

American Sectionalism in the 1800s

Sectionalism Views – North, South, West

VIEWS OF THE NORTH –

Protective Tariff – The most important national political issue for you is a high tariff to protect the growing manufacturing industry from British competition. Manufacturers demand this high tax on imports while shipping interests are mildly opposed to it. The tariff will have little effect on most of your constituents and you realize that the Southeast (due to its dependence on exports and imports) will bear the greatest burden of paying this tax. Since the tariff is the major revenue source for the national government, it would provide funding for other policies beneficial to the northeast such as a national bank and internal improvements. What could be better than protecting Northeastern manufacturing, providing federal funds for canals and banks to help the Northeast and having the Southeast pay for it.

Bank of the United States and Internal Improvements – The National Bank and Canals improving the transportation network between the Northeast and Northwest are of great concern to your region. The National Bank will provide a source of investment capital for the manufacturing industry as well as the booming shipping industry revitalized by the Asian trade. Canals will facilitate opening up the west as a market for northeastern manufacturing goods as well as the transportation of Western farm products to the Northeastern cities. These developments will greatly benefit both manufactures and merchants in the Northeast. Some struggling small farmers and urban poor support canals to promote their emigration to fertile western lands. Northeastern farmers failed to recognize that improved transportation would create competition with Western grain farmers that would eventually force most Northeastern farmers to shift to dairy and vegetable farms.

Slavery – Slavery is a less important issue for Northeasterners at this time but one that is very emotional for many. Some of your most vocal and aggressive Northerners totally reject the institution of slavery as a moral abomination that should be immediately abolished. Other constituents strongly oppose abolition fearing that the result would be an influx of freed slaves into the Northeast. The one thing that can be agreed upon is opposition to extending slavery into the territories. For some this is due to moral reasons, for others due to the unfairness of having small farmers competing with slave agriculture and, for Northeastern politicians, due to concern for the national political balance.

Western Lands and Indian Removal – Disposal of Western lands and Indian Removal are of limited concern to you. Northeastern farmers anticipating future migrations and abolitionists seeking to limit the spread of plantation agriculture would both prefer cheap land in small plots in the west. On the other hand, large landowners and manufacturers would prefer that their labor supply not be lured west by the promise of cheap land and the sale of land in large tracts would facilitate speculative buying by wealthy Northeasterners. Most Northeasterners are unconcerned about the plight of Native Americans but a small, very vocal group have a romantic image of the “Noble Savage” and object to Indian removal on moral grounds.

VIEWS OF THE SOUTH –

Slavery – You are diametrically opposed to any bills that would have a negative impact on the institution of slavery. Northern abolitionists have been flooding the Congress with petitions calling for the abolition or restriction of slavery. Southerners are insulted by these diatribes and the constant focus on slavery has prevented the consideration of other issues of significance.

Protective Tariff – You are opposed to a high protective tariff which adds a large tax to the price of imported goods. Since your principal trading partner is Europe, you import large amounts of manufactured products and end up paying higher prices as a result of the tariff. Southerners provide two-thirds of the national revenue collected by the tariff. Furthermore, European countries invariably respond by imposing their own tariffs on the cotton that you are selling, thereby causing your profits to fall. You get hurt both ways!

Internal Improvements – You are opposed to national subsidies for internal improvements. Since your economy is export oriented, you only need transportation to the coast and the Southeast is already blessed with natural waterways that accomplish this with minimal improvements. The proposed internal improvements would link the Northeast with the Northwest, benefiting those two regions, but the national government gets its revenue primarily from the high tariff. Why pay two-thirds of the bill and get no benefit?

Bank of the United States – You are opposed to extending the charter of the Bank. Many of your constituents advocate “states rights” and the most obvious role of the US Bank is federal regulation of local banks. Furthermore, the US Bank would have little benefit for the Southeast where the need for investment capital is limited and money is tied up in slaves or land. Extending the charter of the Bank will only help the North develop faster and become more politically powerful. Who wants that?

Western Lands – You are in favor of low prices for western lands sold in large tracts (640+ acres). You support the availability of these lands because some Southeastern lands are wearing out. Since you believe that cotton is essential to the growth of the South and the economic health of the nation, the replacement of worn out lands with large tracts of western lands suitable for plantation agriculture is vital. The future growth of the southern economy depends on this issue.

Indian Removal – Most southeasterners are unconcerned about the plight of Native Americans although Georgia and North Carolina would definitely support removal.

VIEWS OF THE WEST –

Disposal of Western lands – You are in favor of cheap public land that is distributed to settlers, not Eastern speculators. Most westerners desire that this land should be sold in smaller parcels of 240 acres in order to encourage small farms but others in the southern portion of your region want the land to be sold in large parcels suitable to plantation agriculture. The future of this democratic nation lies in the disposition of the Western lands.

Native American Removal – Western settlers generally want more land available and almost all assume that the disappearance of Indian society is an inevitable part of the progress of civilization. For years, the federal government has promised to extinguish Indian title to lands within the boundaries of a states and you are demanding that the federal government negotiate treaties that will open new lands to white settlement.

Internal Improvements – You are in favor of federal subsidies for internal improvements. The building of roads and waterways that connect the agricultural West with the markets of the Northeast will stimulate the growth of both sections and contribute to the economic strength of the nation.

Bank of the United States – You are not in favor of extending the charter of the Second Bank of the United States. While some of the wealthy might see the US Bank as a source of investment capital, the vast majority see it as the regulator that restricts local banks from making loans. Easy access to loans is essential to the development of the West, even if some of the loans are questionable. If the charter is extended the restrictions on local banks and high interest rates on borrowed money will continue thereby making it difficult for small farmers to secure loans. Small farmers must be protected from drought, locusts, Eastern banks and other natural disasters.

Protective Tariff – You are in favor of a “reasonable” tariff. It is to your benefit that manufacturing cities develop in the Northeast but you are not interested in higher prices on manufactured goods. You would support it more if the funds went to the building of canals and roads to the West!

Slavery – Slavery is a volatile issue. The Northwest Ordinance in 1785 forbade slavery while the Southwest was directly in its path. For this reason, the issue of slavery found both support and opposition in the old west. Westerners can bargain with either the Northeast or the Southeast on the issue of slavery to get what they want.