the interest and affections of the people, has gained and is daily gaining strength. Local jealousies are rapidly yielding to more gen-

erous, enlarged and enlightened views of national policy. For advantages so numerous and highly important it is our duty to unite in grateful acknowledgments to that Omnipotent Being from whom they are derived and in unceasing prayer that he will endow us with virtue and strength to maintain and hand them down in their utmost purity to our latest posterity.

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The negotiations with Spain for spoliation on our commerce and the settlements of boundaries remains essentially in the state it held by the communications that were made to Congress by my predecessor. . . .

It was anticipated at an early stage that the contest between Spain and the Colonies would become highly interesting to the United States. It was natural that our citizens should sympathize in

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events which affect probable also that th along our coast and i occasionally interrupt wise affect the pers citizens. These anti Such injuries have b ing under authority which redress has in Through every stag States have mainta giving aid to neither ships or munitions contest not in the li or rebellion, but a nearly equal, havir rights. Our ports every article, the fr of our citizens whi has been equally fr onies establish the now to state that nor would accept commerce or othe open to all other that event, become any obligation to may not then be th of a fair reciproci

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events which affected their neighbors. It seemed probable also that the prosecution of the conflict along our coast and in contiguous countries would occasionally interrupt our commerce and otherwise affect the persons and the property of our citizens. These anticipations have been realized. Such injuries have been received from persons acting under authority of both the parties, and for which redress has in most instances been withheld. Through every stage of the conflict the United States have maintained an impartial neutrality, giving aid to neither of the parties in men, money, ships or munitions of war. They have regarded the contest not in the light of an ordinary insurrection or rebellion, but as a civil war between parties nearly equal, having as to neutral powers equal rights. Our ports have been open to both, and every article, the fruit of our soil or of the industry of our citizens which either was permitted to take has been equally free to the other. Should the Colonies establish their independence, it is proper now to state that this Government neither seeks, nor would accept from them any advantage in commerce or otherwise which will not be equally open to all other nations. The Colonies will, in that event, become independent States, free from any obligation to or connection with us, which it may not then be their interest to form on the basis of a fair reciprocity.

In the summer of the present year an expedition was set on foot against East Florida by persons claiming to act under the authority of some of the Colonies, who took possession of Amelia Island at the mouth of the St. Marys River, near the boundary of the State of Georgia. As this Province lies Eastward of the Mississippi, and is bounded by the United States and the ocean on every side and has been the subject of negotiation with the Government of Spain as an indemnity for losses by spoliation or in exchange for territory of equal value westward of the Mississippi—a fact well known to the world—it excited surprise that any countenance should be given to this measure by any of the colonies. As it would be difficult to reconcile it with the friendly relations existing between the United States and the colonies, a doubt

was entertained whether it had been authorized by them or any of them. This doubt has gained strength by the circumstances which have unfolded themselves in the prosecution of the enterprise, which have marked it as a mere private unauthorized adventure. Projected and commenced with an incompetent force, reliance seems to have been placed on what might be drawn, in defiance of our laws, from within our limits; and of late, as their resources have failed, it has assumed a more marked character of unfriendliness to us, the island being made a channel for the illicit introduction of slaves from Africa into the United States, an asylum for fugitive slaves from the neighboring States, and a port for smuggling of every kind.

A similar establishment was made at an earlier period by persons of the same description in the Gulf of Mexico at a place called Galvezton within the limits of the United States, as we contend, under the cession of Louisiana. This enterprise has been marked in a more signal manner by all the objectionable circumstances which characterized the other and more particularly by the equipment of privateers which have annoyed our commerce and by smuggling. These establishments, if ever sanctioned by any authority whatever, which is not believed, have abused their trust and forfeited all claim to consideration. A just regard for the rights and interests of the United States required that they should be suppressed, and orders have been accordingly issued to that effect. . . .

* * *

From several of the Indian tribes inhabiting the country bordering on Lake Erie purchases have been made of lands on conditions very favorable to the United States, and, as it is presumed, not less so to the tribes themselves.

By these purchases the Indian title, with moderate reservations, has been extinguished to the whole of the land within the limits of the State of Ohio, and to a part of that in the Michigan Territory and of the State of Indiana. From the Cherokee tribe a tract has been purchased in the State of Georgia and an arrangement made by which in

exchange for lands beyond the Mississippi, a great part, if not the whole of the land belonging to that tribe eastward of that river in the States of North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee and in the Alabama Territory will soon be acquired. By these acquisitions and others that may reasonably be expected soon to follow, we shall be enabled to extend our settlements from the inhabited parts of the State of Ohio along Lake Erie into the Michigan Territory, and to connect our settlements by degrees through the State of Indiana and the Illinois Territory to that of Missouri. A similar and equally advantageous effect will soon be produced to the South, through the whole extent of the States and Territory which border on the waters emptying into the Mississippi and the Mobile. In this progress, which the rights of nature demand, and nothing can prevent, marking a growth rapid and gigantic, it is our duty to make new efforts for the preservation, improvement, and civilization of the native inhabitants. The hunter state can exist only in the vast uncultivated desert. It yields to the more dense and compact form and greater force of civilized population; and of right it ought to yield, for the earth was given to mankind to support the greatest number of which it is capable, and no tribe or people have a right to withhold from the wants of others more than is necessary for their own support and comfort. It is gratifying to know that the reservations of land made by the treaties with the tribes on Lake Erie were made with a view to individual ownership among them and to the cultivation of the soil by all, and that an annual stipend has been pledged to supply their other wants. It will merit the consideration of Congress whether other provision, not stipulated by treaty ought to be made for these tribes and for the advancement of the liberal and humane policy of the United States toward all the tribes within our limit, and more particularly for their improvement in the arts of civilized life.

Among the advantages incident to these purchases and to those which have preceded, the security which thereby may be afforded to our inland frontiers is peculiarly important. With a strong barrier, consisting of our own people, thus

planted on the Lakes, the Mississippi, and the Mobile, with the protection to be derived from the regular force, Indian hostilities, if they do not altogether cease, will henceforth lose their terror. Fortifications in those quarters to any extent will not be necessary, and the expense attending them may be saved. A people accustomed to the use of firearms only, as the Indian tribes are, will shun even moderate works which are defended by cannon. Great fortifications will therefore be requisite in future only along the coast and at some points in the interior connected with it. On these will the safety of our towns and the commerce of our great rivers, from the Bay of Fundy to the Mississippi, depend. On these, therefore, should the utmost attention, skill and labor be bestowed. A considerable and rapid augmentation in the value of all the public lands, proceeding from these and other obvious causes, may henceforward be expected. The difficulties attending early emigrations will be dissipated even in the most remote parts. Several new States have been admitted into our Union to the west and South and Territorial governments, happily organized, established over every other portion in which there is vacant land for sale. In terminating Indian hostilities, as must soon be done, in a formidable shape at least, the emigration which has heretofore been great, will probably increase and the augmentation in its value be in like proportion. The great increase of our population throughout the Union will alone produce an important effect, and in no quarter will it be so sensibly felt as in those in contemplation. The public lands are a public stock which ought to be disposed of to the best advantage for the nation. The nation should therefore derive the profit proceeding from the continual rise in their value. Every encouragement should be given to the emigrants consistent with a fair competition between them, but that competition should operate in the first sale to the advantage of the nation rather than of individuals. . . .

When we consider the vast extent of territory within the United States, the great amount and value of its productions, the connection of its parts, and other circumstances on which their

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prosperity and happiness depend, we cannot fail to entertain a high sense of the advantage to be derived from the facility which may be afforded in the intercourse between them by means of good roads and canals. Never did a country of such vast extent offer equal inducements to an improvement of this kind, nor ever were consequences of such magnitude involved in them. As this subject was acted on by Congress at the last session, and there may be a disposition to revive it at the present, I have brought it into view for the purpose of communicating my sentiments on a very important circumstance connected with it with that freedom and candor which a regard for the public interest and a proper respect for Congress require. A difference of opinion has existed from the first formation of our Constitution to the present time among our most enlightened and virtuous citizens respecting the right of Congress to establish such a system of improvement. Taking into view the trust with which I am now honored, it would be improper after what has passed that this discussion should be revived with an uncertainty of my opinion respecting the right. Disregarding early impressions, I have bestowed on the subject all the deliberation which its great importance and a just sense of my duty required, and the result is a settled conviction in my mind that Congress do not possess the right. It is not contained in any of the specified powers granted to Congress, nor can I consider it incidental to or a necessary means, viewed on the most liberal scale, for carrying into effect any of the powers which are specifically granted. In communicating this result, I cannot

resist the obligation which I feel to suggest to Congress the propriety of recommending to the States, the adoption of an Amendment to the Constitution which shall give to Congress the right in question. . . .

* * *

In contemplating the happy situation of the United States, our attention is drawn with peculiar interest to the surviving officers and soldiers of our Revolutionary Army, who so eminently contributed by their services to lay its foundation. Most of those very meritorious citizens have paid the debt of nature and gone to repose. It is believed that among the survivors there are some not provided for by existing laws, who are reduced to indigence and even to real distress. These men have a claim on the gratitude of their country, and it will do honor to their country to provide for them. . . .

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REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Did Monroe see nationalism or sectionalism as the predominant force in American politics? Why?
2. How did the insurrections in Spain's colonies affect American foreign policy?
3. Was security the dominant theme of this address? Explain.
4. How did Monroe describe American civilization and its destiny?

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Observations on Jackson and the Spanish Florida Situation (1818–19)

President Monroe made John Quincy Adams his secretary of state. It was a provident appointment, for Adams had long been engaged in diplomacy to good effect for his country: he had been part of the commission that negotiated the Treaty of Ghent which ended the War of 1812, and he had represented the United States in the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain. Adams had also served in the Senate, the legislative branch with the duty to advise the president on treaties and ambassadors. His heritage, education, and experience molded his perceptions and policies to the point that he generally—the issue of slavery would later test him on this—put nation before section or state. He believed that the United States should have dominion over the North American continent and labored to that end. As secretary of state he negotiated the Convention of 1818 with the British, establishing among other things boundary and fishing rights, as well as the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819 with Spain (also called the Adams-Onís Treaty). Adams was also a major influence in the creation of what has become known as the Monroe Doctrine. He could so expand American property and power because of a growing American population, economy, and militarism. The latter was seen in the actions of, and popular reactions to (especially in the South and West), General Andrew Jackson's campaign against the Seminole Indians in 1817–18.

From Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794–1845* (1928; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 196–201. [Editorial insertions appear in square brackets—Ed.]

* * *

May. 4. [1818]—The President sent me word this morning that he had returned from his short tour to Virginia. When I called at his house, I found there Mr. Calhoun and Mr. Crowninshield: Mr. Crawford came in shortly afterwards. The dispatches from General Jackson were just received, containing the account of his progress in the war against the Seminole Indians, and his having taken the Spanish fort of St. Mark's, in Florida, where they had taken refuge. They hung some of the Indian prisoners, as it appears, without due regard

to humanity. A Scotchman by the name of Arbuthnot was found among them, and Jackson appears half inclined to take his life. Crawford some time ago proposed to send Jackson an order to give no quarter to any white man found with the Indians. I objected to it then, and this day avowed that I was not prepared for such a mode of warfare.

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June 9.—We spent the evening at the French Minister Hyde de Neuville's, a small musical party. Mr. Bagot spoke to me of certain publications in

the newspaper sentences of General Jackson and the Indians in this evidence again on the part of which he said dation.

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July 10.—Had de Neuville, 1 affairs with Sp Floridas to th for the inden urged that we ern boundary He urged thi than an hou against Gene: good friend t back, he said two, perhaps could come differences.

July 15.—President's, fi of deliberatic actions in Fl sacola. The I Cabinet, exce acted not or tions: that I which canno disavowed t abandoned l there was no of his instru tified by the

the newspapers, mentioning the execution by sentences of court-martial, under the orders of General Jackson, of two Englishmen, named Arbuthnot and Ambrister, taken with the Seminole Indians in this war. These publications say that the evidence against them proved the greatest perfidy on the part of the British Government. Mr. Bagot was very much hurt by this charge of perfidy, for which he said there was not the slightest foundation.

June 18.—The President spoke of the taking of Pensacola by General Jackson, contrary to his orders, and, as it is now reported, by storm. This, and other events in this Indian war, makes many difficulties for the Administration.

* * *

July 10.—Had an interview at the office with Hyde de Neuville, the French Minister—all upon our affairs with Spain. He says that Spain will cede the Floridas to the United States, and let the lands go for the indemnities due to our citizens, and he urged that we should take the Sabine for the western boundary, which I told him was impossible. He urged this subject very strenuously for more than an hour. As to Onis's note of invective against General Jackson, which I told him as a good friend to Onis he should advise him to take back, he said I need not answer it for a month or two, perhaps not at all, if in the meantime we could come to an arrangement of the other differences.

July 15.—Attended the Cabinet meeting at the President's, from noon till five o'clock. The subject of deliberation was General Jackson's late transactions in Florida, particularly the taking of Pensacola. The President and all the members of the Cabinet, except myself, are of opinion that Jackson acted not only without, but against, his instructions: that he has committed war upon Spain, which cannot be justified, and in which, if not disavowed by the Administration, they will be abandoned by the country. My opinion is that there was no real, though an apparent, violation of his instructions: that his proceedings were justified by the necessity of the case, and by the mis-

conduct of the Spanish commanding officers in Florida. The question is embarrassing and complicated, not only as involving that of an actual war with Spain, but that of the Executive power to authorize hostilities without a declaration of war by Congress. There is no doubt that defensive acts of hostility may be authorized by the Executive; but Jackson was authorized to cross the Spanish line in pursuit of the Indian enemy . . . [.]

Calhoun, the Secretary at War, generally of sound, judicious, and comprehensive mind, seems in this case to be personally offended with the idea that Jackson has set at naught the instructions of the Department. The President supposes there might be cases which would have justified Jackson's measures, but that he has not made out his case.

July 16.—Second cabinet meeting at the President's, and the question of the course to be pursued with relation to General Jackson's proceedings in Florida recurred. As the opinion is unanimously against Jackson excepting mine, my range of argument now is only upon the degree to which his acts are to be disavowed. It was urged that the public dissatisfaction at the taking of Pensacola is so great that the Administration must immediately and publicly disclaim having given any authority for it, and publish all the instructions given to him to throw the blame entirely upon him.

July 17.—Cabinet meeting at the President's—the discussion continued upon the answer to be given to Onis, and the restoration of Florida to Spain. The weakness and palsy of my right hand make it impossible for me to report this discussion, in which I continue to oppose the unanimous opinions of the President, the Secretary of the Treasury Crawford, the Secretary of War Calhoun, and the Attorney-General Wirt. I have thought that the whole conduct of General Jackson was justifiable under his orders, although he certainly had none to take any Spanish fort. My principle is that everything he did was defensive; that as such it was neither war against Spain nor violation of the Constitution.

July 21.—A Cabinet meeting, at which the sec-

ond draft of my letter to Mr. Onis was read and finally fixed. Mr. Wirt read what he called a second edition of his article for the *National Intelligencer*. I strenuously re-urged my objections, especially to a paragraph declaring that the President thought he had no constitutional power to have authorized General Jackson to take Pensacola . . . [.] I finally gave up the debate, acquiescing in the determination which had been taken. The Administration were placed in a dilemma from which it is impossible for them to escape censure by some, and factious crimination by many. If they avow and approve Jackson's conduct, they incur the double responsibility of having commenced a war against Spain, and of warring in violation of the Constitution without the authority of Congress. If they disavow him, they must give offence to all his friends, encounter the shock of his popularity, and have the appearance of trucking to Spain. For all this I should be prepared. But the mischief of this determination lies deeper: 1. It is weakness, and confession of weakness. 2. The disclaimer of power in the Executive is of dangerous example and of evil consequences. 3. There is injustice to the officer in disavowing him, when in principle he is strictly justifiable . . . [.]

Calhoun says he has heard that the court-martial at first acquitted the two Englishmen, but that Jackson sent the case back to them. He says, also, that last winter there was a company formed in Tennessee, who sent Jackson's nephew to Pensacola and purchased Florida lands, and that Jackson himself is reported to be interested in the speculation. I hope not.

* * *

January 23. [1819]—As I was going to the President's, General Jackson and his suite were going out. The President called him and Colonel Butler back, and introduced them to me. The General arrived this morning from his residence at Nashville, Tennessee, and had already called at my office. Among the rumors which have been circulated by the cabal now intriguing in Congress against Jackson, it has been very industriously

whispered that Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Madison had declared themselves in very strong terms against him. I had mentioned this report a few days since to the President, who told me that he was convinced there was no foundation for it. This morning he showed me in confidence a letter he had just received from Mr. Jefferson. It not only expresses full satisfaction with the course pursued by the Administration, but mentions my letters of 12th March last to Onis, and of 28th November to Erving, in terms which it would not become me to repeat. He advises that they, with others of my letters to Onis, should be translated into French and communicated to every Government in Europe, as a thorough vindication of the conduct and policy of this Government.

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February 3.—General Jackson came to my house this morning, and I showed him the boundary line which has been offered to the Spanish Minister, and that which we proposed to offer upon Melish's map. He said there were many individuals who would take exception to our receding so far from the boundary of the Rio del Norte, which we claim, as the Sabine, and the enemies of the Administration would certainly make a handle of it to assail them: but the possession of the Floridas was of so great importance to the southern frontier of the United States, and so essential even to their safety, that the vast majority of the nation would be satisfied with the western boundary as we propose, if we obtain the Floridas. He showed me on the map the operations of the British force during the late war, and remarked that while the mouths of the Florida rivers should be accessible to a foreign naval force there would be no security for the United States.

He also entered into conversation upon the subject of discussion now pending in the House of Representatives on his proceedings in the late Seminole War, upon that which is preparing in the Senate under the auspices of Mr. Forsyth, of Georgia, and upon the general order given by Jackson in 1817, which was considered as setting

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at defiance the War Department. He imputed the whole to Mr. Crawford's resentments against him on account of his having at the last Presidential election supported Mr. Monroe against him; said there was not a single officer in the army known to have been at that time in favor of Monroe whom Crawford had not since insulted: that Mr. Monroe was of an open, fair, unsuspecting character, amiable in the highest degree, and would not believe human nature capable of the baseness which Crawford, while holding a confidential office under him, was practising against him.

I told Jackson that Mr. Crawford had never in any of the discussions on the Seminole War said a word which led me to suppose he had any hostile feeling against him. He replied that, however that might be, Crawford was now setting the whole delegation of Georgia against him, and by intentional insult and the grossest violation of all military principle had compelled him to issue the order of 1817. Crawford, he said, was a man restrained by no principle, and capable of any baseness . . . [.] Crawford was now canvassing for the next Presidential election, and actually wrote a letter to Clay proposing a coalition with him to overthrow Mr. Monroe's Administration.

That Crawford has written such a letter to Clay as Jackson has informed, is to the last degree improbable. He has too much discretion to have put himself so much in Clay's power. But that all his conduct is governed by his views to the Presidency, as the immediate successor to Mr. Monroe, and that his hopes depend upon a result unfavorable to the success, or at least to the popularity of the Administration, is perfectly clear. The important and critical interests of the country are those the management of which belongs to the Department of State. Those incidental to the Treasury are in a state which would give an able financier an opportunity to display his talents: but Crawford has no talents as a financier. He is just, and barely, equal to the current routine of the business of his office. His talent is intrigue. And as it is in the foreign affairs that the success or failure of the Administration will be most conspicuous, and as

their success would promote the reputation and influence, and their failure would lead to the disgrace, of the Secretary of State, Crawford's personal views centre in the ill success of the Administration in its foreign relations; and, perhaps unconscious of his own motives, he will always be impelled to throw obstacles in its way, and to bring upon the Department of State especially any feeling of public dissatisfaction that he can.

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Feb. 22.—Mr. Onis came at eleven, with Mr. Stoughton, one of the persons attached to his Legation. The two copies of the treaty made out at his house were ready: none of ours were entirely finished. We exchanged the original full powers on both sides, which I believe to be the correct course on the conclusion of treaties, though at Ghent, and on the conclusion of the Convention of 3d July, 1815, the originals were only exhibited and copies exchanged. I had one of the copies of the treaty, and Mr. Onis the other. I read the English side, which he collated, and he the Spanish side, which I collated. We then signed and sealed both copies on both sides—I first on the English and he first on the Spanish side . . . [.]

The acquisition of the Floridas has long been an object of earnest desire to this country. The acknowledgment of a definite line of boundary to the South Sea forms a great epoch in our history. The first proposal of it in this negotiation was my own, and I trust it is now secured beyond the reach of revocation. It was not even among our claims by the Treaty of Independence with Great Britain. It was not among our pretensions under the purchase of Louisiana—for that gave us only the range of the Mississippi and its waters. I first introduced it in the written proposal of 31st October last, after having discussed it verbally both with Onis and De Neuville. It is the only peculiar and appropriate right acquired by this treaty in the event of its ratification.

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JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

Reflections on the Missouri Question (1820)

As Monroe mentioned to Jackson in his 23 May 1820 letter, the nation was wrestling not only with matters of state but with matters within the states as well. The question of Missouri's admittance to the union had "excited feelings & raised difficulties, of an internal nature, which did not exist before." Actually the difficulties—those concerning the extension of slavery, the corresponding expansion of slaveholder power, and the respective rights of the people, states, and Congress—were not totally new, but while they had been subdued in the "Era of Good Feelings," they now burst forth in greater vigor and viciousness. The debate began in early 1819 when there were enough people in the territory around and including the town of St. Louis to constitute a new state. Considering how the nation had celebrated the admittance of each new state up to this time as a confirmation of America's power and prosperity, there should not have been a problem. One developed, however, when Representative James Tallmadge, Jr., of New York proposed that Congress make a prohibition on the future importation of slaves into the area and introduce a system of gradual manumission as a condition of admission. Slaveowners in Missouri and elsewhere countered by arguing that Congress did not have the right to so restrict a state's power and an individual's right to control his property. John Quincy Adams, because of personal inclination as well as his professional responsibility to advise the president, observed and commented on the "Missouri question" as Congress and country debated the issue for over a year.

From Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845* (1928. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 225-32. [Editorial insertions appear in square brackets—Ed.]

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Jan. 24.—I walked with R. M. Johnson to the Senate chamber and heard Mr. Pinkney close his Missouri speech. There was a great crowd of auditors. Many ladies, among whom several seated on the floor of the Senate. His eloquence was said to be less overpowering than it had been last Friday. His language is good, his fluency without interruption or hesitation, his manner impressive, but his argument weak, from the inherent weakness of his cause.

Feb. 11.—I went up to the Capitol and heard

Mr. King in the Senate, upon what is called the Missouri question. He had been speaking perhaps an hour before I went in, and I heard him about an hour. His manner is dignified, grave, earnest, but not rapid or vehement. There was nothing new in his argument, but he unravelled with ingenious and subtle analysis many of the sophistical tissues of the slave-holders. He laid down the position of the natural liberty of man, and its incompatibility with slavery in any shape. He also questioned the Constitutional right of the President and Senate to make the Louisiana Treaty; but he did not dwell upon those points, nor draw the

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consequences from them which I should think important in speaking to that subject. He spoke, however, with great power, and the great slaveholders in the House gnawed their lips and clenched their fists as they heard him . . . We attended an evening party at Mr. Calhoun's, and heard of nothing but the Missouri question and Mr. King's speeches. The slave-holders cannot hear of them without being seized with cramps. They call them seditious and inflammatory, when their greatest real defect is their timidity. Never since human sentiments and human conduct were influenced by human speech was there a theme for eloquence like the free side of this question now before Congress of this Union. By what fatality does it happen that all the most eloquent orators of the body are on its slavish side? There is a great mass of cool judgment and plain sense on the side of freedom and humanity, but the ardent spirits and passions are on the side of oppression. Oh, if but one man could arise with a genius capable of comprehending, a heart capable of supporting, and an utterance capable of communicating those eternal truths that belong to this question, to lay bare in all its nakedness that outrage upon the goodness of God, human slavery, now is the time, and this is the occasion, upon which such a man would perform the duties of an angel upon earth!

Feb. 13.—Attended the divine service at the Capitol, and heard Mr. Edward Everett, the Professor of the Greek language at Harvard University, a young man of shining talents and of illustrious promise. His text was from I Cor. vii. 29: "Brethren, the time is short," and it was without comparison the most splendid composition as a sermon that I ever heard delivered. . . . Mr. Clay, with whom I walked, after the service, to call upon Chief-Justice Marshall, told me that although Everett had a fine fancy and a chaste style of composition, his manner was too theatrical, and he liked Mr. Holley's manner better.

Clay started, however, immediately to the Missouri question, yet in debate before both Houses of Congress, and, alluding to a strange scene at Richmond, Virginia, last Wednesday evening, said

it was a shocking thing to think of, but he had not a doubt that within five years from this time the Union would be divided into three distinct confederacies. I did not incline to discuss the subject with him. We found Judges Livingston and Story with the Chief Justice.

* * *

February 23.—A. Livermore and W. Plumer, Junr, members of the House of Representatives from New Hampshire, called upon me, and, conversing on the Missouri slave question, which at this time agitates Congress and the Nation, asked my opinion of the propriety of agreeing to a compromise. The division in Congress and the nation is nearly equal on both sides. The argument on the free side is, the moral and political duty of preventing the extension of slavery in the immense country from the Mississippi River to the South Sea. The argument on the slave side is, that Congress have no power by the Constitution to prohibit slavery in any State, and, the zealots say, not in any Territory. The proposed compromise is to admit Missouri, and hereafter Arkansas, as States, without any restriction upon them regarding slavery, but to prohibit the future introduction of slaves in all Territories of the United States north of 36° 30' latitude. I told these gentlemen that my opinion was, the question could be settled no otherwise than by a compromise.

Feb. 24.—I had some conversation with Calhoun on the slave question pending in Congress. He said he did not think it would produce a dissolution of the Union, but, if it should, the South would be from necessity compelled to form an alliance, offensive and defensive, with Great Britain.

I said that would be returning to the colonial state.

He said, yes, pretty much, but it would be forced upon them. I asked him whether he thought, if by the effect of this alliance, offensive and defensive, the population of the North should be cut off from its natural outlet upon the ocean, it would fall back upon its rocks bound hand and foot, to starve, or whether it would not retain its powers of locomotion to move southward by land.

Then, he said, they would find it necessary to make their communities all military. I pressed the conversation no further: but if the dissolution of the Union should result from the slave question, it is as obvious as anything that can be foreseen of futurity, that it must shortly afterwards be followed by the universal emancipation of the slaves. A more remote but perhaps not less certain consequence would be the extirpation of the African race on this continent, by the gradually bleaching process of intermixture, where the white portion is already so predominant, and by the destructive progress of emancipation, which, like all great religious and political reformations, is terrible in its means though happy and glorious in its end. Slavery is the great and foul stain upon the North American Union, and it is a contemplation worthy of the most exalted soul whether its total abolition is or is not practicable: if practicable, by what it may be effected, and if a choice of means be within the scope of the object, what means would accomplish it at the smallest cost of human suffering. A dissolution, at least temporary, of the Union, as now constituted, would be certainly necessary . . . [.] The Union might then be reorganized on the fundamental principle of emancipation. This object is vast in its compass, awful in its prospects, sublime and beautiful in its issue.

* * *

Washington, March 2, 1820.—The compromise of the slave question was this day completed in Congress. The Senate have carried their whole point, barely consenting to the formality of separating the bill for the admission of the State of Maine into the Union from that for authorizing the people of the Territory of Missouri to form a State Government. The condition that slavery should be prohibited by their Constitution, which the House of Representatives had inserted, they have abandoned. Missouri and Arkansas will be slave States, but to the Missouri bill a section is annexed, prohibiting slavery in the remaining part of the Louisiana cession north of latitude 36° 30'. This compromise, as it is called, was finally carried this evening by a vote of ninety to eighty-seven in the

House of Representatives, after successive days and almost nights of stormy debate.

March 3.—When I came this day to my office, I found there a note requesting me to call at one o'clock at the President's house. It was then one, and I immediately went over. He expected that the two bills, for the admission of Maine, and to enable Missouri to make a Constitution, would have been brought to him for his signature, and he had summoned all the members of the Administration to ask their opinions in writing, to be deposited in the Department of State, upon two questions: 1, Whether Congress had a Constitutional right to prohibit slavery in a Territory: and 2, Whether the eighth section of the Missouri bill (which interdicts slavery forever in the Territory north of thirty-six and a half latitude) was applicable only to the Territorial State, or could extend to it after it should become a State.

As to the first question, it was unanimously agreed that Congress have the power to prohibit slavery in the Territories . . . [.] I had no doubt of the right of Congress to interdict slavery in the Territories, and urged that the power contained in the term "dispose of" included the authority to do everything that could be done with it as mere property, and that the additional words, authorizing needful rules and regulations respecting it, must have reference to persons connected with it, or could have no meaning at all. As to the force of the term needful, I observed, it was relative, and must always be supposed to have reference to some end. Needful to what end? Needful in the Constitution of the United States to any of the ends for which that compact was formed. Those ends are declared in its preamble: to establish justice, for example. What can be more needful for the establishment of justice than the interdiction of slavery where it does not exist? . . . [.]

After this meeting, I walked home with Calhoun, who said that the principles which I had avowed were just and noble: but that in the Southern country, whenever they were mentioned, they were always understood as applying only to white men. Domestic labor was confined to the blacks, and such was the prejudice, that if he, who was

the most popular man a white servant in reputation would be

I said that this servitude and labor slavery: but he thought excellent consequence of labor—not, for self had often held Manufacturing and grading. It was of work of slaves. No that. And it was among the whites. among them. It not even admit of man could domin

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the most popular man in his district, were to keep a white servant in his house, his character and reputation would be irretrievably ruined.

I said that this confounding of the ideas of servitude and labor was one of the bad effects of slavery: but he thought it attended with many excellent consequences. It did not apply to all kinds of labor—not, for example, to farming. He himself had often held the plough: so had his father. Manufacturing and mechanical labor was not degrading. It was only manual labor—the proper work of slaves. No white person could descend to that. And it was the best guarantee to equality among the whites. It produced an unvarying level among them. It not only did not excite, but did not even admit of inequalities, by which one white man could domineer over another.

I told Calhoun I could not see things in the same light. It is, in truth, all perverted sentiment—mistaking labor for slavery and dominion for freedom. The discussion of this Missouri question has betrayed the secret of their souls. In the abstract they admit that slavery is an evil, they disclaim all participation in the introduction of it, and cast it all upon the shoulders of our old Granddam Britain. But when probed to the quick upon it, they show at the bottom of their souls pride and vainglory in their condition of masterdom. They fancy themselves more generous and noble-hearted than the plain freemen who labor for subsistence. They look down upon the simplicity of a Yankee's manners, because he has no habits of overbearing like theirs and cannot treat negroes like dogs. It is among the evils of slavery that it taints the very sources of moral principle. It establishes false estimates of virtue and vice: for what can be more false and heartless than this

doctrine which makes the first and holiest rights of humanity to depend upon the color of the skin? . . . [.]

I have favored this Missouri compromise, believing it to be all that could be effected under the present Constitution, and from extreme unwillingness to put the Union at hazard. But perhaps it would have been a wiser as well as a bolder course to have persisted in the restriction upon Missouri, till it should have terminated in a convention of the States to revise and amend the Constitution. This would have produced a new Union of thirteen or fourteen States unpolluted with slavery, with a great and glorious object to effect, namely, that of rallying to their standard the other States by the universal emancipation of their slaves. If the Union must be dissolved, slavery is precisely the question upon which it ought to break. For the present, however, this contest it laid asleep.

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REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did the question of Missouri statehood provoke such a crisis? What were the moral and constitutional issues involved?
2. What appeared to have the most weight with the politicians? Does this issue appear to have affected the nature of the compromise?
3. What was Adams's position on the problem and the compromise?
4. Do these entries reveal Adams to be a believer in strict or loose construction of the *Constitution*? What do they reveal about Monroe?

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

The End of the "Era of Good Feelings" (1820)

The Missouri question was but one symptom of a growing national malady. By 1820 many Americans were no longer feeling "good." The flush of nationalistic spirit and enterprise that marked the postwar era was waning under the onslaught of personal and sectional ambition and misfortune. These rising problems were not enough to undermine Monroe's reelection in 1820, but they indicated trouble ahead for the coming decade. The Federalist Party was, at least on the national level, virtually dead, and the old Republican Party was being devoured by partisans within it. Added to these difficulties was the national bellyache caused by economic woes. Secretary of State Adams, looking perhaps to his own as well as to his country's political future, fretted over the causes and possible cures.

From Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845* (1928; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 223-24, 241-42. [Editorial insertions appear in square brackets—Ed.]

* * *

Jan. 8, 1820.—One of the most remarkable features of what I am witnessing every day is a perpetual struggle in both Houses of Congress to control the Executive—to make it dependent upon and subservient to them. They are continually attempting to encroach upon the powers and authorities of the President. As the old line of demarcation between parties has been broken down, personal has taken the place of principled opposition. The personal friends of the President in the House are neither so numerous, nor so active, nor so able as his opponents. Crawford's personal friends, instead of befriending the Administration, operate as powerfully as they can, without exposing or avowing their motives, against it. Every act and thought of Crawford looks to the next Presidency. All his springs of action work not upon the present, but upon the future, and yet his path in the Department is now beset with thorns, from which he shrinks, and which I think he will not ward off with success. In short, as the first Presi-

dential term of Mr. Monroe's Administration has hitherto been the period of the greatest national tranquillity enjoyed by this nation at any portion of its history, so it appears to me scarcely avoidable that the second term will be among the most stormy and violent. I told him this day that I thought the difficulties before him were thickening and becoming hourly more and more formidable. In our foreign relations, we stood upon terms with England as favorable as can ever be expected, but with a state of things dissatisfactory for the present, and problematical for the future, with regard to our commercial intercourse with her American Colonies. With France our situation was much less pleasing and more unpromising. She is pressing absurd claims, and refusing satisfaction for the most just and unequivocal claims on our part . . . [.]

A prospect thus dark and unpropitious abroad is far more gloomy and threatening when we turn our eyes homeward. The bank, the national currency, the stagnation of commerce, the depression of manufactures, the restless turbulence and jeal-

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ousies and insubordination of the State Legislatures, the Missouri slave question, the deficiencies of the revenue to be supplied, the rankling passions and ambitious projects of individuals, mingling with everything, presented a prospect of the future which I freely acknowledged was to me appalling. I asked him whether these apprehensions were visionary, and, if not, whether he had contemplated any distinct system of measures to be in preparation for the embarrassments which it was obvious to foresee as inevitable at no distant day.

He said that, as to the Missouri question, he apprehended no great danger from that. He believed a compromise would be found and agreed to, which would be satisfactory to all parties.

* * *

May 17.—Ninian Edwards, the Senator from Illinois, and W. Lowndes, member of the House of Representatives from South Carolina, called this morning at my house to take leave. Edwards spoke of the state of parties and of public affairs. At the next session, he says, the great struggle will come on. Edwards is first cousin to the Popes of Kentucky and Illinois, and therefore not in the interest of Clay, of whom John Pope is the unsuccessful rival in Kentucky. But, as a Western man, Edwards feels himself to be rowing against the general current of Western feeling, and is uneasy under it. He remarks with anxiety the ascendancy which Clay has been acquiring during the latter part of the session of Congress, and seems to dread that he will carry all before him. He supposes that he will resign his seat as Speaker, but not as member, of the House; that he will immediately engage extensively in the practice of the law, and will come next winter and attend at the same time the session of the Supreme Court and of Congress.

May 22.—I called upon Mr. Calhoun, and he went with me to Mr. Thomas Law's, in Prince George's County. On the ride we had much conversation upon various topics. I asked him whether he knew what was the occasion of the President's calling the cabinet meeting on Saturday. He said it was a letter that he had received from Mr. Jefferson, in which, though mentioning

in terms of high commendation the Florida Treaty, he yet advises that its ratification should not now be accepted, but that we should look to the occupation of Texas. This explains to me what had been utterly unaccountable in the call of that meeting three days after my last note to Vivés and after the receipt of his answer. It reminded me of O'Brien's shrewd remark, that an old sea-captain never likes that his mate should make a better voyage than himself.

We conversed upon politics past, present, and future. Calhoun's anticipations are gloomy. He says there has been within these two years an immense revolution of fortunes in every part of the Union; enormous numbers of persons utterly ruined; multitudes in deep distress; and a general mass of disaffection to the Government, not concentrated in any particular direction, but ready to seize upon any event and looking out anywhere for a leader. The Missouri question and the debates on the tariff were merely incidental to this state of things. It was a vague but wide-spread discontent, caused by the disordered circumstances of individuals, but resulting in a general impression that there was something radically wrong in the administration of the Government. These observations are undoubtedly well-founded. The disease is apparent, the remedy not discernible. The primary cause is that which has been the scourge of this country from its Colonial infancy—speculations in paper currency, now appearing in the shape of banks; the great multiplication, followed by the sudden and severe reduction, of fictitious capital; then the great falling off in the prices of all our principal articles of exportation, the competition of foreign manufactures carried on by starving workmen, with ours loaded with high wages, the diminution of commerce and the carrying trade, and the accumulation of debt as long as credit could be strained—all this, with ambitious and crafty and disappointed men on the watch for every misfortune and welcoming every disaster, together with the elated hopes, the dazzling promise, and the mortifying reverses of the Florida Treaty, accounts too well for the loss of popularity by the Administration within the last year.