1816

James Monroe vs Rufus King

A 20-minute lesson on the 1816 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA First Party System	ELECTORAL VOTES 217 total
WINNER James Monroe (Democratic-Republican) · 183 EV	RUNNER-UP Rufus King (Federalist) · 34 EV
KEY ISSUE Post-war nationalism; decline of the Federalist Party	TURNOUT 23.5%

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1816

James Madison had been president for eight years. Just like Washington and Jefferson before him, he chose to retire after two terms. The country needed a new president.

The War of 1812 had just ended. Americans were proud. They had stood up to mighty Britain a second time. Andrew Jackson had won a huge victory at New Orleans. Francis Scott Key had written the poem that became the Star-Spangled Banner during the war. People felt proud of their country.

Look at the picture. That's James Monroe. He came from Virginia. He had been a soldier with George Washington at Valley Forge during the Revolutionary War. He had been a senator, a governor, and Secretary of State. He had also been Secretary of War. He was very, very experienced.

The Federalist Party was tired. Their last chance had been in the War of 1812, and they had not been popular for opposing the war. They picked Rufus King of New York. But not many people wanted to vote Federalist anymore.

Monroe won easily. He got 183 electoral votes. King got only 34. Monroe became the fifth president. He won again four years later



James Monroe, the fifth U.S. president. He served two terms in what people called the Era of Good Feelings.

JOHN VANDERLYN (1775-1852), VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Let's talk about the story

1.

Who became the fifth president of the United States?

2.

What does Era of Good Feelings mean?

3.

Why was the Federalist Party so weak in 1816?

Warm-up (5 min)

Look at the man in the picture. His name is James Monroe. He was a soldier in the Revolutionary War when he was young. In 1816 he ran for president.

Answer key

1.

James Monroe became the fifth president. He took office on March 4, 1817.

Monroe won 183 EV to Rufus King's 34 EV. He served two terms, retiring in 1825.

2.

Era of Good Feelings means the years from 1817 to 1825, when there was really only one big political party left in America. People disagreed about lots of things, but the political fighting between parties was much quieter than before. James Monroe was president the entire time.

Era of Good Feelings was a phrase coined by a Boston newspaper in 1817. The "good feelings" were limited - serious disputes (Missouri Compromise, banking) emerged - but the formal two-party competition was gone.

3.

The Federalist Party had opposed the War of 1812. The Hartford Convention in 1814-15 was a secret Federalist meeting where some delegates talked about leaving the United States. The meeting happened just as news of the Treaty of Ghent and Jackson's New Orleans victory arrived. Federalists were seen as unpatriotic. The party broke apart and could never recover.

The Hartford Convention's timing is one of the most-cited examples of political self-destruction. The Federalists' final presidential run in 1816 was a formality - everyone knew they would lose.