The Panic of 1819

In 1819, a series of events abroad and at home combined to bring a sudden halt to some of the economic growth in the United States. Prices for cotton lands in the Southeast skyrocketed as world demand for cotton cloth increased every year. Southern cotton prices rose to such an extent that in 1818 and 1819, British manufacturers turned to other cotton sources, especially India, and as they did, American cotton prices tumbled, along with the value of the land that produced it. The panic of 1819 had begun.

The panic proved a sudden and sobering reminder of just how complicated and interdependent the economy of the nation was becoming. The cities were hit the hardest. About half a million workers lost their jobs as business ground to a halt. Americans shuddered to see "children freezing in the winter's storm—and the fathers without coats and shoes." In the streets where new goods had been piled, people now wandered without homes or food. Charitable groups opened soup kitchens. Wherever they could, families who had moved to towns and cities returned to the countryside to live with relatives. Things were not much better in the country, however, where the failure of banks meant that apparently prosperous farmers saw household goods, farm animals, and the people they held as slaves sold in humiliating auctions.

Many people, including congressmen, began to call for the revocation of the charter of the Second Bank of the United States. States had chafed throughout the two years of the bank's life at what they considered its dictatorial power. Several states tried to limit that power by levying extremely high taxes on the branches of the bank in their states, but they were overruled by the Supreme Court in *McCulloch v. Maryland*.

Despite the panic, James Monroe was reelected to the presidency in 1820 in one of the quietest and most lopsided elections in the nation's history. The Federalist Party, fatally crippled by its opposition to the War of 1812, offered no effective opposition. Neither did Monroe face an organized contest from others within his own party, which was divided along sectional lines. He received every electoral vote but one. Most Americans seemed to blame someone other than President Monroe for the panic of 1819 and the lingering hard times that followed it. The **Era of Good Feelings,** so called for the near-absence of party politics, somehow managed to survive in the White House—though, it turned out, not in the halls of Congress.

The Missouri Compromise, 1820

The recent admission of the new states of the Southwest and Old Northwest had left a precarious balance in the Senate between slave states and free, though northern states held a strong, and growing, preponderance in the House of Representatives. The Missouri Territory posed a special challenge to the balance. Slavery had quickly spread in Missouri, stretching along the richest river lands. If Missouri were admitted with slavery, as its territorial legislature had decreed, then the slave states would hold a majority in the Senate. Slavery in Missouri, an area of the same latitude as much of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, seemed to violate the assumption long held by many people in the North that slavery, if it grew at all, would expand only to the south.

The three-fifths clause of the Constitution, northerners complained, gave the slave states twenty more members of Congress and twenty more electors for the presidency than they would have if only white populations were counted. The South seemed to be getting extra representation unfairly.

NOT the Louisiana Purchase, but EAST of Mississippi River
1816–1819
– Indiana (free)
– Mississippi (slave)
– Illinois (free)
– Alabama (slave)

More people in Northern States – See chart in this link

See the Northwest Ordinances – 1787 – "prohibited slavery from the region forever" In 4th ed. pages 156–157

The debates over slavery in Missouri in 1819 and 1820 were not between fervent abolitionists in the North and fervent proslavery advocates in the South. Neither of those positions had yet been defined. Instead, white northerners and southerners of all political persuasions agreed that as many blacks as possible should be sent to Africa. White Americans who could come together on little else about slavery did agree that blacks and whites could not live together in the United States once slavery had ended. That was the message of the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816 and based in Washington, D.C. The society bought land in Africa, naming the new country "Liberia," and sent about twelve thousand free African Americans there over the next fifty years. Disease in Liberia took a terrible toll, however, and many died. As time went by, fewer African Americans migrated. In Philadelphia, many even staged protests against the notion of **colonization**.

In the meantime, slavery caused problems for the political system. A New York congressman, James Tallmadge, Jr., introduced an amendment to the bill that would admit Missouri as a state only if it admitted no more slaves and if those slaves in the territory were freed when they became twenty-five years old. More than eighty of the North's congressmen supported the Tallmadge amendment and only ten opposed it. In the Senate, though, the slave states prevailed by two votes. A deadlocked Congress adjourned in March 1819, to meet again in December.

Initial views North and South same

But Missouri & Tallmadge — Northern position

Sectional vote — only Southern votes in Senate!!!

DOING HISTORY ONLINE

Charles Pinckney's Speech to Congress

What are Pinckney's major problems with northerners' attitudes toward slavery (see Document 11)? Based on what you've read about cotton and the market economy, are his claims justified?

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During the months in between, politicians worked behind the scenes to prepare for the debates and decisions of December. The Union, so celebrated and expansive in the wake of the war with Britain, so peaceful for whites since the Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokees had been quelled, now seemed in danger of breaking apart from within. Both northern and southern politicians talked openly of ending the Union if need be. Simmering northern resentment, held in check for decades, was suddenly announced, even celebrated. Southerners felt betrayed. In their eyes, slavery was something they had inherited, for which they bore no blame. White southerners thought northerners irresponsible and unrealistic to attack it as the proposed Tallmadge amendment did. The denial of Missouri statehood seemed to southerners nothing less than an assault on their character.

Very heated

"Northern resentment"

Southern view "betrayal"

In northern states, where antislavery societies had been relatively sedate, people suddenly announced the depth of their distaste for the institution. Furious meetings erupted in towns and cities across the North, turning out petitions and resolutions in large numbers. Slavery, these petitions thundered, was a blot on the nation, a violation of the spirit of Christianity, an abomination that must not spread into places it had not already ruined. The antislavery advocates of the 1820s expected colonization and abolition to occur simultaneously and gradually. But they were also determined to stop the spread of slavery toward the northern part of the continent.

Northern intensity

Determination on this

After weeks of debate, the **Missouri Compromise** emerged from the Senate: Missouri, with no restriction on slavery, should be admitted to the Union at the same

South gets

time as Maine, thereby ensuring the balance between slave and free states. Slavery would be prohibited in all the lands acquired in the Louisiana Purchase north of the southern border of Missouri at 36°30' latitude. Such a provision excluded the Arkansas territory, where slavery was already established, but closed to slavery the vast expanses of the Louisiana Territory—the future states of Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas. Any slaves who escaped to the free states would be returned. Many northern congressmen who voted for the measure found themselves burned in effigy back home and defeated when it came time for reelection. Southerners were no more satisfied than the northerners; they were furious to hear themselves vilified in the national capital they had long dominated.

Northern and southern politicians had become wary and distrustful of one another as they had never been before. In a real sense, the debates over slavery in Missouri created "the North" and "the South," uniting the new states of the Northwest with the states of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, and forging a tighter alliance among the new states of the Southwest and Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Accusations of greed, corruption, and hypocrisy flew. The country became polarized geographically.

In Charleston, South Carolina, the heart of South Carolina's richest plantation district, a free black man named **Denmark Vesey** had followed in the papers the debates over the Missouri controversy. What he read there reinforced what he had seen in the Bible and the documents of the American Revolution: slavery was immoral. Vesey, a middle-aged man of large stature who had bought his freedom twenty years earlier, stood as a commanding presence among the African American people of the Low Country. A skilled carpenter and preacher, Vesey traveled up and down the coast and into the interior, berating blacks who accepted racial insult. Many African Americans were attracted to him, but most were afraid to oppose him regardless.

Vesey drew not only on his own strengths but on those of a powerful ally, Gullah Jack. This man, an Angolan, had arrived in South Carolina near the turn of the century, one of the forty thousand slaves brought into the state right before the end of the legal slave trade in 1807. With huge whiskers, tiny arms, and unusual gestures, Gullah Jack projected an aura of spiritual authority.

Vesey, Gullah Jack, and their followers conspired to seize the city's poorly protected guardhouse, stores, and roads before the whites could gather themselves in opposition. House slaves would kill their white owners. Once Charleston was secure, the rebels, Vesey planned, would sail to Haiti, where Toussaint L'Ouverture had staged a black rebellion decades earlier and where slavery had been abolished. But a house servant alerted Charleston whites to the danger only two days before the revolt planned for June 16, 1822. The governor ordered out five military companies, and Vesey called off the attack. Over the next two months, white authorities hanged thirty-five alleged conspirators and banished thirty-seven more from the state. Few of the rebels would reveal the names of their allies, going to their deaths with the secrets of the revolt secure. Denmark Vesey was one of those executed.

Charleston's mayor, James Hamilton, bragged, "There can be no harm in the salutary inculcation of one lesson, among a certain portion of our population, that there is nothing they are bad enough to do, that we are not powerful enough to punish." Despite such boasts, white southerners blamed Vesey's rebellion on the agitation against slavery by northern congressmen in the Missouri debate. "The events of 1822," a leading South Carolinian observed, "will long be remembered, as amongst the choicest fruits of the agitation of that question in Congress."