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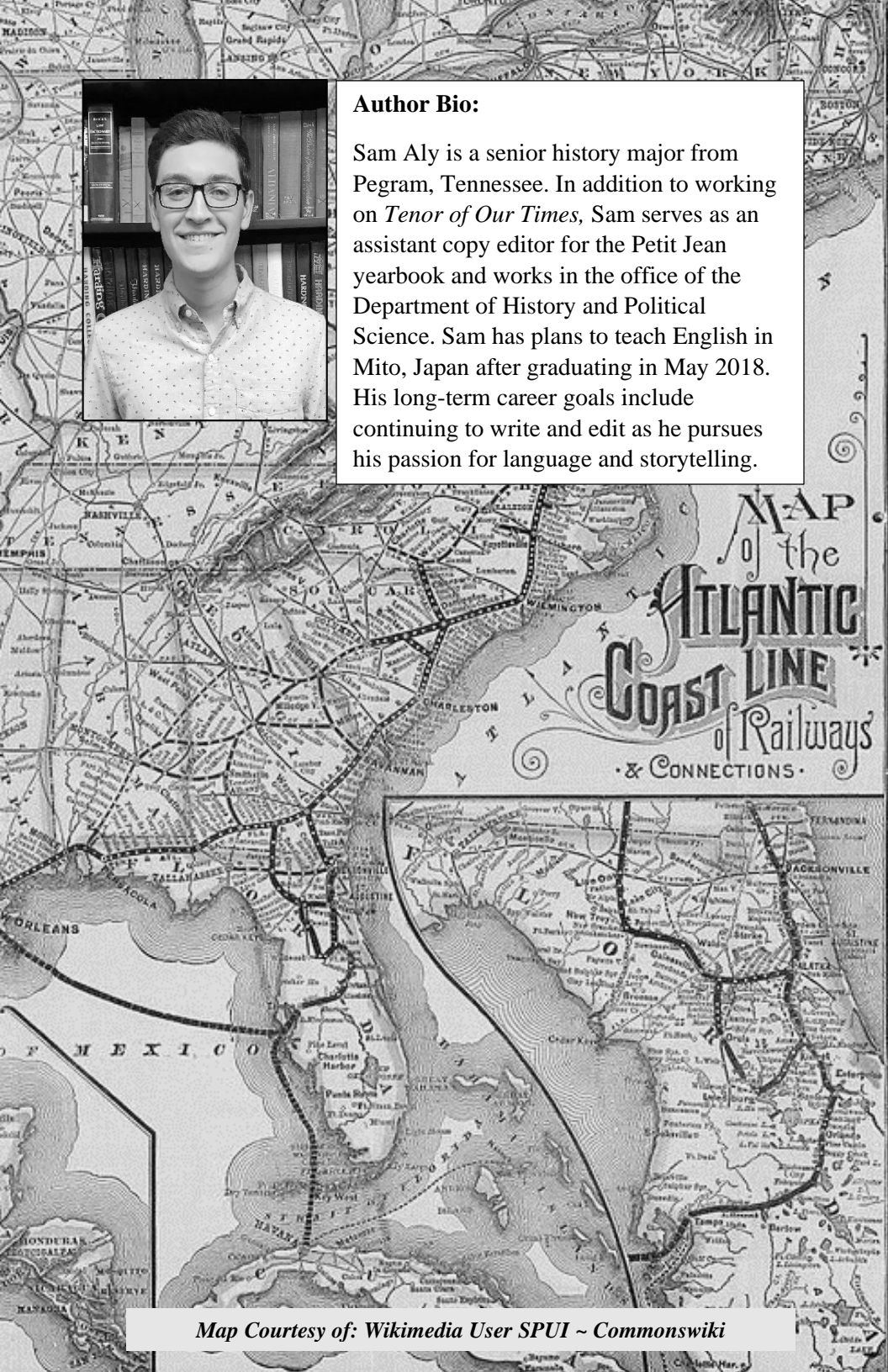
Early Republican Motherhood Through Eliza Pinckney

by Taylor Wilkins



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THE GENERAL AND THE DIPLOMAT: COMPARING ANDREW JACKSON AND JOHN QUINCY ADAMS ON THE ISSUE OF FLORIDA AND THE TRANSCONTINENTAL TREATY OF 1821

By Samuel B. Aly

In July 1818, secretary of state John Quincy Adams stood alone in President Monroe's cabinet on an issue of national importance. A seemingly hot-headed general had overstepped his orders to find a more comprehensive answer for Seminole Indian raids on the border between Spanish-held Florida and the southern United States. Secretary of war John C. Calhoun and secretary of the treasury William Crawford both remained vehement over Andrew Jackson's unauthorized conduct in Spanish Florida after the President had ordered raids specifically targeting the culpable Seminoles. John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson both played critical, contradictory roles in the long, arduous saga of the accession of Florida. The story culminated in 1821 with the Adams-Onís treaty, examining the development of republican sentiment on issues such as slavery, Indian relations, and foreign policy.

The heritage of the two men could not have been more different, and the early periods of their lives would come to shape many of their later beliefs. Jackson spent his formative years in the backcountry of the South Carolina frontier, the son of Scots Irish immigrant parents. The cultural legacy formed by his family and community contributed heavily to his Anglophobic beliefs and distrust of elites. His experience as a fourteen-year old Patriot during the Revolutionary War only cemented these feelings: after Jackson refused to clean a British officer's boots, the Tory struck him with his sword, leaving a scar across young Jackson's face that would still be visible in his presidential portraits decades later.¹

After serving brief stints in the Tennessee state legislature and Congress, Jackson entered military life as a general of his state's militia.

¹ H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times*, (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 26.

A war hawk through and through, “Old Hickory,” as he would come to be known, itched for justification to ensure the safety of western settlers by eliminating native or foreign imperial threats.² Shifting territorial claims which defined the first two decades of the nineteenth century led to instability and constant threat for western expansionists like Jackson. His volatile tendencies and deeply held sense of honor led to many varied challenges to duel issued to opponents, rivals, and opponents who dared slight him or his wife Rachel. Jackson’s most infamous dueling incident came as a young man in 1806 when he shot and killed Edward Dickinson, although the effects of Dickinson’s death at Jackson’s hands was less significant to the public than his allegations that Rachel Jackson was a bigamist.³ The enduring legacy of Jackson’s early years was that of a hot-blooded Tennessean unafraid to fight for his honor and kin, whether that be in a literal or political sense.

In contrast, John Quincy Adams bore the weight of his heritage every time he signed his name, although not always begrudgingly. The effects of his father’s participation in the founding and continuation of the young nation, a bloody struggle which defined Adams’ life as he watched the Battle of Bunker Hill as an eight-year-old in 1775, were not without consequence. William Earl Weeks noted that Adams’ heritage “stressed achievement but condemned personal aggrandizement,” and that his tasks needed to be carried out without any hint of “selfishness or personal ambition.”⁴ This aspect of his personality, more than any concrete political ideology, was his father’s effect on Adams’ political style.

The difference between the early lives of Adams and Jackson provides a wonderfully exemplary view of the greater picture of early nineteenth century America. The young nation was in a process of monumental societal change. The political shift from revolutionary

² Lynn Hudson Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, and the Election of 1828*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26.

³ Brands, 136.

⁴ William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire*, (University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 15.

leaders to the second generation will be discussed later, but there were many other critical changes occurring as well.

The War of 1812 had a much more recent, immediate impact on Adams and Jackson's America than did the War of Independence. The conflict proved to be the United States' first real test of sovereignty as a nation and also served to expose sectional tendencies that were beginning to predominate the national identity. As westward expansion changed the political and economic interests of a great deal of Americans, new attitudes on issues like slavery, national improvements, and foreign relations (particularly with Great Britain) began to emerge. Slavery was decisively bound up in the interests of westerners like Jackson. The shift away from tobacco along the Atlantic seaboard towards wheat and cotton in the Deep South led to a massive migration of slave populations.⁵ Common estimates place the slave population of the South at 700,000 in 1790 and 1.5 million in 1820. Such a shocking change is only made more surprising when considering that the Atlantic slave trade was abolished in 1808, meaning that the population grew naturally, rather than through the importation of slaves from Africa. In addition, new developments like the cotton gin and steamboat found their success undoubtedly bound up with the development of southern cotton plantations; the inventions and complicit industries were mutually reinforcing.

Even before 1812, much of Jackson's life was linked to the institution of slavery. In 1804, he acquired the land which would become the Hermitage, his plantation and homestead outside of Nashville.⁶ Jackson's circumstantial entry into the institution in 1788 and his "relatively modest number [of slaves] indicates that he was a slaveholder rather than a slave trader."⁷ The latter profession became increasingly lucrative on the domestic front after the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade due to the changing regional demands for cheap labor across the southwest, but it was one that Jackson never became involved with.

⁵ Up to 100,000 slaves moved from the Chesapeake region, known for tobacco, to the Lower South in the period from 1790 to 1810.

⁶ Brands, 148.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

Nonetheless, Jackson's opinions on slavery remained unambiguous. He understood the interests of his pro-slavery colleagues through experience and remained a staunch defender of the institution throughout his political career and the rest of his life.

With the onset of a period of strong republican sentiment, the elder John Adams' Federalist Party quickly crumbled under a wave of broad republican support which indubitably left his son's political influences and convictions in doubt. In fact, the younger Adams did as much as he could to distance himself from the partisan politics of the time, having seen its divisive effects through his father's tenure as president and during his time in Europe serving as foreign minister to Russia.⁸ As the Republican Party grew and essentially created a one-party system in America, Adams found his place in the party to be quite distinct from other politicians.

Adams' early life and political career impressed a fierce internal desire to serve the public and seek the greater good, a craving which would repeatedly need satisfying over the next few decades. Adams' strong, individualistic attitude only compounded the power of his impressive intellectual capacities and budding foreign relations prowess. Even early in his political career, as a state senator and subsequently a senator for Massachusetts, his nationalist convictions on issues like union, neutrality, and expansion of borders would often leave him crossing party lines and angering partisan allies and constituents.⁹ His first major roles in government would be abroad, preparing him for national prominence upon his return in 1817.

While Adams was in Europe, Jackson left his life as a well-known, important figure in Tennessee politics to establish himself on the national stage and earn immense popularity with his military heroics in New Orleans.¹⁰ Before that, though, he played a role in several key events across the southwest which prepared him for future exploits in Florida. Both his duel with Dickinson and accusations of involvement in Aaron Burr's treasonous plot of 1806 landed him in hot water, as it was

⁸ Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics*, 21.

⁹ Robert V. Remini, *John Quincy Adams*, (New York: Times Books, 2002) , 44.

¹⁰ Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics*, 26.

never publically determined how large of a role he played in the conspiracy.¹¹

The most consequential of his adventures in this period before New Orleans was the Creek War, in which Jackson participated as a military leader for the United States. The Creek War developed as part of a larger context which provides clarity for the War of 1812, the development of the Republican party, and the ideology of men like Andrew Jackson. As already noted, Jackson held a deep-rooted hatred for the British. This animosity came to manifest itself in his treatment of the Indians.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, Shawnee Indian leaders Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa propagated a native confederacy in the Ohio Territory. Tenskwatawa, meaning “Open Door,” served as a shaman, prophet, and religious leader of the confederacy. Their base of operations came to be Prophetstown, named by American visitors after the shaman himself, in present day Indiana. Although one major aspect of the movement was spiritual, Tecumseh served to make it political and create a military presence.

Tecumseh understood the broader scope of the international scene in the early nineteenth century and used it to his full advantage, playing off the tension between the young United States and Great Britain to solidify pan-Indian unity across the western frontier. With the outbreak of the War of 1812, Tecumseh and his confederacy, comprised of many, but not all major Indian groups in the west, allied with the British. As his goals grew grander, Tecumseh’s quest took him farther than just his homeland in the Midwest.¹²

When Tecumseh made a tour south, declaring his message boldly with his renowned oratory abilities, a division between Creek tribes created a native civil war which eventually boiled over into a fully-fledged native independence movement in northern Alabama.¹³ After a series of retaliatory attacks back and forth, the massacre of over 250

¹¹ Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics*, 23-24.

¹² George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), 28.

¹³ Brands, 192-3.

American settlers, including many women and children, at Fort Mims on August 30, 1813 sparked panic across the southern frontier.¹⁴

After having several attempts at military glory stymied by orders from higher up and personal injuries, Jackson finally took this opportunity to put his ideology into practice by driving out natives from the south. In a sweeping campaign all the way through Alabama to the Gulf Coast, Jackson dismantled Creek settlements and forts, civilian and military alike, which culminated in the devastating Battle of Horseshoe Bend and ended the Creek struggle altogether.¹⁵ Tecumseh's death at the hands of William Henry Harrison the previous year had foreshadowed the demise of organized Indian resistance in the west, and the Creeks were one of the last significant military groups to be abated.¹⁶

The general had silenced the Creek threat. The Treaty of Fort Jackson, signed on August 9, 1814, opened up a vast swath of land from Tennessee to the Gulf of Mexico for white settlement and advanced the interests of Jackson's allies.¹⁷ For Republicans like Jackson and Adams, Indian populations became a direct hindrance to westward expansion completely incompatible with their interests. Although the fight for Indian removal in Georgia would take another decade to come to a close under Jackson's presidency, its origins lay in the period after the War of 1812. Westerners remembered all too well the immense threat that Tecumseh's confederacy and the Creek War presented. These issues became critical for republican nationalists in the westward expansion movement, and they would later weigh heavily on the decisions made on the federal level under Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, as the executive branch carefully negotiated the unique early nineteenth century blend of Indian relations and foreign policy.

In 1814, after Adams served a prolific five-year term as minister to Czar Alexander I and Russia, President Madison called him to serve as chairman for the nation's delegation to peace negotiations with Britain in Ghent. Adams succeeded in leading the delegation to peace talks, although very little was accomplished in terms of pragmatic change on

¹⁴ Weeks, 27.

¹⁵ Brands, 215-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 203-4.

¹⁷ Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics*, 29.

American issues prior to the war. The gap between British and American demands was too broad to cross in many cases. Adams would become “especially incensed by the British insistence on granting Indians permanent territorial rights,” which would limit westward expansion in a more concrete manner.¹⁸

Quincy Adams had reported to his father three of his concerns—fishing rights, the western and northern borders between American and British holdings, and Native American relations—although he had ignored two other major issues: impressment and freedom of trade in the Atlantic during wartime.¹⁹ However, the treaty is significant in the broader historical scope.

In the words of Adams biographer, James Traub, the agreement “marked the end of the first, and very fragile, stage of American political history.”²⁰ The treaty was a turning point at which the republic’s federal government was, at least pragmatically, free of potent foreign military threats to the east and able to turn its attention to domestic policy and westward expansion. John Quincy Adams stood at the helm of this catalyst of a new period of American affairs, and within five years he would assume a new role as Secretary of State and establish a legacy by his own right. After resolving peace at Ghent, Adams spent almost two years serving as an envoy to Britain. When he finally returned from his eight years of European assignments in August 1817 with a healthy record of diplomatic successes in tow, Adams carried the reputation of being a politician unfettered by politics who had successfully bargained for a surprisingly favorable peace agreement.²¹ Simultaneously, Jackson’s heroics in New Orleans in 1815 had provided a similar end, that of growing national fame, by entirely opposite means.

This moment of correlation was one of the first, but more were to follow. The two figures found their political origins in a time which came to be known by historians as the Era of Good Feelings. Both

¹⁸ James Traub, *John Quincy Adams: Militant Spirit*, (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 189.

¹⁹ Remini, 46.

²⁰ Traub, 195.

²¹ Weeks, 21. See also: John Kaplan, *John Quincy Adams: American Visionary* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 320.

Adams and Jackson had to establish themselves on the national stage by their merits found in a fully-functioning republic.

For decades after the American Revolution, revolutionary leaders had played the major roles national politics. The first four presidents—Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison—had all participated in the leadership of the War of Independence. When James Monroe was inaugurated on March 4, 1817, he would become the final president of revolutionary fame. Quincy Adams and Jackson had been young during the war and it had certainly made lasting impressions on them both; however, they were not active players in the war in a significant way. Experiences such as these informed and motivated Quincy Adams and Jackson's actions in regards to the quickly escalating Florida issue. Quincy Adams had to approach the situation from his newly-appointed position of Secretary of State, which led towards an attitude of moderation and pragmatism. Jackson still held a regional position, therefore he was more concerned with satisfying his southern republican nationalist constituents who despised Spain and feared Indian violence.

Florida had been an enticing prospect for southerners since the beginning of the century. Not only would it appease their seemingly insatiable desire for land, but Florida's position made it critical to national security. George Dangerfield wrote of a common adage from the day:

“whoever possessed the Floridas held a pistol at the heart of the Republic.”²² The fear of Britain using the territory as a base of operations in the Deep South had been prevalent during the War of 1812. These concepts contributed to Jackson's conviction of the necessity of a military solution to the Florida problem.

However, Jackson's invasion of Florida proved to be more complicated than his showdown with the British in New Orleans three years earlier. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun appointed Jackson leader of the campaign against Native Americans on the nation's

²² Dangerfield, 127.

southern border on Dec 26, 1817.²³ Two factors contributed to the necessity of the mission: the weakness of Spanish authority in Florida and the large number of resettled Creek Indians from the Mississippi Valley (the same group Jackson had been responsible for relocating a few years earlier) who continued to harbor runaway slaves and cross the border to raid American settlers in Georgia. Local independence movements against Spanish imperial forces in South America caused a dilemma for foreign heads of state—a hot topic of debate in American politics in the late 1810s. Because of the turmoil in places like Simon Bolivar’s Caracas, Spanish colonial authorities had little time and effort to expend on Florida.²⁴ By opposing resolutions to send ministers to the newly created and semi-legitimate governments in South America, Adams held onto another bargaining chip in the broader game between Spain and the U.S., one that he would be willing to wield in future negotiations.²⁵

The general’s actions in Florida were successful from a military perspective, but untenable from a foreign relations standpoint. The Seminole forces along the border of Western Florida were scattered and now posed little threat to Americans on the Georgia side of the border. However, the general had gone even farther. Jackson and his men had captured the Spanish settlements of St. Marks and Pensacola in May 1818, established a U.S. customs house in the larger of the two towns, deposed the Spanish governor, and executed two British citizens accused of colluding with the Seminoles.

In a situation only aggravated by slow, unreliable lines of communication, by June the Monroe administration finally discovered the havoc that Jackson had wreaked in Florida. The campaign accomplished its primary objectives of dispersing natives and breaking their presence in northern Florida, but it also committed various illegal and arguably unwarranted acts which placed Monroe in an untenable position. On June 18, 1818, Adams wrote that, in particular, Jackson’s

²³ David S. Heidler, “The Politics of National Aggression: Congress and the First Seminole War,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 4 (1993): 504.

²⁴ Dangerfield, 128.

²⁵ Weeks, 104.

capture of Pensacola “contrary to his orders” caused “many difficulties for the Administration.”²⁶

These actions were atrocious corruptions of power, at least according to Calhoun, Crawford, and others in the President’s cabinet. Adams observed the situation from the opposite perspective, partially out of necessity in his role as Secretary of State. He would be the one responsible for determining how to approach the Spanish ambassador, the American public, and the greater international community, all of whom fixed their eyes on Washington in awaiting a response to what was surely an unconstitutional action made by General Jackson. Upon receiving news in June 1818 of the loss of Pensacola, Don Luis de Onís, the Spanish minister in Washington, desired nothing less than a full reprimand of the general; in fact, he refused to believe that Jackson’s actions against his colonial authorities could have been authorized to any degree by Washington.²⁷

Other members of the president’s cabinet, namely Secretary of War John C. Calhoun and Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford, were outraged at Jackson’s disobedience. Adams recorded in his diary on July 15, 1818 that Calhoun seemed “personally offended” at the idea that one of his major generals would exceed his rank by committing actions like Jackson had in Florida.²⁸ However, for the president and the Secretary of State, the response was not a simple one to formulate.

Part of this process remains blurred to the historian, for it must be noted that Jackson’s orders were ambiguous enough to have been left up to interpretation. Whether this was an oversight or an intentional lack of clarity given to a man with a temper and a reputation for vengeance is still debatable.²⁹ However, on July 21, 1818, Adams listed three reasons in his diary for refusing to side with Onís and the Spanish: the admittance would imply “weakness of confession”; it would serve as a “disclaimer of power in the Executive [which] is of dangerous example and of evil consequences”; and the fact that “there is injustice to the officer

²⁶ John Quincy Adams, *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845*, ed. Allan Nevins. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 198.

²⁷ Weeks, 113.

²⁸ John Quincy Adams, 199.

²⁹ Brands, 323-4.

[Jackson] in disavowing him, when in principle he is strictly justifiable.”³⁰

Adams communicates several key issues in this writing. First of all, he addresses one of his main concerns—which was not only foreign policy but the power of the executive to form military and foreign policy. Any concession made by an apology to the Spanish would surely be brought up in the future as justification for removing powers from the executive branch of government.³¹ In the young republic, any federal action set extreme precedent, a fact of political life that Adams was keenly aware of. Additionally, Adams believed Jackson was justified in his actions. During the period between the capture of Pensacola and Onís’ demand for punishment to be enacted upon Jackson, neither Adams nor Monroe sent additional orders to the general in Florida.³² Their response was not as swift and easily formulated as Onís clearly thought it would be.

It was at this point that John Quincy Adams made a stand in defense of the beleaguered general. One possible motivational factor in this was the extreme popularity Jackson had gained across the country, particularly the West. His victories against the Creeks earned him a heroic reputation in the South, and the Battle at New Orleans widened his base of support across the nation.³³ A severe punishment would have been extremely unpopular with the public; this was not a risk the Monroe administration wanted to make as it approached the 1820 election season. After several debates within the Cabinet on how to resolve the issue, Adams mitigated the initially harsh ideas of Monroe and Calhoun into a light reprimand for Jackson and the return of Pensacola to the Spanish.³⁴ Adams’ bold apology proved crucial in the way in which Monroe was to handle the situation.

This situation made the correlation between Jackson and Adams quite clear. The two represented different sides of the same coin—that coin being the Republican party, which dominated the Era of Good

³⁰ John Quincy Adams, 200.

³¹ Weeks, 116.

³² Weeks, 112.

³³ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁴ Traub, 222.

Feelings and played a major part in the development of the antebellum United States. Lynn Parsons wrote, “The Adams-Jackson alliance, if it may be called that, was based partly on genuine admiration and partly on a mutually shared goal. Each man desired to acquire Florida for the United States. Adams hoped to do it by diplomacy and cash, Jackson by force, if necessary.”³⁵ The shared objectives clearly aligned on the Florida issue, a fact which had a significant impact on Adams’ defense of Jackson.

However, Adams needed Florida to be acquired legally. Whether that be through force or diplomacy was a later issue, but to set a precedent on the international stage of unconstitutional attacks on foreign powers would have been diplomatic suicide for the young republic. In July 1818, Monroe included in a letter to Jackson that the general’s actions authorized by the executive branch alone would have been illegal, that “Congress alone possess the power” to declare war.³⁶

Adams and Onís continued their long-winded debates and negotiations. Onís was an experienced minister; he understood the gains he could hope to achieve for his country with its severely limited bargaining power.³⁷ Although the Spanish minister claimed that Jackson’s misconduct “had set back treaty negotiations, [both Onís] and the secretary of state knew that it only gave further emphasis to Spanish vulnerability.”³⁸ The negotiations were long and hard-fought.

Only by conceding that the western border be placed at the Sabine River, rather than the Rio Grande, was the Adams-Onís Treaty finally agreed upon by the Spanish minister.³⁹ Although the treaty granted Adams all of his demands, most importantly the accession of Florida, it was not without fault for some nationalists. The move was unpopular with westerners dreaming of opportunities for expansion into Texas, but that issue would be solved later.

³⁵ Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics*, 54.

³⁶ James Monroe, *James Monroe to Andrew Jackson, Nashville, July 19, 1818*. Letter, from *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* Vol. 2, ed. W. Edwin Hemphill, (Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press, 1963), 401.

³⁷ Traub, 223.

³⁸ Kaplan, 337.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 337-8.

After the resolution and a brief controversy over land grants, which stalled proceedings and gave Adams a fright over what he thought had been a huge success, the Adams-Onís Treaty was ratified by the Senate in February 1821.⁴⁰ The Florida territory was now legally and unequivocally American land. Furthermore, the treaty addressed issues of territory disputes along the western border—an issue which had caused tensions since the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The Spanish had disputed the legality of the French sale of Louisiana, and the boundary blurred around Texas and farther west. With the treaty in 1820, the western border was finally agreed upon; it included the land north of the forty-first parallel all the way to the Pacific Ocean. This Transcontinental Treaty, as it came to be known, was a relief for the president and other interested parties, even if the border had not been set to include Texas. In the meantime, Jackson had been dealing with the political ramifications of his invasion. A Senate committee condemned the executions of the British nationals, as well as the taking of Pensacola and St. Marks.⁴¹ In Jackson, men like Calhoun and Clay saw a potential rival growing in popularity among their constituency; they strove, unsuccessfully, to limit his political growth.⁴² Fortunately for Jackson, nothing came of the committee report on his actions. Ironically, he was soon on his way to become governor of the territory; its capital was Pensacola.⁴³

In 1822, Adams wrote, “General Jackson had rendered such services to this nation that it was impossible for me to contemplate his character or conduct without veneration.”⁴⁴ The two continued to have a cordial relationship until the election of 1824, at least publicly. The split of the Republican party and Adams’ deal with Crawford, which would assure him the presidency over Jackson, did little to assuage any personal animosity between the two men. After Jackson’s allegations of

⁴⁰ Kaplan, 348.

⁴¹ Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics*, 52.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴³ Brands, 356.

⁴⁴ John Quincy Adams, 274.

corruption by Adams and Crawford in the election, the relationship between the two men continued to deteriorate for the rest of their lives.⁴⁵

However, it was in the Florida situation that the historical relationship between the two solidified. The two men had entirely different backgrounds and experiences leading up to the affair. Whereas New Englander Adams served as a foreign minister and came to thrive in the minutia of nineteenth century foreign relations, Jackson brought a western war hawk perspective into the Era of Good Feelings with his fiery, forceful attitude. Each addressed issues like slavery, westward expansion, and Indian relations in his own way. John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson often shared similar goals, but the means to those ends varied entirely.

⁴⁵ See Lynn Parsons, "In Which the Political Becomes the Personal, and Vice Versa: The Last Ten Years of John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 2003).