

SECTIONAL POLITICS: A CLASSROOM HISTORY SIMULATION

A historical simulation is designed to accurately recreate a historical situation in the classroom. Students assume historical roles and attitudes while the simulation provides goals, decision options and a reward system that are historically accurate. A realistic historical simulation should have results that are similar to the actual historical situation but student choices can create numerous variations. The similarities and differences between the simulation experience and the historical situation provides the teacher with ample discussion material while teaching students the unpredictability of history. The emphasis is on understanding WHY something happened and not on memorizing the exact facts of HOW it happened?

Historical simulations are most effective concerning economic, political and diplomatic issues because the student can be placed in the position of a historical decision maker. Students can be asked why they made certain decisions, what concerns were most important to them, and how their actions corresponded with the historical person? The "game format" of simulations creates a competitive situation with goals and rewards for each player or group of players to attempt to "win" the game. Students can be asked what real life goals and rewards motivated the historical decision makers being simulated to "win" in their own lives. Some roles or attitudes will be "uncomfortable" to students (such as advocating slavery or Indian Removal) and class discussion could focus on how people justified those attitudes at the time or to what extent modern attitudes are similar to those historical ones.

Multicultural, social or intellectual issues can be focused on in class discussion, immediately or in subsequent classes, where the students' simulation experience can be addressed in detail. The need for historical accuracy and the focus on decision makers in the simulations ignores the experience of those groups who were historically under represented in the making of those decisions. How much influence did various groups have with the decision makers and what was the effect of the decisions on those groups? Whose views were not represented and why? The attitudes, goals, decision options and rewards outlined in the simulation can all be called into question. The underlying ideology or the basic assumptions of the decision makers can be critiqued. Finally, multicultural, social or intellectual issues might be further explored through the use of case studies or role playing after they have been raised in the context of a political, economic or diplomatic simulation.

SECTIONAL POLITICS

The United States of the early nineteenth century was rapidly expanding and developing with three distinct sections of the country both socially and economically: the Northeast, the Southeast and the Trans-Appalachian West. **Sectional Politics** focuses on the time period from the late 1820s to the early 1840s when a variety of important political battles were fought along sectional lines and the three regions had relatively equal political power at the national level. The most important political issues were primarily economic in nature, as befitted a rapidly growing nation, but they proved contentious because any resolution of an issue had very different effects on the economic development of each section of the country. While the federal government wrestled with these difficult and emotionally charged economic issues, it attempted to ignore any moral aspects or to justify them in the name of progress. These sectional political dynamics had

changed by the middle of the century and slavery, in both moral and economic terms, had become the overriding issue for the nation. Areas of the Trans-Appalachian West had become economically and culturally tied to the Northeast or Southeast, creating the North and the South of the Civil War Era, while the West had shifted to beyond the Mississippi River.

Sectional Politics is a relatively quick (20-30 minute) classroom simulation in which students assume the role of United States Senators during the 1830s and early 1840s. The class is divided into groups of six to nine students with each group representing a US Senate. Each US Senate is further divided into thirds with two or three students assigned to each region: Northeast, Southeast and West. Students receive a one-page double-sided handout specific to their assigned region which explains their role as a Senator and the points awarded to their region for the passage or defeat of each of the six pieces of legislation. Then the logical arguments supporting that region's political positions are outlined in six paragraphs, each paragraph focusing on a separate issue. Since student identities, political arguments, and point awards are all organized by region, the students naturally negotiate and vote in regional blocks, even though each Senator actually casts an individual vote. As a result, two regional blocks (4-6 students) can always out vote one regional block (2-3 students) even when each region does not have exactly the same number of students. This organization of the simulation facilitates classroom management and student learning. The typical classroom would contain three to five of these "Senates" with six to nine students each. Instructors cruising the classroom can clarify procedures, listen to political arguments, prompt discussion, initiate closure and/or evaluate student contributions.

Each "Senate" develops its own dynamics. Some will engage in a thorough discussion of the issues with members attempting to persuade each other of the validity of their views. The instructor will need to suggest compromises, initiate votes and ensure closure. Others groups will focus on identifying what each region wants, arranging compromises and negotiating political deals to reach the desired conclusion. The instructor will need to prompt a discussion of regional viewpoints and arguments, possibly revealing the importance of that information on the upcoming exam. Certain individuals will assume a dominant role due to their knowledge, personality or assertiveness. The instructor may have to prompt discussion from less active students with suggested arguments or bargains. The "Senator" who initiates discussion may have the advantage of setting the agenda. On the other hand, a domineering student may prompt the other two regional groups to cooperate to thwart the domination.

POLITICAL ISSUES AND POSITIONS

Slavery

Slavery was ultimately the most emotional and most divisive issue in American History. However, the national government attempted to ignore the issue during the 1830s and early 1840s, when emotions were not as high nor political divisions as deep as they were to become in the 1850s. A small, well-organized abolitionist movement flooded the Congress with petitions calling for the abolition of slavery, prompting the passage of the Gag Rule that automatically tabled any petition or legislation addressing the issue. Southern Senators were insulted and enraged by the abolitionist diatribes and Northern Senators were

concerned that the constant focus on slavery prevented the consideration of other issues of significance. The issue of slavery in the territories had seemingly been resolved by the Missouri Compromise in 1821, and Congress postponed the annexation of Texas for ten years rather than disturb this resolution. The expectation that new territories would be acquired as a result of the Mexican War, prompted northern efforts to prevent the extension of slavery into these new territories. The most famous of those efforts, the Wilmot Proviso, is the legislation used in this simulation.

Southerners considered slavery both a social and economic necessity that they justified with a variety of religious, scientific, and cultural arguments. Senators from the Southeast were diametrically opposed to any bills that would have had a negative impact on the institution of slavery. The simulation reflects this by awarding the Southeast the highest point score (5) for the defeat of the restriction on slavery. Northern attitudes were mixed with some totally rejecting the institution of slavery as a moral abomination, others citing the unfairness of small farmers competing with slave agriculture, and others strongly opposing abolition fearing an influx of freed slaves into the Northeast. All of these groups opposed the extension of slavery and the resulting growth of southern political power, so the simulation awards the Northeast three points for passing the Wilmot Proviso. The West was literally divided over the issue of slavery by the Ohio River. The Northwest Ordinance in 1785 had forbidden slavery in that region, but by the 1830s the “cotton belt” was emerging with its concentration of slaves. As a result, the simulation awards no points to the West concerning slavery, leaving Westerners free to bargain on the issue of slavery.

Protective Tariff

Students are surprised that a tax on foreign imports was an important national political issue, let alone that it was the most emotional and divisive issue of the late 1820s and early 1830s. The Tariff of 1828 greatly expanded the number of products taxed and dramatically raised the tax rates, infuriating many in the southern states. Using the Nullification Doctrine espoused by Jefferson and Madison in 1798, South Carolina declared this “Tariff of Abominations” unconstitutional initiating an emotionally charged four-year public controversy in Congress and between President Jackson and Vice President Calhoun. When the Congress chose only a slight reduction of the tariff in 1832, South Carolina passed an Ordinance of Nullification declaring the tariff void in their state and threatening armed resistance and possible succession. President Jackson’s determination to enforce the tariff, congressional authorization of military action and the passage of a more moderate compromise tariff in 1833 prompted South Carolina to avert the conflict by accepting the lower tariff and rescinding their Ordinance of Nullification. This ended the “Nullification Crisis,” but many of the issues and arguments that would ultimately lead to the Civil War had been revealed.

The Southeast was strongly opposed to a high protective tariff because it was heavily dependant on foreign trade, and the region provided two-thirds of the national revenue collected by the tariff. The tariff increased the prices for European manufactured products purchased in the Southeast, but it also prompted European retaliatory tariffs, which reduced the profits on Southeastern agricultural goods. The Northeast demanded a high tariff to protect its growing manufacturing industry from British competition, even though most voters were unaffected by the tariff and shipping interests were mildly opposed to it. Since the tariff was the major revenue source for the national government, many in the

Northeast and West supported a high tariff simply to provide the funding for other national programs that would benefit their region. The development of manufacturing cities in the Northeast would eventually benefit the West, but the immediate effect, particularly for the Gulf coast states, would have been higher prices for manufactured goods and retaliatory tariffs on exports, so the West generally favored lower tariffs. The determination of a specific percentage forces a more detailed discussion of the tariff, which is the most complicated issue addressed in the simulation.

Internal Improvements

Roads, canals and eventually railroads improved the nation's transportation network, thereby speeding communication, lowering trade costs, expanding product markets, facilitating economic growth, and fostering regional interdependence. This Transportation Revolution brought profound and dramatic changes in economic activity as it transformed the United States from a collection of local and regional markets into a thriving national economy. The resulting increase in the United States' international power and prestige was precisely what fervent nationalists had predicted, but their assumptions that these internal improvements would integrate the disparate regions of the nation into a unified whole were sadly mistaken. The upper West shifted its economic orientation from the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, linking it with the Gulf states, to the new roads, canals and railroads linking it to the Northeast. Concurrently, immigration from the Northeast was creating social and cultural bonds between the two regions which together with the economic ones gradually unified them into one new region, the North. Similarly, immigration from the Southeast to the lower West and shared economic concerns about plantation agriculture, the export trade, and slavery fostered the emergence of a common Southern identity. Tragically, internal improvements had fostered the integration of the various local areas into two very different regions, each with distinctive economic, social and cultural characteristics.

The Southeast opposed national subsidies for internal improvements because its economy was export oriented, and already possessed abundant natural waterways to transport products to the coast. Furthermore, states' rights advocates were naturally opposed to federal subsidies for local transportation improvements, and particularly objected to funding links between the Northeast and the Ohio River valley with tariff revenue from the Southeast. Manufacturers and merchants in the Northeast welcomed lowered costs, expanded markets, and greater access to raw materials while many of the urban and rural poor supported canals to promote their own emigration to find new opportunities in the fertile western lands. Most Northeastern farmers could not compete with Western grain farmers so they eventually lost their land through bankruptcy or shifted to dairy and vegetable farming. Internal improvements benefited the West by increasing the speed and lowering the transportation costs for western agricultural products going to the east and eastern manufactured goods going to the west. Much of the West saw its future economic, social and cultural progress intimately connected with the development of a broad transportation network of roads, canals and railroads.

Bank of the United States

The Bank of the United States provided a national currency, stabilized the circulation of money, stimulated the economy with investment capital and regulated the

loans of state and local banks. Despite having provided a stable growing economy, the charter of the First Bank of the United States was not renewed in 1811 due to objections to its control of state banks. After five years of instability, a severe economic depression prompted the Congress to create the Second Bank of the United States in 1816. The bank helped reestablish economic growth and stability under the leadership of Director Nicholas Biddle, but again, its regulation of state and local bank loans frustrated many people. President Andrew Jackson opposed a national bank, questioning its constitutionality. Presidential candidate Henry Clay sought to renew the bank charter in 1832, four years early, believing this issue would reveal to the voters Jackson's inability to comprehend national economics. The presidential campaign was preoccupied with this "Bank War" which was ultimately decided by Congress sustaining Jackson's veto of the bank bill and the voters reelecting him by a wide margin. Since Jackson transferred the remaining federal funds to state banks, the Second Bank of the United States could no longer regulate the loans of state banks and it, in effect, became a local Philadelphia bank until its charter ran out in 1836. Easy lending policies by state banks prompted unwise speculation in land and canals, currency inflation, and economic uncertainty, ultimately culminating in a severe depression from 1837 to 1842.

The US Bank had little benefit for the Southeast where the need for investment capital was limited and money was overwhelmingly tied up in slaves or land. Furthermore, "states rights" advocates objected to federal regulation of state and local banks as an unconstitutional power being exercised by the national government. The Northeast supported the National Bank because it provided a source of investment capital for the manufacturing industry as well as the booming shipping industry revitalized by the Asian trade. In the West, some merchants and wealthy land owners supported the Bank because it helped stabilize the economy and provided needed investment capital. However, most westerners chafed under the restrictions of the National Bank, thinking that 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. In all three regions, many poor and middle class residents resented the bank as a symbol and tool of the wealthy elites of society.

Indian Removal

An array of social, economic, scientific and religious arguments confirmed the biological and cultural inferiority of Indians, and Indian Removal, a nineteenth century version of "ethnic cleansing," was supported by a wide variety of American citizens. Many, whether they be poor farmers, local merchants, manufacturers, or land speculators, were in a position to benefit economically from opening new territories to settlement. Others believed that the United States had a mission, later termed "Manifest Destiny," to spread the virtues of its civilization, and the Indians were an obstacle to progress that would inevitably be destroyed by a superior civilization. Still others had personal reasons of revenge or general racial animosity that prompted them to believe that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." Most critics of Indian Removal did not challenge the basic assumptions, but argued for a humane policy of voluntary land cessions at a fair price negotiated through treaties. Many "friends" of the Indians supported Indian Removal because it would save Indian lives, separate them from the vices of American society, and give them time to become more

civilized. Only a handful of critics such as Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen argued that Indian culture deserved respect and Indian nations deserved the same recognition of sovereignty as European countries.

The West was strongly in favor of Indian removal. People in the West generally wanted more land available and most assumed that the disappearance of Indian society was an inevitable part of the progress of civilization. For years, the federal government had promised to extinguish Indian title to lands within the boundaries of a state and the Indian Removal bill would force the federal government to negotiate treaties to fulfill their promise and open new lands to white settlement. Most westerners of all social levels would benefit economically from the removal of the Indians and the resulting influx of new settlers. On the other hand, Indian policy was not a significant issue for most people in the Northeast and Southeast. The vast majority in these regions assumed that the ultimate destruction of Indian society was inevitable, regardless of official federal policy. They generally expected the government to acquire the land legally through treaties, to avoid bloody and expensive wars, and to show some compassion for the hopeless plight of the Indians. There were some citizens who objected to Indian Removal based on a romantic image of the "Noble Savage," and others, particularly in Georgia and New York, states with significant Indian populations, who had attitudes and motives similar to those in the West. Thus, Indian Removal was a minor issue for both the Northeast and Southeast, which could be used to bargain with the West to get the things that they wanted.

Western Land Policy

President George Washington maintained a restrictive, relatively high priced land policy designed to slow frontier settlement, avoid expensive wars with Indians, and raise significant revenue for the federal government. However, President Thomas Jefferson and his successors throughout the early nineteenth century, designed federal land policy to accelerate the settlement of western lands and to promote economic development of that region and the nation. A growing population in the West strengthened the nation's frontier defenses against both Indians and foreign countries, and for many early nineteenth century Americans, the image of the small yeoman farmer cultivating his own land symbolized political and social democracy. As a result, Congress enacted various laws to reduce the price of public land, lower minimum acreage requirements, and allow flexible payments. The Preemption Act of 1841, the legislation used in this simulation, maintained these policies, but also rewarded "squatters" by giving them the right to purchase public land that they had occupied before it would be sold to anyone else. The more famous Homestead Act of 1862, which gave free land to any settler who cultivated it, was simply the culmination of these policies.

The disposal of western lands was not a major issue in the Northeast, and those citizens who had concerns were divided in their opinions. Northeastern farmers anticipating future migrations and abolitionists seeking to limit the spread of plantation agriculture would have both benefited from cheap land in small plots in the west. On the other hand, large landowners and manufacturers would have preferred that their labor supply not be lured west by the promise of easy land and the sale of land in 640 acre tracts would have facilitated speculative buying by wealthy Northeasterners. The Southeast favored low prices for western lands so long as they are sold in large tracts (640+ acres) suitable for plantation agriculture. Since cotton was considered essential to the growth of the South, the

future of the nation depended on the availability of new western land to replace the worn out lands in the Southeast. The West was overwhelmingly in favor of cheap public land except for a few wealthy speculators. Most westerners desired that this land be sold in smaller parcels of 40 acres in order to encourage small farms, but some in the southern portion of the region wanted the land to be sold in large parcels suitable to plantation agriculture.

DISCUSSION OF THE SIMULATION

The discussion following the simulation is a dynamic situation that will change each time this simulation is done. The scores for the West, the Northeast and the Southeast should be recorded for three or four groups and displayed for the class. Students can then compare and contrast the scores for different groups and discuss how these scores were attained. Which pieces of legislation were passed, which were defeated, and what political bargains or deals were made? This discussion should raise a number of teaching points, but the teaching points will be different every time simulation is done. Different issues will be raised, different examples will be used, and different actions will take place that will provide the teacher with the opportunity to comment, elaborate and compare the simulation with real-life. The teacher can summarize the discussion, elaborate on issues raised by the students, or point out other important aspects that should be considered.

The simulation process may have raised important issues that the instructor wants to use as teaching points. What political issue did your group deal with first and why did you choose that issue first? What were the most difficult issues to resolve in the simulation and why were they the most difficult? Did any particular student dominate the negotiations due to knowledge, strategy or personality? In real-life, do Senators dominate the negotiations due to knowledge, strategy or personality? What were the emotions that you felt during the simulation? Were you frustrated when you did not get a negotiated settlement that you wanted on a particular issue? Were you pleased and proud when you did get a negotiated settlement that you wanted? Did you ever feel angry? On one occasion, I had a student who was so frustrated that she had to leave the room. This turned into a wonderful teaching moment. The student happened to represent the Southeast, and I was able to lead a discussion about the frustration in the simulation that she felt, and the frustration that Southerners felt when they believed their national government did not support them. This expanded into a discussion of secession, not just the secession of the South in 1860-61, but also threatened secession by southern states in 1790, by settlers in the Trans-Appalachian region in 1793-94, by New England federalists in 1804 and 1814, and by South Carolina in 1832.

POLITICAL DEALS

There will be some similarities from one simulation to another because the political arguments, regional objectives, and point allocations will not change. There were some natural alliances between regions of the country that have been built into the point scores allocated to the different regions. For example the Southeast and the West both are opposed to high tariffs and the renewal of the U.S. Bank charter where as the North wants a high tariff and the renewal of the bank charter. On the other hand, the Northeast and the West are both in favor of internal improvements, roads, canals and eventually railroads, which the South opposes. The West wants cheap western lands sold

in small parcels while the Southeast and Northeast both support moderately priced land sold in large blocks. If the students engage in a spirited discussion, the regional positions and arguments will be expressed, the natural alliances will be revealed, and the voting will follow a predictable pattern. However, some students, focusing on the “game,” will begin negotiating political bargains to get the points before the issues are discussed and the natural alliances revealed. An astute student, realizing that his region will be outvoted on an issue, may try to initiate a bargain before the other students recognize their agreement on the issue. Whether this occurs by happenstance or design, the results of the simulation will vary from what would have been predictable based upon the point allocations.

There are no natural alliances over the issues of slavery in the territories and Indian removal, so these issues are open to more wide-ranging negotiations. Indian removal was very important throughout the West, but the West was divided over the slavery issue both politically and geographically. The Northeast and Southeast were on opposite sides of the slavery issue, but have no firm position on Indian removal. Therefore, the West is in the position to bargain, and the decision on the slavery issue often hinges on which region, the Southeast or Northeast, is first to recognize this opportunity. However, other political bargains may have already been made before the discussion reveals this opportunity, or the natural alliances discussed above. The West may be able to secure Southeastern support for Indian removal by promising to vote against the bank and the high tariff, positions that they would have taken without any political bargaining. Conversely, the Northeast may offer support for Indian removal as an enticement for the West to compromise or reverse their position on the less important tariff and bank issues.

The West usually wins the simulation by accumulating more points than the other two regions. Since the West has natural alliances with the Southeast on the issue of the low tariff and defeating the US bank and with the Northeast on the issue of internal improvements, a thorough discussion of these issues should lead to the West getting its way on all three. Furthermore the West benefits from being in a position to negotiate on slavery in the territories and to get Indian removal in exchange. As a result, the West usually wins the simulation because it is in a position to make the political deals and to arrange the compromises. For the Northeast or the Southeast to win the simulation, they must control the legislative agenda and negotiate favorable political bargains before the West recognizes its inherent advantages. The West’s position in the simulation reflects the actual situation during the 1830s and 1840s, when senators from the Northeast and the Southeast were constantly seeking votes from Western Senators to pass the legislation that they supported.

This situation in the simulation, the Northeast and Southeast being opposed on most issues and the West being in the negotiating position, allows the instructor to raise interesting questions about individual famous senators. John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay are considered three of the greatest senators in the history of the United States. Calhoun was known as an uncompromising advocate of states rights and southern issues. The same can be said of Daniel Webster for his defense of the interest of the Northeast. Henry Clay on the other hand is known as the great compromiser. Does the simulation provide insight on Senators Clay, Webster and Calhoun? To what extent were Clay, Webster and Calhoun the result of their personalities, intellectual capabilities,

and political intuition? To what extent do they simply reflect the region that they represent? Webster and Calhoun are the leaders of regions that have conflicting national interests where as Clay comes from a region that is in the position to negotiate with the other two regions to get what it wants. Is it surprising that Henry Clay, the great compromiser, came from the West? The fact that he represents Kentucky actually gives him a certain amount of negotiating room on the issue of slavery, the most divisive issue of all. This raises the old question, “does the leader create the situation or the situation create the leader?”

Note: There is a simulation entitled “Sectionalism Game” created by William Krause and David Sisco and published in 1974 by INVOLVEMENT, Fresno, California, in which the entire class represents the House of Representatives over 2-3 class periods. Familiarity with that simulation was very beneficial in the development of “Sectional Politics,” but the class organization, simulation format, selected pieces of legislation, background information on issues and scoring instructions are totally different and were designed by David Ghery and Jan Spreeman.