

Congress and the Emergence of Sectionalism: From the Missouri Compromise to the Age of Jackson

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Review

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Finkelman, Paul and Kennon, Donald R., eds.. *Congress and the Emergence of Sectionalism: From the Missouri Compromise to the Age of Jackson*. Ohio University Press, \$46.95 hardcover ISBN 9780821417836

The Long View of Sectionalism

The essays in this collection arose out of conferences sponsored by the United States Capitol Historical Society. It is frequently the case that such published versions of conference papers are uneven. In the case of this collection, it is not a question of the chapters' quality but of their connection to each other and to the volume's title. Some say nothing about Congress, others say nothing about sectionalism, and a few don't discuss either topic.

Paul Finkelman, one of the volume's editors, attempts to pull the many disparate topics the authors cover together in an introductory essay that begins with the nationalist surge of the Era of Good Feelings and surveys the major developments of that period and the Jacksonian era. Although the authors will describe sectional issues such as tariffs, the Second Bank of the United States, and Indian removal, Finkelman is at pains to remind readers that the ultimate issue of sectionalism was slavery, which Finkelman several times refers to as the "root" of the sectional issues of the Jacksonian age.

Jan Lewis takes the reader to a time well before the Era of Good Feelings to find the "origins of sectionalism" in the three-fifths clause. This portion of the Constitution provided that every five slaves be counted as three persons for purposes of representation, thus inflating the white South's power in both the House of Representatives and the electoral college. Lewis begins with the Continental Congress's discussions of taxation, in which white Southerners succeeded in getting a "discount" rather than pay full taxes for their slaves. In the constitutional convention, James Wilson of Pennsylvania borrowed the taxation formula and proposed what would become the three-fifths clause for

representation in an effort to head off small states' insistence on a one-state, one-vote form of representation. Lewis argues that Wilson, and James Madison, thus encouraged the white South to seek special status for slavery and legitimized sectionalism.

Peter S. Onuf is interested in differing views of tariff policy after the War of 1812. Followers of Alexander Hamilton believed that tariffs were necessary to national security. They would help strengthen the national economy and provide incentives for trading partners to accommodate the United States. Without them, the United States would be completely under the heel of the powerful British. Followers of Thomas Jefferson and later Andrew Jackson argued that free trade would promote an interdependent trading world in which the United States would wield more influence and create good will that would be conducive to peace. Onuf then correlates these world views to loose versus strict construction of the Constitution and to what he calls Northern and Southern nationhood. Onuf devotes more effort, however, to detailing the divergent views on tariffs than to connecting them to sectionalism.

The essay in which slavery most clearly emerges as a sectional issue is Robert P. Forbes's discussion of the Missouri Compromise. Forbes argues that white Southerners reacted not just to the insult to slavery implicit in James Tallmadge's amendment providing for the gradual end to slavery in return for Missouri's admission, but to a belief that slavery in the existing slave states was under attack. While most historians note the role of Tallmadge in setting off the crisis, Forbes is interested in New York congressman Henry Meigs who proposed emancipating and colonizing the slave population. Meigs's proposal coincided with the creation of the American Colonization Society. The confluence of events convinced many southern congressmen that the federal government was a threat to slavery. It is to this realization that Forbes attributes the efforts of South Carolinians to pick a fight with the federal government by passing the Negro Seaman's Act, ordering that black sailors in South Carolina ports be housed in jail so that they not contaminate the local slave population with ideas about freedom. This would prove to be just the beginning of South Carolina, and southern efforts, to force the federal government into a subservient position on slavery.

Tim Alan Garrison provides two articles about Indian removal. In the Compact of 1802, the federal government promised to end Indian title in Georgia but set no timeline. By the 1820s, Georgians felt the time had come for the

federal government to fulfill its promise. Their population was growing and cotton lands were becoming quite valuable. But President John Quincy Adams reneged on a treaty with the Creek when he learned that it had been coerced. Andrew Jackson, of course, proved more accommodating to white Southerners and the Removal Act passed along sectional lines, with the Northwest providing the swing votes. In a second contribution to the volume, Garrison argues that Jackson's historical reputation has suffered largely because modern historians are more troubled by Indian removal than previous historians had been. This is the only historiographical essay in the book and it is narrowly focused on Jackson's attitudes toward Indians, with particular attention to how Jackson's pre-eminent biographer, Robert Remini, has treated that subject.

William W. Freehling's assessment of whether Jackson was a great president turns on the Bank War and a proslavery agenda which included Indian removal. Despite the Jacksonian era's reputation as the "age of the common man," Freehling finds that Jackson's measures increased inequality. The nullification crisis was Jackson's greatest moment, setting the precedent for Union-saving activity during the secession crisis. Michael Les Benedict also examines the Bank War and nullification in an exploration of federalism. By Jackson's election, two forms of federalism had developed: states' rights and nationalism, or what the author calls "nationalist constitutionalism." These are clearly explicated, but it is less clear why Jackson chose nationalism during the nullification crisis rather than the states' rights position he preferred with Indian removal.

Jenny B. Wahl's discussion of banking is certainly timely but is the least relevant to any of the volume's themes. Much of it is a counter-factual discussion of whether the Second Bank of the United States, if it hadn't gone out of existence, could have prevented the panics and depression of the 1830s and 1840s. There is no discussion of sectionalism or Congress. While having nothing to say about sectionalism, Daniel Feller's "Andrew Jackson versus the Senate" is an interesting discussion of why Jackson's relations with that body were so poisonous: Jackson is the only president to have been censured. Feller examines Jackson's struggle to get his appointees, many of them quite mediocre, confirmed. A Senate protecting its independence rejected many until Democrats, pledged to a party line, gained control of that body.

The essays have a sprawling tendency, covering many subtopics and ancillary subjects. Wahl's essay on finance promises to explain how the Bank

War led to the Federal Reserve, but this is only glancingly touched upon. Benedict discusses Ohio's reaction to the Clean Air Act of 1970 to lay the groundwork for his discussion of federalism in the Jacksonian period. None of the chapters bears directly on the Civil War although Lewis's discussion of the three-fifths clause may be of interest to historians looking at the origins of white southern power. Individual essays are interesting in their own right, but never did a book's contents have so little to do with its cover—or at least its title.

Nicole Etcheson is the Alexander M. Bracken Professor History at Ball State University and the author of Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).