# A Growing Sense of Nationhood

## *What did it mean to be an American in the early 1800s?*

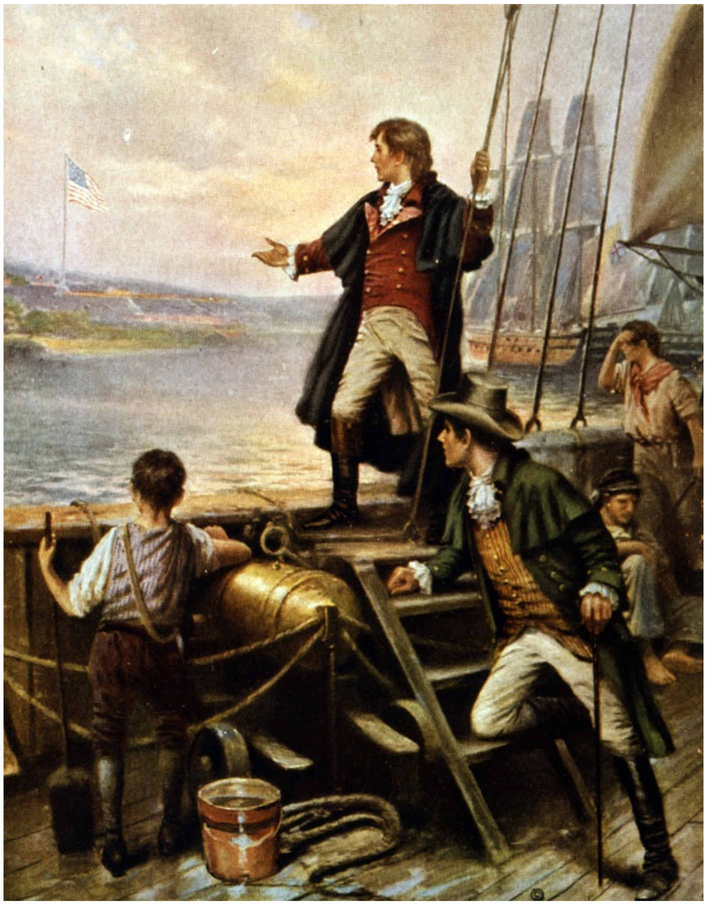
## Introduction

If you had been there on that rainy night in Maryland during the War of 1812, you might have mistaken the bombardment for thunder. But Maryland lawyer Francis Scott Key knew better as he huddled in a boat in Baltimore harbor and watched British warships fire on Fort McHenry.

Fort McHenry had a flag so big “that the British will have no difficulty seeing it from a distance,” said the fort's commander. It was 30 feet high and 42 feet long. Key knew that if the flag came down, it meant that both the fort and Baltimore had been defeated. However, when the sun rose, the flag was still there, and the British were retreating.

Key celebrated by writing a poem, “The Defence of Fort McHenry.” The poem was published in a newspaper six days later, and it was soon reprinted all across the country. It was set to music in 1814 and sung as “The Star-Spangled Banner.” In 1931, it was **proclaimed** the national anthem.

Moments like these during the War of 1812 helped give Americans a feeling of national identity. But what did being American mean? How was it different from being European? Alexis de Tocqueville, a French nobleman who toured the United States in 1831 and 1832, had one answer. “I do not even know of a country where the love of money holds a greater place in the heart of man,” he wrote in his book *Democracy in America*. While the pursuit of wealth was an important element of the **emerging** American identity, there were also other elements that united Americans of different backgrounds and experiences. In this lesson, you will learn how a growing sense of nationhood developed during the early 1800s in spite of significant differences between various regions of the country.



**Social Studies Vocabulary**

American system

capitalism

folk art

frontier

spiritual

## 1. Developing a Nation in a Land of Differences

In the early 1800s, the United States was a very young country. Older adults could still remember when they were British subjects. Even after the American Revolution, the United States was more like a collection of states than a single nation.

A surge of patriotism following the War of 1812 helped forge a new national identity. Because many Federalists had been opposed to the war—a stance their opponents described as disloyal—the Federalist Party struggled to survive in the face of this growing patriotism. Leaders like James Monroe hoped that partisan strife, or fighting between political parties, was a thing of the past. Most Americans looked with pride on a rapidly growing country whose brightest days, they believed, lay ahead.

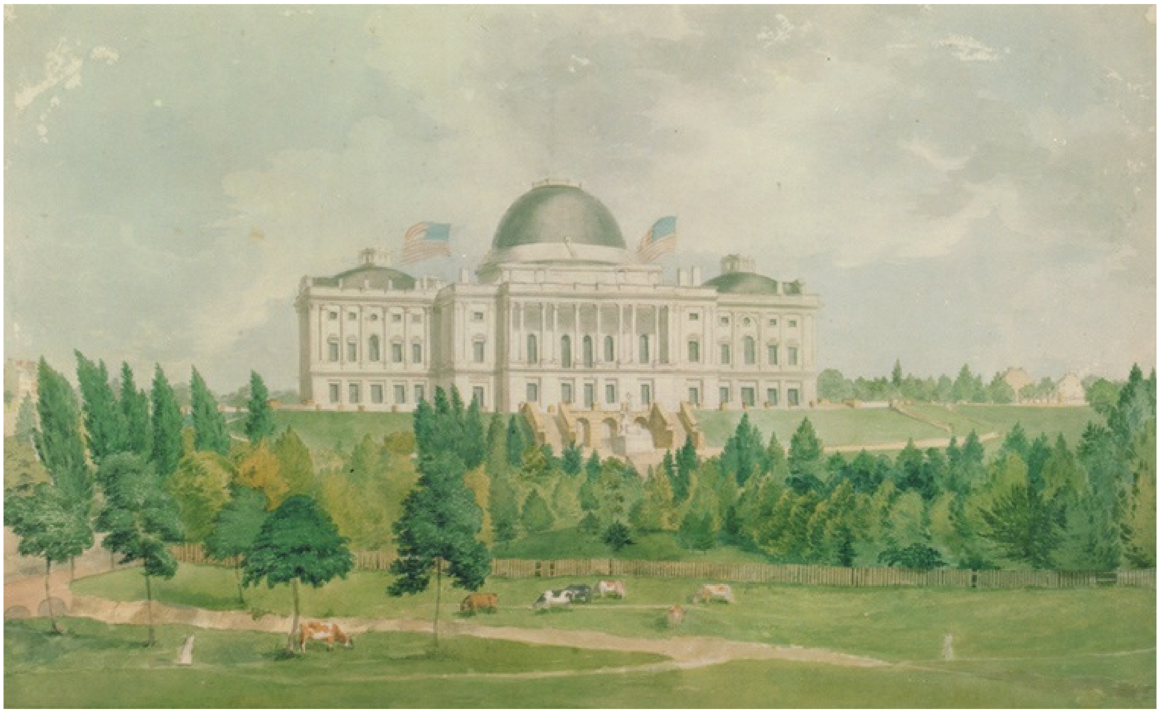
**The United States in the Early 1800s** In 1800, two out of every three Americans still lived within 50 miles of the Atlantic Coast, and fewer than one in ten lived west of the Appalachians. These forested mountains extended like a bumpy spine from Maine through Georgia, making travel between east and west very difficult.

Beyond the mountains, the land flattened out and was covered by dense woods. More and more settlers crossed the Appalachians in the early 1800s, clearing trees and starting farms and mills. For Americans of the day, this land between the eastern mountains and the Mississippi River was known as “the West.” Across the Mississippi lay the **frontier**, a vast, unexplored wilderness.

Everywhere, travel was difficult and slow. Nothing moved faster than a horse could run—not people, not goods, not messages. News could take weeks to travel from one city to another, as the post office labored to deliver letters and newspapers over rutted, muddy roads.

In part because of geographical differences, **distinct** regional lifestyles developed, which led to **stereotypes**, or exaggerated images, of different groups. The “Yankees” of the Northeast, with its growing cities and bustling trade, were seen as enterprising, thrifty, and—in the eyes of southerners—quick to chase a dollar. The rich plantation owners of the South were seen as gracious, cultured, and—in the eyes of northerners—lazy. The frontier settlers who sought their fortunes in the West were seen as rugged, hardy, and—in the eyes of people on the

East Coast—crude.



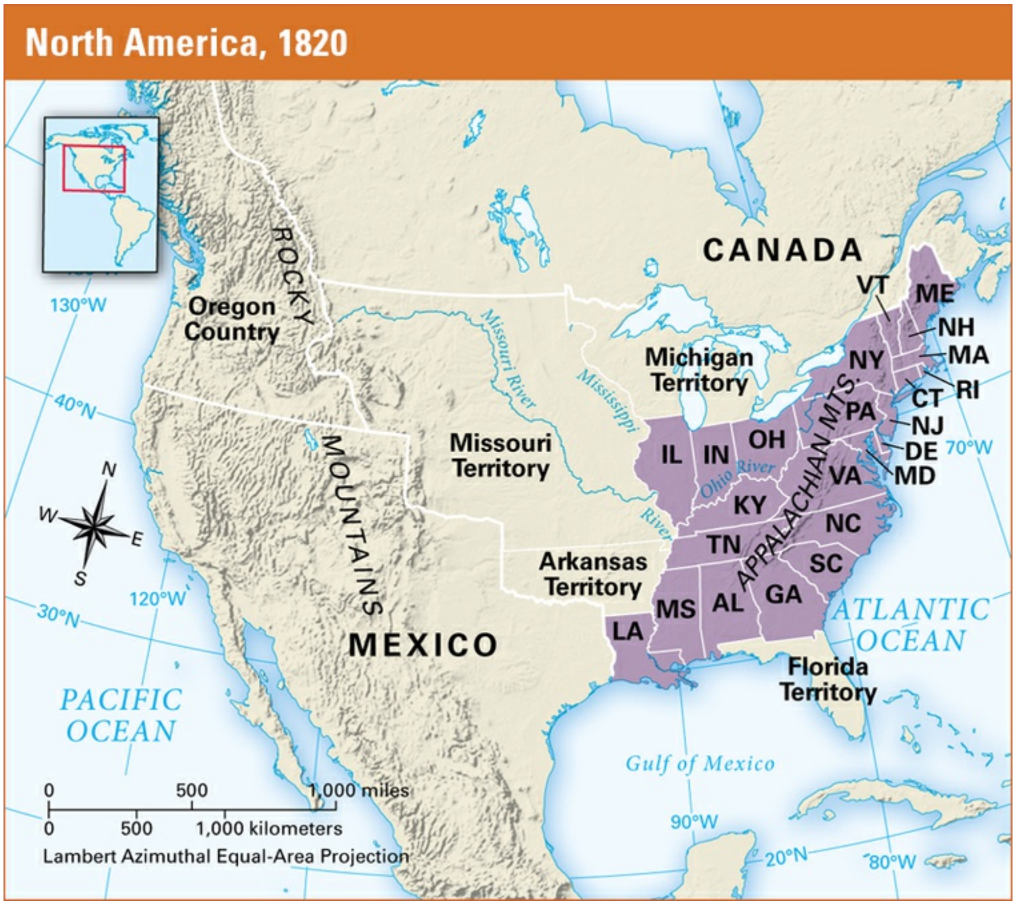
Many of the country's leaders knew they would have to overcome geographical obstacles and stereotypes to truly unite the country. One idea they favored was an ambitious program of building roads and canals to make transportation easier and faster.

**Symbols and Values** Uniting the nation required more than building roads and waterways. Citizens needed to feel American. One way to accomplish this was to build on Americans' pride in their government. After the British burned Washington, D.C., during the War of 1812, Congress hired architects to rebuild the White House and the Capitol using Greek and Roman architectural styles. Although Congress likely complained about the cost, they were pleased with the results of these magnificent buildings, which are still admired to this day as national symbols.

Another national symbol was born during this period: Uncle Sam. Legend has it that the name came from Sam Wilson, a New York butcher, who had provided the army with meat during the War of 1812. More likely the name was made up to match the initials U.S. for United States. After the war, “Uncle Sam” became a popular nickname for the federal government.

However, a national identity requires more than symbols. Citizens need to share values as well. White American men saw themselves as devoted to individualism and equality, but their commitment to these values did not always extend to enslaved African Americans, American Indians, or women. Still, they were united in the belief that they were different—and better—than Europeans.

Alexis de Tocqueville sensed this feeling just four days into his visit. “The Americans carry national pride to an altogether excessive length,” he noted. By the end of his trip, however, he had come to admire this distinctly American spirit, which was reflected in every aspect of life, from politics to art, music, and literature.


North America, 1820
CANADA
Oregon Country
ROCKY MOUNTAINS
Michigan Territory
Missouri Territory
Arkansas Territory
MEXICO
Florida Territory
Missouri River
Mississippi River
Ohio River
APPALACHIAN MTS.
ME
NH
VT
MA
RI
CT
NY
NJ
PA
DE
MD
VA
OH
IN
IL
KY
NC
TN
SC
GA
AL
MS
LA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PACIFIC OCEAN
Gulf of Mexico
130°W
120°W
90°W
80°W
70°W
40°N
30°N
20°N
N
S
E
W
0
500
1,000 miles
0
500
1,000 kilometers
Lambert Azimuthal Equal-Area Projection

## 2. Politics: The Era of Good Feelings

After being elected president in 1816, James Monroe went on a goodwill tour. Huge crowds greeted him so warmly that a newspaper proclaimed an “Era of Good Feelings.” Monroe's eight years as president are still known by this name today. To many Americans at the time, it seemed that a new period of national unity had dawned.

**Economic Nationalism** The swelling of nationalist spirit was reflected in proposals that the federal government take a more active role in building the national economy. One of the leading supporters of such measures in Congress was Henry Clay of Kentucky. Clay was a persuasive speaker, full of charm and intelligence.

Clay believed that America's future lay in **capitalism**, an economic system in which individuals and companies produce and distribute goods for profit. Though most supporters of capitalism agreed that government should have a limited role in the economy, Clay believed that the national government had a role to play in encouraging economic growth. Clay supported an economic plan called the **American System**. This plan called for taxes on imported goods to protect industry as well as federal spending on transportation projects like roads and canals.

A third part of Clay's plan was a new national bank to standardize currency and provide credit. Congress adopted this idea in 1816 when it created the second Bank of the United States. (The first national bank had lapsed in 1811.) The bank was a private business, but the U.S. government deposited federal funds there, and two-thirds of the bank stock was held by British interests.

Another early champion of economic nationalism was South Carolina's John C. Calhoun. In Congress, Calhoun supported the national bank, a permanent road system, and a tax on imports. Yet in other ways he resisted federal power. By the 1830s, he would become the leading spokesman for states' rights, largely to protect slavery in the South. His career illustrates the tensions between nationalism and the pull of regional differences.

A third proponent of nationalism was Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, who had served several terms in both the House and Senate. Unlike Clay, who was a War Hawk, Webster bitterly opposed the War of 1812. After the war, however, he voiced strong support for Clay's American

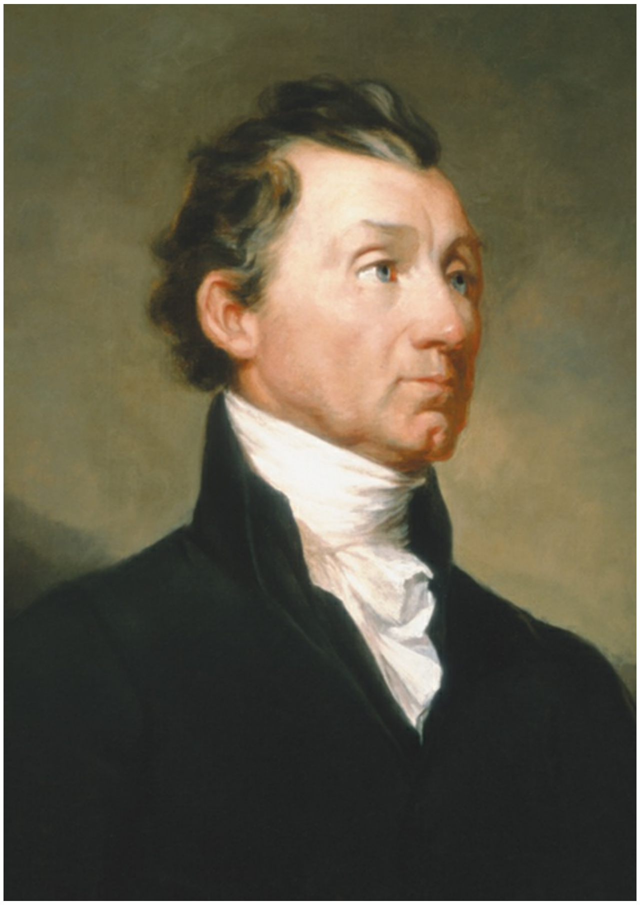
System. “Let us act under a settled conviction, and an habitual feeling, that these twenty-four states are one country,” Webster urged in 1825. Later, he would strongly challenge Calhoun's claim that states had the right to defy the federal government.

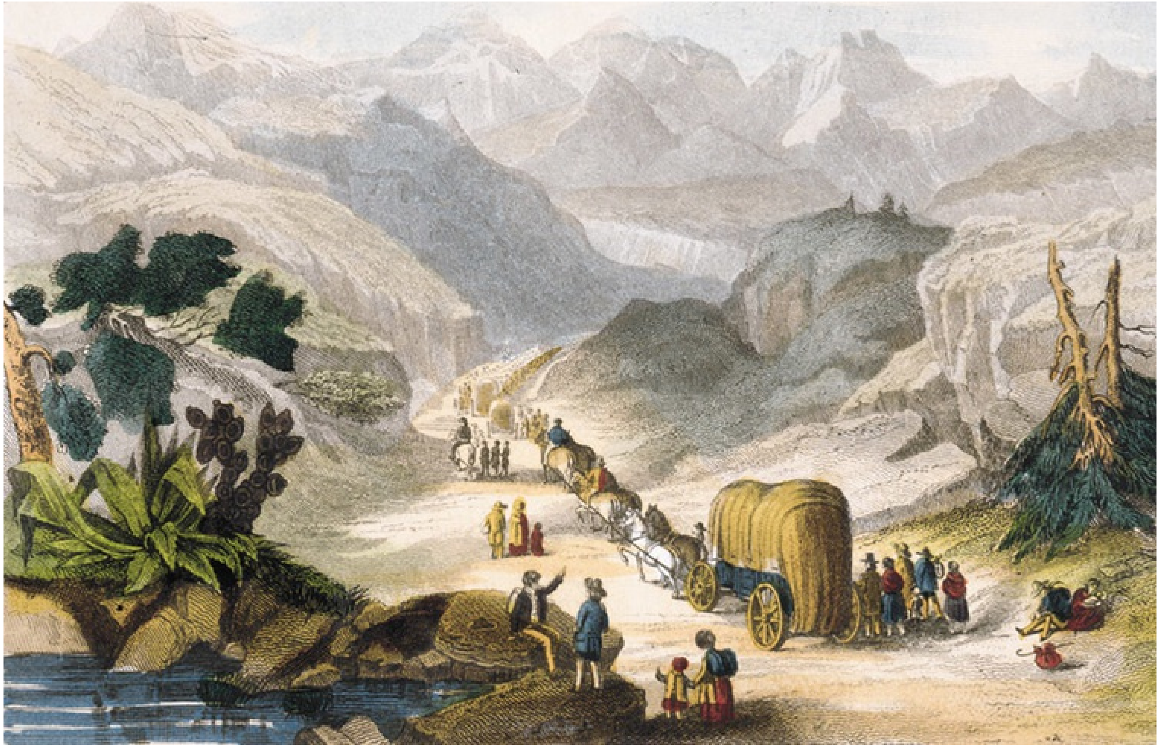
**Judicial Nationalism** Both nationalism and commerce had a friend in the Supreme Court's chief justice, John Marshall. Appointed by John Adams in 1801, Marshall wrote some of the most important court decisions in U.S. history.

Marshall's decisions had two major effects. First, they strengthened the role of the Supreme Court itself and the federal government's power over the states. Second, they encouraged the growth of capitalism, as a few specific cases show. In *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), the Court confirmed Congress's authority to create a national bank that was free from state interference, which strengthened the federal government's position. In another case, the Marshall Court held that business contracts could not be broken, even by state legislatures. This decision gave contracts a fundamental place in constitutional law. In *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824), the Court further reduced state powers by ending a monopoly that New York State had granted to a steamboat company operating between New York and New Jersey. Only Congress, the Court said, had the authority to regulate interstate commerce. Besides strengthening the power of the federal government, this decision promoted business growth by limiting the ability of states to regulate transportation.

**The End of the Era of Good Feelings** In 1824, five candidates, including Clay, competed to succeed Monroe as president, but none of the candidates won a majority in the Electoral College. As a result, the election had to be decided by the House of Representatives. The House elected John Quincy Adams, the son of John Adams.

The House's action enraged the candidate who had received the most votes on Election Day. That candidate was Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, one of the heroes of the War of 1812. Jackson vowed to run again in the next election, and the voters who rallied around him to defeat Adams in 1828 would become the heart of a new political party, the Democrats. The Era of Good Feelings was over. Partisan strife was here to stay.





## 3. Early American Art

Americans had brought European art traditions with them to the colonies, but by the 1800s they were expressing their national identity by developing styles all their own. Not all artists were professionals, and ordinary people produced many kinds of **folk art**. Some men carved weather vanes and hunting decoys, while some women sewed spare bits of cloth into quilts. Typically, untrained artists created signs, murals, and images of national symbols like the American flag. Such folk art was simple, direct, and often very colorful.

Most professional artists during this period made a living doing portraits, which tried to capture the personalities and emotions of the subjects. The best-known portrait artist was Gilbert Stuart. The image of George Washington on a dollar bill is adapted from a Stuart painting. The painting was so treasured that when the British attacked Washington, D.C., during the War of 1812, President Madison's wife, Dolly, saved Stuart's painting of Washington from the burning White House.

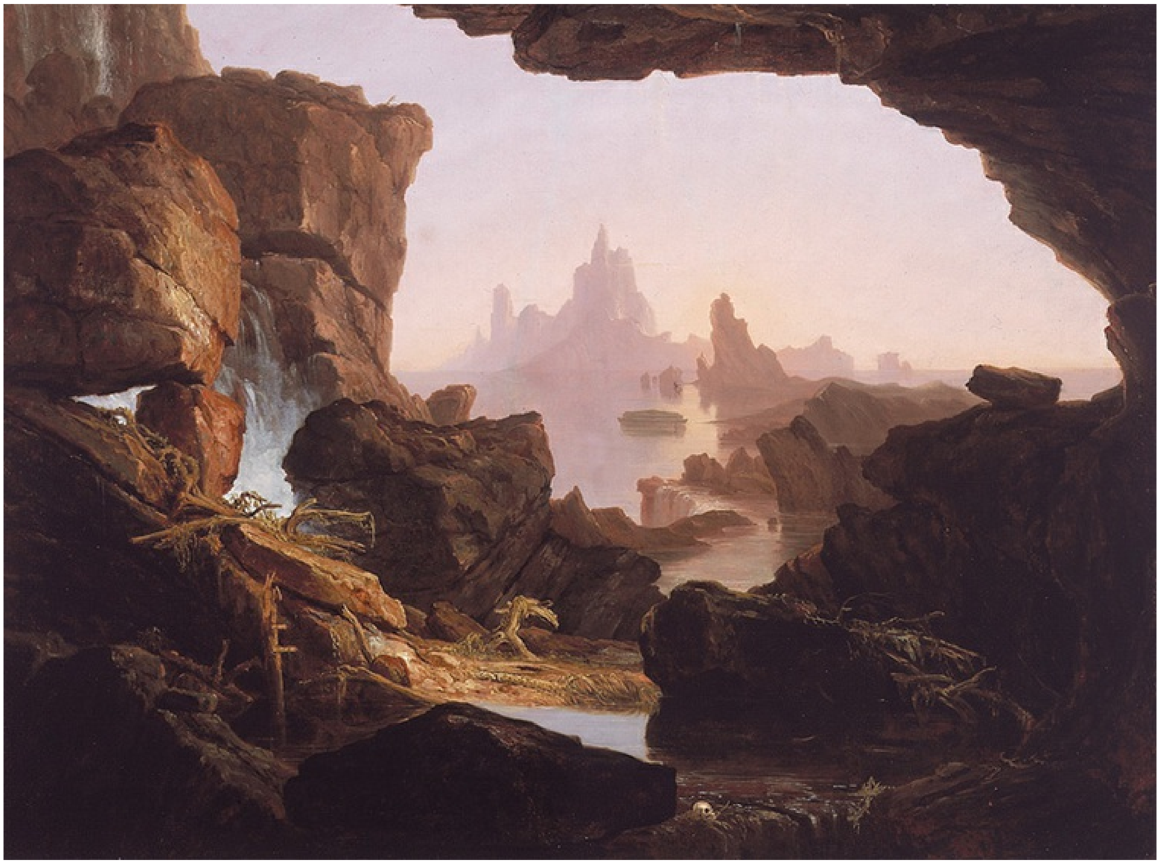
Strangely enough, it was an Englishman whose work led to a uniquely American brand of fine art. When Thomas Cole arrived from England in 1818, he fell in love with the immense and varied American landscape. His most famous works feature both storm clouds and sunny skies over broad stretches of land, the glowing light making a striking contrast to the stormy darkness. Fellow artists followed Cole's example and started what became known as the Hudson River School of painting. These painters focused on nature rather than people, often choosing to paint broad, scenic vistas.

Other artists portrayed more particular aspects of nature. John James Audubon painted finely detailed portraits of birds. In some respects, Audubon was more a naturalist than an artist, choosing to make accurate, realistic studies of the species he observed in the fields and woods. No one in the United States would print his four-volume book, so he found a publisher in England. *The Birds of America* made him one of the country's first internationally famous artists.

Philadelphia's George Catlin turned his eye on the natives of the

American West. He saw that American Indians' traditional ways were disappearing. For years, Catlin crisscrossed the West, drawing the native people and capturing in rich colors their villages, hunts, and rituals.

By choosing as their subject the wondrous features of their new country, Americans gave their art a distinct identity. At times, they presented dangerous landscapes in deceptively positive tones. Still, the vividness and optimism of their work accurately reflected the national outlook.



## 4. Early American Music

Americans' national identity was also expressed through music. Until the 1800s, music in the United States was performed and heard mostly in church, and the songs that were performed outside church usually were old tunes with new lyrics. The music for “The Star-Spangled Banner,” for instance, came from an English tune.

With growing prosperity came an outburst of musical activity. In the North, orchestras played classical music from Europe, and provided the music for the cotillion, in which groups of four couples danced together with elegantly coordinated movements. Dancers swirled through ballrooms, performing lively minuets, gavottes, mazurkas, and waltzes. Sometimes, female dancers lifted their floor-length petticoats to show off their footwork. Displaying their ankles was considered quite daring.

In the South, slaves combined the hymns of white churchgoers with African musical styles to create **spirituals**. They also entertained themselves—and sometimes slave owners—with folk songs accompanied by violin, drum, and banjo.

In the South and West, square dances became common, which were less formal versions of the popular cotillion. As fiddles played, a “caller” told dancers which steps to perform.

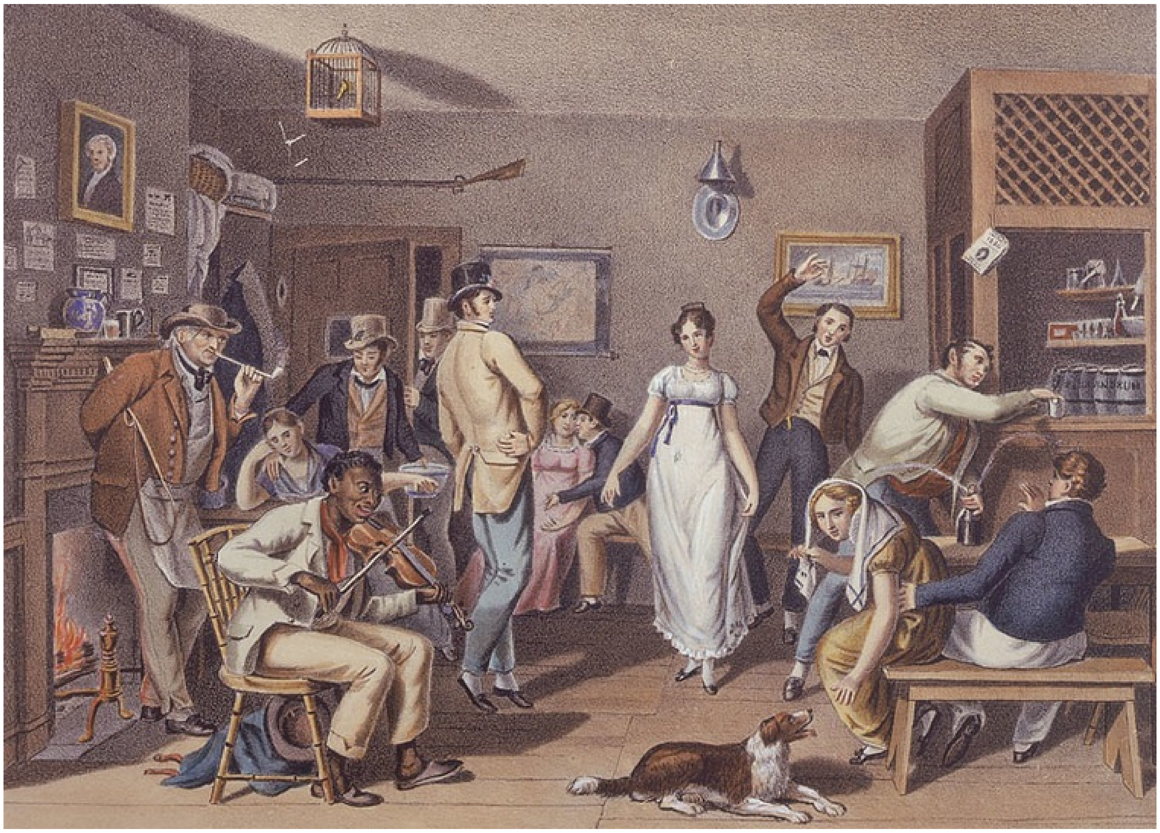
As demand for popular songs grew, composers answered with a stream of patriotic anthems. The best known is “America,” written in 1831 by Samuel Francis Smith. It begins “My country, 'tis of Thee” and is sung to the tune of England's “God Save the King.”

White composers from the South created a type of music known as minstrel songs that mimicked African American songs. The performers mocked African Americans by blackening their own white faces, wearing shabby clothes, and singing in exaggerated African American dialects. One white composer, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, caused a national sensation in 1828 with his song “Jump Jim Crow”:

> *Weel about and turn about and do jis so*
> *Ebery time I weel about I jump Jim Crow.*

The racist phrase “Jim Crow,” which came from Rice's black minstrel show character, had a long life. Many years later, laws that discriminated against African Americans would be known as “Jim Crow laws.”

Minstrel shows became one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the country and inspired composer Stephen Foster to write such famous songs as “Old Folks at Home,” “Camptown Races,” and “Oh! Susanna.” Foster's music demonstrated the first uniquely American musical tradition.



## 5. Early American Literature

In 1820, a British writer sneered, “Who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?” Although the United States was a culturally backward nation in the eyes of Europeans, America was finding its cultural voice, especially in literature.

Like the painters of the Hudson River School, writers began to use uniquely American subjects and settings. One of the first to achieve literary fame was Washington Irving. He drew on German folklore for his colorful tales of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” but he set them in the wilds of upstate New York. Irving's enchanted stories were an immediate hit.

One of the nation's first novelists was James Fenimore Cooper. In books such as *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper wrote about the adventures of settlers in the wilderness. His descriptions of frontier life and American Indians attracted worldwide interest. In France, many publishers competed to publish *The Pioneers*.

Davy Crockett was a real-life frontiersman who spun tall tales about his life as a hunter, soldier, and explorer. His election to Congress from Tennessee horrified Alexis de Tocqueville, who described Crockett as a man “who has no education, can read with difficulty, has no property, no fixed residence, but passes his life hunting, selling his game to live, and dwelling continuously in the woods.” But that very image captivated Americans, who saw Crockett as the fictional frontier hero come to life. Crockett's autobiography, which was full of his plain backwoods speech and rough humor, helped give popular literature a new, distinctly American accent.

New England's Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the first serious American poets. He wrote an American epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, based on stories of American Indians, while other poems, like his famous “Paul Revere's Ride,” touched on patriotic themes. In “The Building of the Ship,” Longfellow celebrated the growing importance of the United States to the world:

> *Sail on, O Ship of State!*
> *Sail on, O Union, strong and great!*
> *Humanity with all its fears,*
> *With all the hopes of future years,*
> *Is hanging breathless on thy fate!*

In both subject matter and style, writers like these encouraged the growth of a national identity. In particular, they promoted the myth of rugged individualism that for many people—at home and abroad— best characterized the United States.

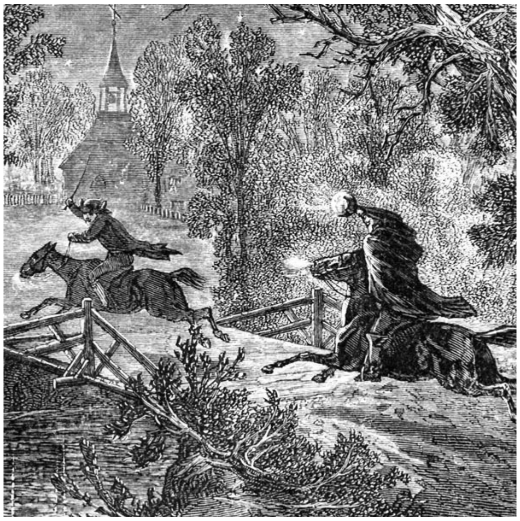
## Lesson Summary

**In this lesson, you read about the growing sense of nationhood in the United States after the War of 1812.**

**Developing a Nation in a Land of Differences** A spirit of patriotism after the War of 1812 helped the United States form a national identity, even though distinct lifestyles developed in different regions of the country. This national identity was shown in Americans' pride in symbols, such as the White House, the Capitol, and Uncle Sam, and in shared values, such as equality.

**Politics: The Era of Good Feelings** James Monroe became president in 1816. His presidency is known as the Era of Good Feelings because of the national unity the country experienced between 1816 and 1824. During these years, leaders like Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Daniel Webster supported proposals that called for the federal government to take a more active role in developing the nation's economy. Also during this period, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall, helped strengthen federal power over the states and encourage the growth of capitalism.

**Early American Art, Music, and Literature** American art forms also helped the nation develop a unique identity. Ordinary people created American folk art, such as carved weather vanes and patchwork quilts. Painters of the Hudson River School created artworks that highlighted the landscape's natural beauty, and George Catlin painted scenes of American Indian life. New forms of music included spirituals and patriotic anthems. Square dancing, danced by four couples at a time to fiddle music, became popular. Writers used uniquely American settings and subjects to create such stories as Washington Irving's “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and popular novels like James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*.



Reading Further

## A New Literature Celebrates a New Nation

**As the country grew, American writers began to develop a uniquely American literature. Stories and novels took place in beautiful American settings. They also focused on distinctly American topics, both celebrating the new nation and pondering its future.**

Rip Van Winkle, the title character of an 1819 short story by Washington Irving, was a happy man. He lived in New York's lush Hudson Valley and passed his days by spending time with his friends, shooting squirrels, and avoiding his domineering wife.

One afternoon, as he rested in the hills after hunting with his dog, Rip heard someone call his name and then saw a strange-looking, elflike man asking for assistance. Rip helped the little man carry a heavy keg to a green valley where he spotted other small, oddly dressed men bowling on a lawn.

Rip wondered if there was something magical about the unusual scene. How had the little man known his name? And why did thunder roar every time a ball hit some pins? Soon Rip's curiosity about what was in the keg—and his desire to avoid his wife—overcame him, and he had one drink after another until he finally fell asleep.

After waking up the following morning, Rip began to realize everything had changed. The little men had vanished, and when he made the short journey home, he found that his “village seemed altered; it was larger and more populous” than it had been when he had left. He felt that the “character of the people seemed changed,” and a “busy, bustling” tone had replaced the “drowsy tranquility” that Rip had known. In fact, Rip Van Winkle had slept for 20 years, although it felt like just one night to him.

Rip soon discovered that he had become an old man in what felt like a matter of hours. “He found himself stiff in the joints,” and he looked different. When he passed the local villagers,

> *They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they cast eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins. The constant recurrence of this gesture, induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same, when, to his astonishment, he found his beard had grown a foot long!*
>
> —Washington Irving, “Rip Van Winkle,” from
> *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*, 1819

Not only had Rip's appearance transformed during his long night, but the American colonies had also fought and won a war for independence while he slept. Imagine Rip's confusion on visiting the local tavern, where the political changes were visible.

> *He recognized on the sign . . . the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe, but even this was singularly metamorphosed [transformed]. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was stuck in the hand instead of a sceptre, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON.*

Talking with the townsfolk, Rip discovered what had happened. “Instead of being a subject of his Majesty George the Third,” he found out, “he was now a free citizen of the United States.”

Many people consider “Rip Van Winkle” to be the United States's first short story. In the tale, Rip Van Winkle falls asleep for 20 years and wakes up to find the colony where he lived has become part of a new country. Written not long after independence, it expressed wonder and shock at how quickly a revolution had happened and how much it had changed the lives of the people of the new nation.

Washington Irving was not the only writer to choose American topics for his work. At the same time Irving was writing, James Fenimore Cooper penned the first American novels. Set in the fictional town of Templeton, New York, *The Leatherstocking Tales* told about the settlement and rapid disappearance of the frontier.

*The Pioneers*, written in 1823, was the first of the series, and introduced readers to Natty Bumppo. This fictional character, a former wilderness scout, was probably modeled after Daniel Boone. He was called Leatherstocking because he wore leather chaps to cover his legs. In Cooper's novels, Natty Bumppo tried to protect both nature and his own way of life from the onslaught of civilization.

In one scene, Cooper described the clash between the pioneers, who represented civilization, and a flock of birds, which represented nature. The excitement began early one morning. “The gulls are hovering over the lake already,” one Templeton resident exclaimed, “and the heavens are alive with pigeons. You may look an hour before you can find a hole through which to get a peep at the sun.”

The excited townspeople gathered. Cooper wrote, “If the heavens were alive with pigeons, the whole village seemed equally in motion with men, women, and children.” They brought their guns—all kinds of guns—and started to shoot at the pigeons. There were so many birds that, without needing to aim, the hunters could simply shoot into the air and the pigeons fell. At one point, the hunters grew so enthusiastic that two of them brought out a cannon to shoot even more pigeons.

Natty Bumppo harshly criticized the settlers for recklessly spoiling nature:

> *“This comes of settling a country!” he said. “Here have I known the pigeon to fly for forty long years, and, till you made your clearings, there was nobody to skear [scare] or to hurt them. I loved to see them come into the woods, for they were company to a body, hurting nothing—being, as it was, as harmless as a garter-snake.”*
> —James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers*, 1823

In describing the hunters as not even bothering to see whether the birds were dead or to pick them up off the ground, Cooper seemed to agree with Natty that the settlers threatened the natural world.

On the other hand, the settlers did have some valid reasons for their actions, and Cooper sympathized with them, too. One hunter, Billy Kirby, heard Natty's outrage and replied,

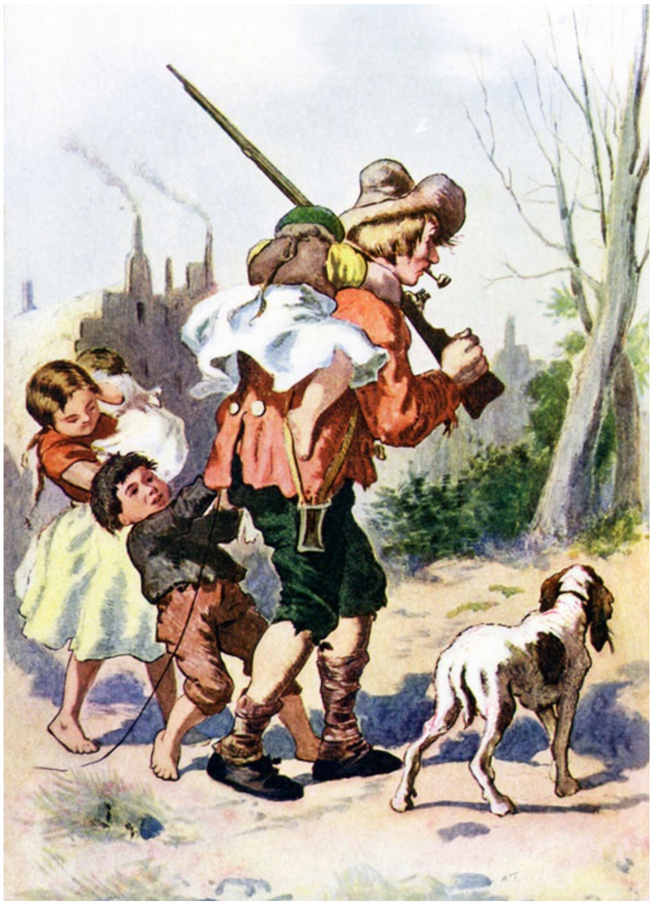
> *“What! old Leather-Stocking,” he cried, “grumbling at the loss of a few pigeons! If you had to sow your wheat twice, and three times, as I have done, you wouldn't be so massyfully [mercifully] feeling toward the divils. Hurrah, boys! scatter the feathers!”*

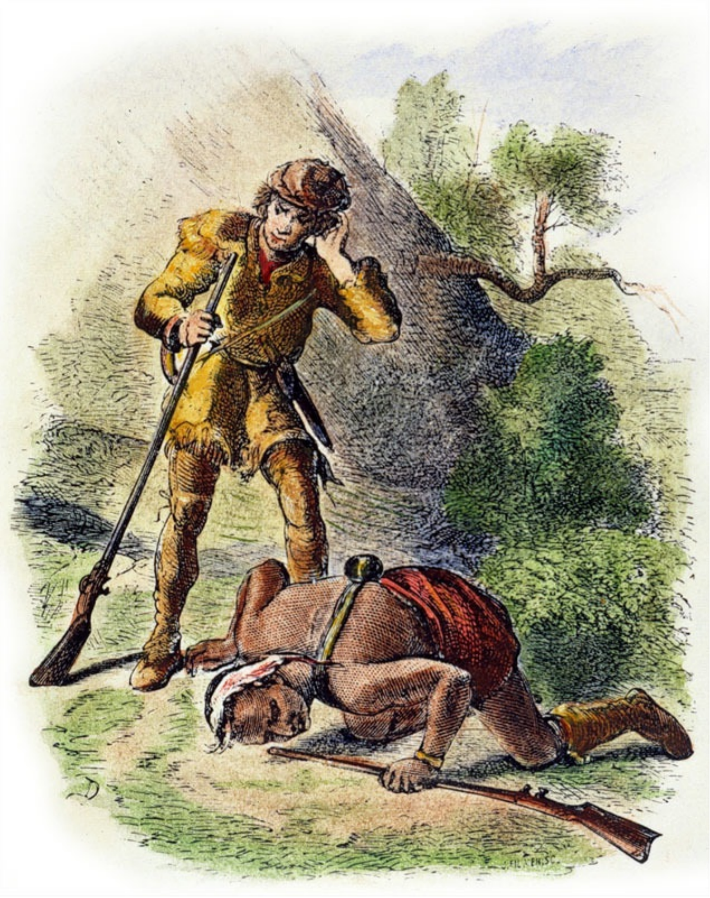
The settlers were farmers, and the birds threatened the crops they needed to survive. In Cooper's eyes, the settlers' motive was as valid as Leatherstocking's anger. But the needs of nature and the needs of the pioneers clashed—and would continue to clash—until the settlers finally won out.

## Voices of a Changing World

Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were two of the first truly American writers, both seeing themselves as voices for the new nation. Having lived overseas, both writers wanted Europeans to respect the budding American culture and set out to create literature that would do just that.

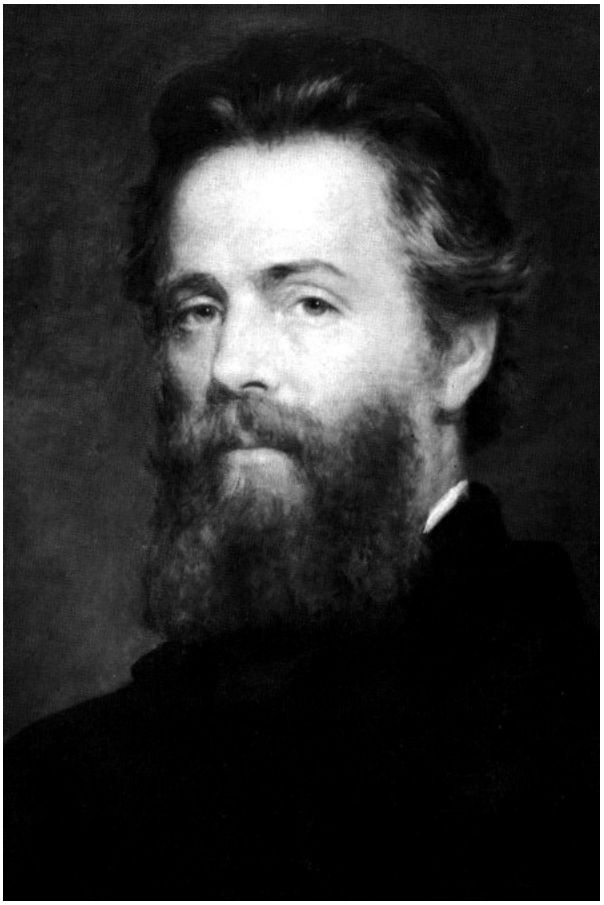
The content of their writing was distinctly American, with stories set in the beautiful American landscape. Proud of their country, they addressed uniquely American issues such as independence, expansion, and life on the frontier. Both men knew that along with the nation's growth, there would be unforeseen changes, and they wrote about these uncertainties in their stories that remain popular to this day.





## The Growth of a National Literature

“To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.” So wrote Herman Melville, the author of the famous novel *Moby Dick*. As American literature grew to maturity in the 19th century, American authors chose mightier and mightier themes. Their efforts quickly led to a distinctive national literature. It didn't go as far back as European literary traditions, but it was just as ambitious and varied. And with the coming of Mark Twain, Americans could boast that their literature had developed a writer equal to any in the world.



## Herman Melville

Herman Melville's “mighty themes” came from his own experiences. Born in New York City in 1819, he showed little promise as a child. He failed at several jobs until he enlisted as a sailor on a whaling ship and spent four years at sea. Back home, he charmed his family with stories of his adventures. He realized he was on to something, and began writing.

Melville published his greatest novel, *Moby Dick,* in 1851. The hero, Captain Ahab, had lost a leg trying to catch a huge white whale called Moby Dick. Ahab sets off to confront the whale again.

Melville wrote in a slow, wandering style. But to the readers of 1850, who had never seen a TV show or a movie, *Moby Dick* was a rip-roaring adventure story. It was also a thoughtful study about wanting something you shouldn't. In the end, Ahab's ship tracks down Moby Dick—and Ahab dies trying to kill the whale. Only one crewmember survives to tell the story.

## Nathaniel Hawthorne

While composing *Moby Dick*, Melville moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. There his neighbor was another writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne had been born to a Puritan family in nearby Salem, the site of witch burnings in 1692. Shamed by this part of his heritage, Hawthorne made the dark side of Puritan society his mighty theme. He used a high-sounding, elegant style to portray early New England life in such novels as *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hawthorne's tales often had a spooky feel. In his short story *Young Goodman Brown,* the hero meets the devil. Is it a nightmare? Is it his imagination? Or is it real? Whichever, the devil tells him, “I helped your grandfather, the constable [policeman], when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village.” Through such haunting passages, Hawthorne exposed the violence underlying America's Puritan ancestry.

## Louisa May Alcott

In the early 1840s, Hawthorne lived at Brook Farm, near Boston. The group that started Brook Farm tried to live by the Transcendentalist philosophies of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Everyone shared equally in the work and profits. Among the farm's leaders was Amos Bronson Alcott. Hawthorne helped inspire Alcott's young daughter, Louisa May, to become a writer herself.

Alcott's mighty theme was the everyday life of half of America's people: girls and women. Unlike Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists, she wrote in an easy, natural style. Her biggest success was *Little Women*. The book sold so well that she wrote several sequels. It remains popular today.

*Little Women* is the story of four young sisters and their mother, whom they call Marmee. Each chapter presents a typical adventure for outgoing girls of Civil War times, and usually ends with a lesson.

In one chapter, the sisters decide they don't want to do their chores.

They get so bored that when Marmee decides she won't do any housework either, they eagerly take her role, only to botch it completely. In the end, Marmee reminds her daughters to “have regular hours for work and play, make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well.” Alcott's warm portrayal of sturdy, independent women contributed to America's growing sense that all people are equal.

## Mark Twain

American literature truly reached maturity with Missouri-born Mark Twain in the last half of the 19th century. Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. His pen name comes from a term used by boat pilots on the Mississippi River to note the water's depth.

Many people consider Twain to be America's greatest writer. Like Melville, he often wrote about life on the water—in his case, the Mississippi. Like Hawthorne, he often wrote about America's shameful past—in his case, slavery. And like Alcott, he often wrote about ordinary people—in his case, the residents of small western towns. Twain then added a few mighty themes of his own and tied them all together with a biting sense of humor.

Perhaps Twain's most famous book is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Published in 1884, it tells a story that takes place before the Civil War ended slavery. Though widely praised, its depictions of child abuse, juvenile delinquency, and race relations make it controversial even today.

The book's hero, Huck Finn, sails down the Mississippi River in a raft with Jim, a runaway slave. At one point Jim is returned to slavery, putting Huck in a no-win situation. He can let Jim go and lose a true friend, or he can rescue Jim and commit a crime, since helping a slave escape is illegal (and, to most people around Huck, morally wrong as well). Finn tells the reader, “I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: ‘All right, then, I'll go to hell.'" He and his friend Tom Sawyer then work together to free Jim.

Mark Twain tackled American themes in a distinctively American style. At the same time, like all great writers, he wrote about subjects and individuals that people everywhere can recognize and appreciate.

## Defining America Through Literature

What is America? By the early 1800s, many events had defined the new nation politcally: Independence had been declared in 1776. The American Revolution had been won. The Constitution had been written. The War of 1812 reaffirmed America’s independence. America was a free and democratic nation.

Two men attempted to define America in a different way—through literature. Authors Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper helped to shape the identity of early America.

### Washington Irving (1783–1859)

As a writer, Irving had a keen eye for the American landscape and the people who lived in it. He wrote about the New Yorkers he knew, often with humor. And he wrote sympathetically about the American Indians who, he believed, were being ill treated by the white settlers. For his charming tales in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819–1820), Irving would later be called the father of the American short story. The following is a passage from one of his best-loved stories, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

It was toward evening that Ichabod arrived at the castle [house] of the Heer Van Tassel, which he found thronged with . . . farmers, a spare leathern-faced race, in homespun [homemade] coats and breeches, blue stockings, huge shoes, and magnificent pewter buckles. Their brisk, withered little dames [wives], in close crimped caps, long waisted short-gowns, homespun petticoats, with scissors and pin-cushions, and gay calico pokets hanging on the outside. Buxom lasses, almost as antiquated as their mothers, excepting where a straw hat, a fine ribbon, or perhaps a white frock, gave symptoms of city innovation. The sons, in short square-skirted coats, with rows of stupendous brass buttons, and their hair generally queued in the fashion of the times, especially if they could procure an eelskin for the purpose, it being esteemed throughout the country as a potent nourisher and strengthener of the hair.

**James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851)**

Cooper was one of the first authors to use an entirely American setting for his stories. He featured the frontier—a setting that could not be mistaken for any place in Europe. His white, American Indian, and black characters reflected the country’s diversity. The following is a passage from what may be his best-known work, *The Last of the Mohicans*, which he published in 1826.

The frame of the white man . . . was like that of one who had known hardships and exertion from his earliest youth...He wore a hunting shirt of forest-green, fringed with faded yellow, and a summer cap of skins which had been shorn [shaved] of their fur. He also bore a knife...but no tomahawk. His moccasins were ornamented after the gay fashion of the natives . . . A pouch and horn completed his personal accouterments [accessories], though a rifle of great length, which the theory of the more ingenious whites had taught them was the most dangerous of all firearms, leaned against a neighboring sapling [young tree]. The eye of the hunter, or scout, whichever he might be, was small, quick, keen, and restless, roving while he spoke, on every side of him, as if in quest of game, or distrusting the sudden approach of some lurking enemy. Notwithstanding the symptoms of habitual suspicion, his countenance was not only without guile [deceit], but at the moment at which he is introduced, it was charged with an expression of sturdy honesty.

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- "The Legend of Sleep Hollow" by Washington Irving in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. in Two Volumes*, pp. 680–744.

Context/Entire Selection: http://ia601408.us.archive.org/5/items/sketchbookgeoff07irvigoog/sketch

Accessed March, 2017

- *The Last of the Mohicans* by J. Fenimore Cooper, 1826, pp. 25–6.

Entire Selection:

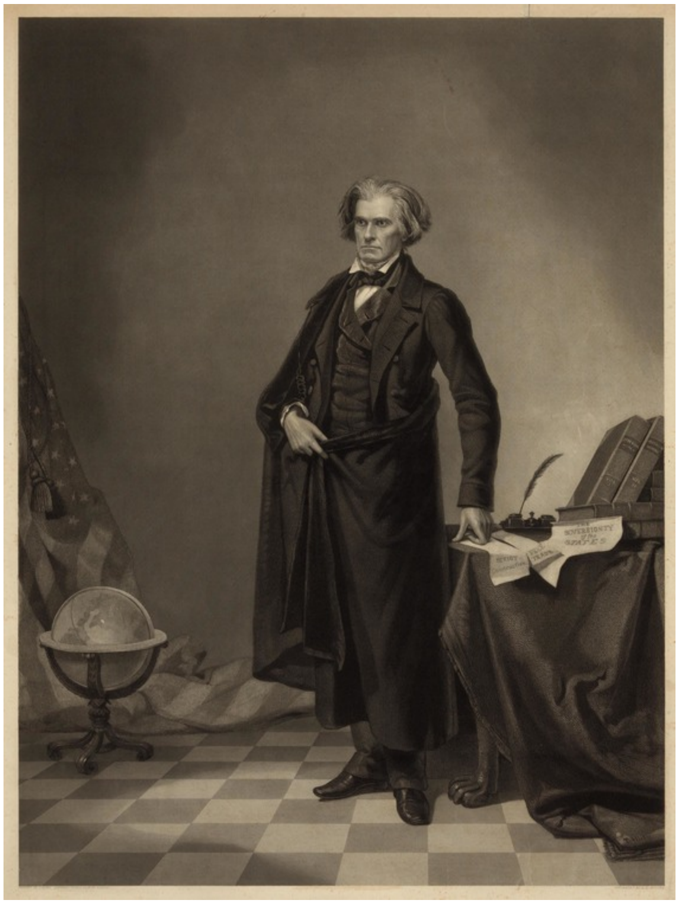
http://ia800301.us.archive.org/30/items/lastofmohicans00cooprich/lastofr

Accessed March, 2017

## Who Has the Ultimate Authority: The States or the Federal Government?

In 1828, the U.S. Constitution was 40 years old. The creators of the document worked hard to agree on a balance of a strong central government and freedom for the states. Throughout history—even today—the constitutional limits of both levels of government have been argued. In 1828, a great debate began in Congress.

### John C. Calhoun



On April 22, 1828, Congress passed what became known as the Tariff of Abominations. It would charge a tax on goods imported from other countries. The tariff helped the manufacturers of the North, but it hurt people in the South, who did not make many of their own goods. Additionally, since the British would be affected by the tariff, they would have trouble paying for the cotton they imported from the South.

Vice President John C. Calhoun of South Carolina was strongly against the federal government imposing a tariff (duties). He anonymously wrote a pamphlet, *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*, encouraging his state to nullify (ignore or cancel) the tariff. This doctrine of nullification argued that a state could nullify an act of Congress if the state believed the national government had over-stepped its authority.

Here is a portion of *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*. Calhoun eventually took credit for the doctrine of nullification in 1832. Some historians believe this hurt his chances to fulfill his ambition to become U.S. president.

*AND NOW, FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN, if the wise and learned philosophers of the elder world, the first observers of nutation and aberration, the discoverers of maddening ether and invisible planets, the inventors of Congreve rockets and Shrapnel shells, should find their hearts disposed to enquire what has America done for the benefit of mankind?*

*The Senate and House of Representatives of South Carolina, now met and sitting in general assembly, through the Honorable Wm. Smith and the Hon. Robert Y. Hayne, their Representatives in the Senate of the United States do in the name and on behalf of the good people of the said Commonwealth, solemnly protest against the system of protecting duties, lately adopted by the Federal Government, for the following reasons:*

*1st Because the good people of this Commonwealth believe, that the powers of Congress were delegated to it, in trust for the accomplishment of certain specified objects which limit and control them, and that every exercise of them, for any other purposes, is a violation of the Constitution as unwarrantable as the undisguised assumption of substantive, independent powers not granted or expressly withheld.*

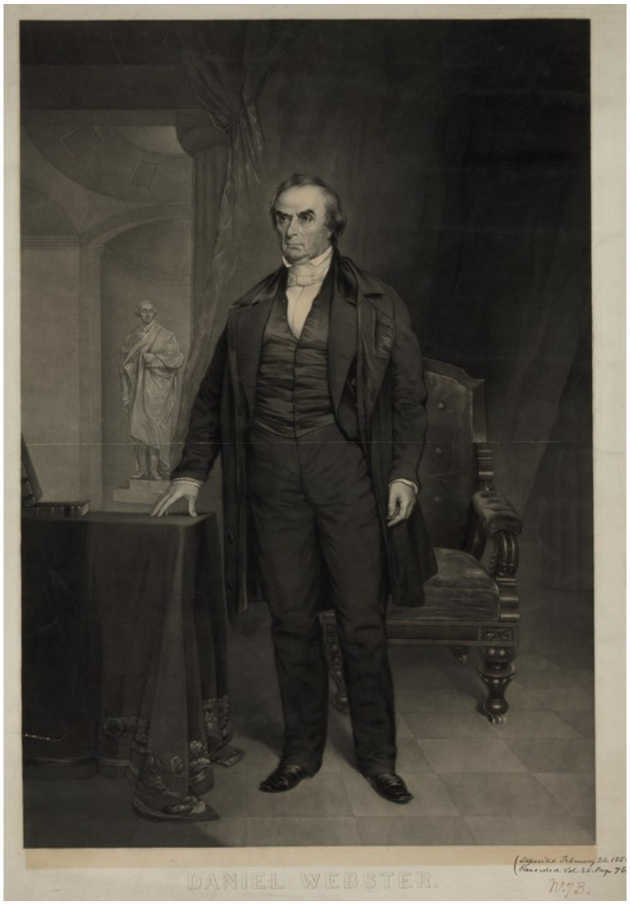
*2nd Because the power to lay duties on imports is and in its very nature can be only a means of effecting objects specified by the Constitution;*

*since no free government and least of all a government of enumerated powers, can of right impose any tax, any more than a penalty which is not at once justified by public necessity and clearly within the scope and purview of the social compact, and since the right of confining appropriations of the public money, to such legitimate and constitutional objects, as is essential to the liberties of the people, as their unquestionable privilege to be taxed only by their own consent.*

*. . . 6th Because whilst the powers to protect manufactures is nowhere expressly granted to Congress, nor can be considered as necessary and proper to carry into effect any specific power, it seems to be expressly reserved to the states, by the tenth section of the first article of the Constitution.*

*. . . Deeply impressed with these considerations, the Representatives of the good people of this Commonwealth, anxiously desiring to live in peace with their fellow citizens, and to do all that in them lies to preserve and perpetuate the union of the States and the liberties of which it is the surest pledge-but feeling it to be their bounden duty to expose and to resist all encroachments upon the true spirit of the Constitution, lest an apparent acquiescence in the system of protecting duties should be drawn into precedent, do, in the name of the Commonwealth of South Carolina, claim to enter upon the Journals of the [U.S.] Senate, their protest against it as unconstitutional, oppressive, and unjust.*

## Daniel Webster



On Saturday, February 16, 1833, John Calhoun spoke out against the federal government's tariff of 1832 and for South Carolina's right to nullify it. Then Daniel Webster, a senator from Massachusetts, argued against Calhoun's message of state authority.

*. . . Mr. President, the alleged right of a State to decide constitutional questions for herself, necessarily leads to force, because other States must have the same right, and because different States will decide differently; and when these questions arise between States, if there be no superior power, they can be decided only by the law of force. On entering into the Union, the people of each State gave up a part of their own power to make laws for themselves, in consideration that, as to common objects, they should have a part in making laws for other States. In other words, the people of all the States agreed, to create a common Government, to be conducted by common councils. Pennsylvania, for example, yielded the right of laying imposts in her own ports, in consideration that the new Government, in which she was to have a share, should possess the power of laying imposts in all the*

*States. If South Carolina now refuses to submit to this power, she breaks the condition on which other States entered into the Union. She partakes of the common councils, and therein assists to bind others, while she refuses to be bound herself. — It makes no difference in this case whether she does all this without reason or pretext, or whether she sets up as a reason that, in her judgment, the acts complained of are unconstitutional.*

John Calhoun had hoped other southern states would also nullify the federal tariff, but none did. On December 10, 1832, President Andrew Jackson made a “Proclamation to the People of South Carolina” and pronounced the supreme authority of the federal government. The following March, Congress passed the Force Bill which gave the president power to use the military to collect tariffs. Two weeks later, South Carolina withdrew its nullification ordinance. But to keep to its principles, it nullified the Force Bill.

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- "South Carolina Exposition and Protest, Reported by the Special Committee of the House of Representatives on the Tariff," prepared anonymously by Vice President John C. Calhoun, read and ordered to be printed, December 19, 1828.

Entire Selection: http://www.teachingushistory.org/lessons/expositionandprotest1828.htm

Accessed March, 2017

- Senator Daniel Webster's remarks concerning the "Revenue Collection Bill," delivered Saturday, February 16, printed in *Gales &B Seaton's Reigster of Debates in Congress. Twenty-Second Congress . . . Second Session: From December 3, 1832, to March 3, 1833*. pp. 561–2.

Entire Selection: http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llrd&fileName=014/llrd014.db&recNum=280

Accessed March, 2017

## Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835/1840)

In 1831, a French politician named Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States. Tocqueville’s purpose in visiting the United States was to gain a better understanding of the principles of American democracy. The result of his observations, which took five years to complete, was a four-part book entitled *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville began his endeavor of writing this comprehensive study in 1835. For Tocqueville, the question of how a democracy is able to survive after a revolution was vital to his understanding of his own country. France, like the United States, had experienced a revolution. However, it was unable to establish a stable democracy afterward.

Tocqueville’s observations were broad and included many topics about American Democracy, such as European immigration to America, sovereignty, the two-party system, race, and the power of the majority. You will read short excerpts from Book 1 of *Democracy in America*. As you read, consider the time at which these excerpts were written. Tocqueville’s visit to America took place nearly 60 years after America declared independence and about 20 years before the start of the Civil War. Based on what you have learned about the United States during this time, do you believe Tocqueville presents an accurate portrait of American democracy?

### European Immigration to America

*The emigrants who came, at different periods to occupy the territory now covered by the American Union differed from each other in many respects; their aim was not the same, and they governed themselves on different principles. These men had, however, certain features in common . . . The tie of language is perhaps the strongest and the most durable that can unite mankind. All the emigrants spoke the same tongue; they were all offsets from the same people. Born in a country which had been agitated for centuries by the struggles of faction, and in which all parties had been obliged in their turn to place themselves under the protection of the laws, their political education had been perfected in this rude school, and they were more conversant with the notions of right and the principles of true freedom than the greater part of their European contemporaries.*

## The Principle of Sovereignty

*If there be a country in the world where the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people can be fairly appreciated, where it can be studied in its application to the affairs of society, and where its dangers and its advantages may be foreseen, that country is assuredly America.*

*In some countries a power exists which, though it is in a degree foreign to the social body, directs it, and forces it to pursue a certain track. In others the ruling force is divided, being partly within and partly without the ranks of the people. But nothing of the kind is to be seen in the United States; there society governs itself for itself. All power centers in its bosom; and scarcely an individual is to be meet with who would venture to conceive, or, still less, to express, the idea of seeking it elsewhere. The nation participates in the making of its laws by the choice of its legislators, and in the execution of them by the choice of the agents of the executive government; it may almost be said to govern itself, so feeble and so restricted is the share left to the administration, so little do the authorities forget their popular origin and the power from which they emanate.*

## Two-Party System

*America has already lost the great parties which once divided the nation; and if her happiness is considerably increased, her morality has suffered by their extinction. When the War of Independence was terminated, and the foundations of the new Government were to be laid down, the nation was divided between two opinions . . . the one tending to limit, the other to extend indefinitely, the power of the people. The conflict of these two opinions never assumed that degree of violence in America which it has frequently displayed elsewhere. Both parties of the Americans were, in fact, agreed upon the most essential points; and neither of them had to destroy a traditionary constitution, or to overthrow the structure of society, in order to ensure its own triumph.*

*The party which desired to limit the power of the people endeavored to apply its doctrines more especially to the Constitution of the Union, whence it derived its name of Federal. The other party, which affected to be more exclusively attached to the cause of liberty, took that of Republican. America is a land of democracy, and the Federalists were* *always in a minority; but they reckoned on their side almost all the great men who had been called forth by the War of Independence, and their moral influence was very considerable. For ten or twelve years they [the Federalists] were at the head of affairs, and they were able to apply some, though not all, of their principles . . . In 1801 the Republicans got possession of the Government; Thomas Jefferson was named President; and he increased the influence of their party by the weight of his celebrity, the greatness of his talents, and the immense extent of his popularity.*

## Government Officials

*I have already observed that the American statesmen of the present day are very inferior to those who stood at the head of affairs fifty years ago. This is as much a consequence of the circumstances as of the laws of the country. When America was struggling in the high cause of independence to throw off the yoke of another country, and when it was about to usher a new nation into the world, the spirits of its inhabitants were roused to the height which their great efforts required. In this general excitement the most distinguished men were ready to forestall the wants of the community, and the people clung to them for support, and placed them at its head. But events of this magnitude are rare, and it is from an inspection of the ordinary course of affairs that our judgment must be formed.*

## Power of the Majority and Race

*I said one day to an inhabitant of Pennsylvania, "Be so good as to explain to me how it happens that in a State founded by Quakers, and celebrated for its toleration, freed blacks are not allowed to exercise civil rights. They pay the taxes; is it not fair that they should have a vote?" "You insult us," replied my informant, "if you imagine that our legislators could have committed so gross an act of injustice and intolerance." "What! then the blacks possess the right of voting in this county?" "Without the smallest doubt." "How comes it, then, that at the polling-booth this morning I did not perceive a single negro in the whole meeting?" "This is not the fault of the law: the negroes have an undisputed right of voting, but they voluntarily abstain from making their appearance." "A very pretty piece of modesty on their parts!" rejoined I. "Why, the truth is, that they are not disinclined to vote, but* *they are afraid of being maltreated; in this country the law is sometimes unable to maintain its authority without the support of the majority. But in this case the majority entertains very strong prejudices against the blacks, and the magistrates are unable to protect them in the exercise of their legal privileges." "What! then the majority claims the right not only of making the laws, but of breaking the laws it has made?"*

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- *De La Démocratie en Amérique* by Alexis de Tocqueville 1835/1840, translated into English by Henry Reeve with the title *Democracy in America*, 1899.

Entire Selection: http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/detoc/toc_indx.html

Accessed March, 2017