AP EDITION · DBQ + LEQ · CLASSROOM

1820

James Monroe vs John Quincy Adams

A 105-minute lesson on the 1820 U.S. presidential election. Includes lesson plan, DBQ pairing, student worksheet, answer key, and discussion prompts.

ERA Era of Good Feelings	ELECTORAL VOTES 232 total
WINNER James Monroe (Democratic-Republican) · 231 EV	RUNNER-UP John Quincy Adams (Democratic-Republican) · 1 EV
KEY ISSUE National unity and the Missouri Compromise over slavery	TURNOUT 10.1%

CONTENTS

1. Cover
2. Lesson plan (105 min) + framework alignment
3. Background: vocabulary + primary source A
4. Primary source B (DBQ pair)
5. Worksheet (8 questions)
6. Long-essay-question + rubric
7. Answer key + discussion

1820: James Monroe vs John Quincy Adams

AP framework alignment

AP US History · Period varies by cycle · Reasoning skills: contextualization, comparison, causation, sourcing. CCSS · CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 (central ideas), RH.11-12.6 (point of view), RH.11-12.7 (multiple sources). NCSS · D2.His.5.9-12, D2.His.14.9-12, D2.His.16.9-12.

Timing

5 min	**Warm-up**	Identify two structural features of the U.S. political system by 1820 that would mask rather than resolve the sectional division over slavery extension. For each, identify the specific 1819-1820 development most responsible.
15 min	**Reading + vocab**	The 1820 election is the structural paradox of the Era of Good Feelings. President James Monroe was re-elected with 231 of 232 electoral votes - the most one-sided U.S. presidential election in the post-1789 era. But the same year produced the Missouri Compromise, the first explicit sectional compromise over slavery extension in U.S. history, and Thomas Jefferson's prediction that the geographic line the Compromise drew would dominate every subsequent slavery dispute until it destroyed the Union. The 1820 electoral result and the 1820 sectional crisis are simultaneously true and politically incompatible: the one-party period's electoral unity was masking a structural division that the same one-party period had no institutional capacity to resolve. The Democratic-Republican congressional caucus did not formally meet to nominate Monroe in 1820. The party did not need to. The Federalist Party had effectively dissolved as a national organization after Rufus King's 1816 loss. No Federalist candidate filed nationally in 1820; no Democratic-Republican challenger emerged. Monroe and Vice President Daniel D. Tompkins were consensus candidates simply by virtue of incumbency. Monroe's first term had been substantively successful by 1820 standards. The February 1819 Adams-Onis Treaty had acquired Florida from Spain and fixed the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase. Andrew Jackson's 1818 First Seminole War had de facto demonstrated U.S. control of Florida before the treaty formalized it. The April 1816 chartering of the Second Bank of the United States and the 1816 Tariff had built on Hamiltonian economic policy. The 1819 McCulloch v. Maryland decision had constitutionalized federal implied powers - a complete reversal of Jefferson's 1791 strict-construction position, now endorsed by a Federalist-appointed Chief Justice Marshall and accepted without significant Democratic-Republican objection. Internal improvements (the National Road extension, federal subsidy of the Erie Canal) were proceeding under Democratic-Republican administration.

The 1819 Panic was a serious peacetime financial crisis - the first in U.S. history. Caused by Second Bank credit contraction, post-1815 commodity-price collapse, and over-leveraged Western land speculation, the Panic produced widespread unemployment, bankruptcies, and the wildcat-banker problem. The Panic ought to have produced significant political opposition. It did not, because no opposition party existed. The Era of Good Feelings' one-party structure absorbed economic distress as intra-Democratic-Republican factional positioning (for 1824) rather than as partisan referendum on Monroe.

The Missouri Crisis was the structural test of the one-party period. Missouri had applied for statehood in February 1819 under the December 1818 Enabling Act. The application triggered the first explicitly sectional congressional fight in U.S. history. Representative James Tallmadge of New York (a Democratic-Republican) attached two amendments to Missouri's statehood bill: (1) prohibition of further introduction of slavery into Missouri; (2) gradual emancipation of enslaved persons already there. The Tallmadge Amendments passed the House on strict sectional votes (87-76 and 82-78). Party affiliation was almost completely overridden by geographic origin: Northern Democratic-Republicans voted with Tallmadge; Southern Democratic-Republicans voted against. The Senate, tied 11-11 between slave-state and free-state senators, killed the amendments. The deadlock lasted from February 1819 through March 1820.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 - brokered primarily by Speaker Henry Clay of Kentucky - resolved the deadlock through three provisions: Missouri admitted as a slave state; Maine (separated from Massachusetts) admitted as a free state; slavery banned in remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of Missouri's southern boundary at 36°30' latitude. The combination maintained the slave state / free state balance at 12-12 and drew a geographic line through the remaining federal territory. The Compromise was structurally innovative: it acknowledged the sectional division explicitly and built a procedural mechanism to manage it through territorial admission. The procedural mechanism would last 34 years.

Thomas Jefferson, then 76, wrote about the Missouri Crisis in his famous April 22, 1820 letter to Maine senator John Holmes (who had voted for the Compromise). The letter recognized that the Crisis had exposed a structural sectional split that no compromise could permanently resolve. "This momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union." Jefferson saw the Crisis as the beginning of a sectional split that would eventually destroy the Union. He was correct: the 36°30' line would dominate every subsequent slavery-extension dispute until the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed it, triggering the political crisis that produced the Civil War in 1861.

The 1820 election itself produced 231 electoral votes for Monroe. New Hampshire elector William Plumer cast his electoral vote for John Quincy Adams - the only defector. Plumer's motivation has been debated for two centuries: some historians

believe he voted strategically to preserve George Washington's distinction as the only unanimously-elected president; others argue he simply preferred Adams's record as a diplomat over Monroe's. The 231-1 result is the most one-sided U.S. presidential election in the post-1789 era.

Monroe's second term unwound the Era of Good Feelings as Democratic-Republican factions positioned themselves for the 1824 succession. By 1823 Monroe's cabinet was openly split: Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, Secretary of Treasury William Crawford, and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun were all maneuvering for the 1824 presidency, joined by Speaker Henry Clay and General Andrew Jackson. The December 1823 Monroe Doctrine projected the U.S. as a regional hemispheric power - and was drafted primarily by Adams as part of his own presidential positioning. The 1820 electoral unity would not survive Monroe's second term.

Historians treat the 1820 election as the structural paradox of the Era of Good Feelings: maximum apparent unity simultaneously with the first explicit institutional acknowledgment of irreconcilable sectional division. The combination would prove unsustainable. The 1824 four-way election would split the Democratic-Republican coalition; the 1828 Jackson-Adams contest would produce the Second Party System; the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act would repeal the Missouri Compromise; the 1860 election would produce secession; the 1861 Civil War would resolve the sectional question through military force. The 231-1 1820 result and the Missouri Compromise are best read together: the apparent unity masked the structural division that the next forty years of American politics could not resolve except through war.

20 min	**Source A**	Read aloud once; students annotate individually for tone, evidence, and audience.
20 min	**Source B**	Compare/contrast against Source A. Pair-share on the DBQ comparison question.
20 min	**Worksheet**	Eight questions: 5 short-answer, 2 stimulus-based MCQ, 1 long-essay framing.
20 min	**LEQ planning**	Students sketch a thesis + outline for the LEQ comparison prompt. Submit for next-day full essay.
5 min	**Closure**	Exit ticket: one sentence summarizing the comparison.

Background

Before the worksheet, review the key terms below and then read the primary source carefully. The two source-analysis questions on the worksheet (questions 6 and 7) ask you to quote from the excerpt.

Key terms

Era of Good Feelings

The 1817-1825 period of one-party Democratic-Republican government following the Federalist collapse. James Monroe was president the entire time. The "good feelings" referred to the absence of formal two-party competition rather than to actual political agreement; serious disputes over banking, tariffs, slavery extension, and internal improvements emerged throughout the period.

Tallmadge Amendments

The 1819 House amendments by Representative James Tallmadge of New York (a Democratic-Republican) to the Missouri statehood bill. Would have banned further introduction of slavery into Missouri and gradually emancipated those already there. Passed the House on strict sectional votes (87-76 and 82-78); killed in the Senate (11-11).

Panic of 1819

The first peacetime financial crisis in U.S. history. Caused by Second Bank credit contraction, post-1815 commodity-price collapse, and over-leveraged Western land speculation. Produced widespread unemployment and bankruptcies; produced no partisan backlash because no opposition party existed.

Adams-Onis Treaty

The February 1819 treaty between the U.S. and Spain, negotiated by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. Acquired Florida; set the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase; renounced U.S. claims to Texas.

Corrupt Bargain

The 1824-1825 episode in which the House of Representatives chose John Quincy Adams as president despite Andrew Jackson having won pluralities of both popular and electoral votes. Henry Clay (who had been eliminated in the House contingent election) became Adams's Sec-

Missouri Compromise

The 1820 federal law admitting Missouri as a slave state, Maine as a free state, and banning slavery in remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36°30' latitude. The first explicit sectional compromise over slavery extension in U.S. history. Lasted 34 years until repealed by the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act.

36°30' line

The latitude used by the Missouri Compromise as the boundary above which slavery would be banned in remaining Louisiana Purchase territory. Dominated American sectional politics for 34 years.

McCulloch v. Maryland

The 1819 Supreme Court decision upholding the constitutionality of the Second Bank of the United States. Chief Justice Marshall's opinion endorsed Hamilton's 1791 loose-construction theory of federal implied powers. Accepted without significant Democratic-Republican objection.

Monroe Doctrine

Monroe's December 1823 announcement (in his annual message to Congress) declaring the Western Hemisphere closed to further European colonization. Drafted primarily by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. The first U.S. claim of regional hemispheric leadership.

retary of State - widely perceived as the "corrupt bargain" that mobilized the Jacksonian movement.

Letter to John Holmes (the Missouri Question letter)

THOMAS JEFFERSON, APRIL 22, 1820

Jefferson wrote this letter at age 76 from his retirement at Monticello to Maine Senator John Holmes, who had voted for the Missouri Compromise. The letter is one of the most-cited American statements about the political crisis of slavery extension. Jefferson recognized that the sectional split exposed by the Missouri Crisis would eventually destroy the Union his generation had built. The letter was published shortly after Jefferson's 1826 death and immediately became a touchstone of American political analysis.

> *"I had for a long time ceased to read newspapers, or pay any attention to public affairs, confident they were in good hands, and content to be a passenger in our bark to the shore from which I am not distant. But this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper."*

Jefferson, "Letter to John Holmes" (Monticello, VA, April 22, 1820). Public domain.

Document-based question

Source A is on the Background page; Source B is below. Use both as evidence for the worksheet's source-analysis questions and the LEQ.

SOURCE A

Letter to John Holmes (the Missouri Question letter)

THOMAS JEFFERSON, APRIL 22, 1820

“I had for a long time ceased to read newspapers, or pay any attention to public affairs, confident they were in good hands, and content to be a passenger in our bark to the shore from which I am not distant. But this momentous question, like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. It is hushed indeed for the moment. But this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence. A geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.”

Jefferson, "Letter to John Holmes" (Monticello, VA, April 22, 1820). Public domain.

SOURCE B

Second Inaugural Address

JAMES MONROE, MARCH 5, 1821

“In contemplating the dangers with which our Union was menaced it required no common portion of fortitude to look forward with hope to the end. Two governments having distinct jurisdictions over the same people, neighboring nations, if the expression may be used, near each other, but with the entire jurisdiction of all that part of the surface of the earth properly designated by the name of America, and connected by the strongest pecuniary considerations as well as by political ones, it was difficult to estimate the dangers from any cause less than the strongest. By organizing the Government on a system different in its bases from any heretofore known the wisdom of those who effected the change forever combined those qualities, the union of which had been considered as impossible heretofore.”

Monroe, "Second Inaugural Address" (Washington, DC, March 5, 1821). Public domain.

The 1820 Election

Answer the eight questions below. Source A is on the Background page; Source B is on the DBQ Pair page.

QUESTION 1 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source A (Monroe's Second Inaugural) that frames the U.S. constitutional system as a successful resolution of structural divisions. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 2 · SHORT-ANSWER

Identify the key phrase in Source B (Jefferson's 1820 letter) that warns of the Union's eventual destruction. Quote it verbatim.

QUESTION 3 · SHORT-ANSWER

Both sources address the political situation of 1820-21 but they make incompatible claims about it. Identify the specific claim each source makes.

QUESTION 4 · SHORT-ANSWER

Monroe's Second Inaugural conspicuously does not mention the Missouri Compromise - the major political event of the preceding year. Why does this omission matter, and what does it tell you about how Monroe was framing his second term?

QUESTION 5 · SHORT-ANSWER

Source B says the Missouri line "once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated." Identify two specific 1820-1860 political crises that confirmed this prediction.

QUESTION 6 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

The latitude used by the Missouri Compromise as the boundary above which slavery would be banned in remaining Louisiana Purchase territory was:

( ) A. 33°00'
( ) B. 36°30'
( ) C. 40°00'
( ) D. 49°00'

QUESTION 7 · MULTIPLE-CHOICE

Who was the architect of the Missouri Compromise?

( ) A. Daniel Webster
( ) B. John C. Calhoun
( ) C. Henry Clay
( ) D. John Quincy Adams

QUESTION 8 · SHORT-ANSWER

Sketch your thesis sentence for the LEQ (next page). State your position: was the 1820 paradox resolved, contingent, or inevitable in producing the Civil War? Identify one piece of evidence from each source you will use.

Long-essay-question

LEQ PROMPT

Jefferson's April 1820 letter (Source B) describes the Missouri Crisis as "a fire bell in the night" warning of the Union's eventual destruction. Monroe's March 1821 Second Inaugural (Source A) treats the U.S. constitutional system as a successful resolution of the structural divisions Jefferson feared. Using BOTH sources and your knowledge of the 1819-1854 period, evaluate the extent to which the 1820 election's structural paradox (maximum electoral unity simultaneously with explicit sectional acknowledgment) was (a) resolved by the Compromise itself for a generation, (b) a contingent fact about the one-party period that could have been managed differently with competitive party structures, or (c) the founding moment of an irresolvable sectional crisis that would inevitably produce the Civil War. Defend a clear thesis.

GRADING RUBRIC

Thesis (1 pt): must take a defensible position on the resolved-vs-contingent-vs-inevitable axis. Contextualization (1 pt): mention at least two of the Panic of 1819, McCulloch v. Maryland, the Adams-Onis Treaty, the corrupt bargain of 1824, the 1832 Nullification Crisis. Evidence (2 pts): must quote at least one phrase from each source. Analysis (1 pt): must explicitly evaluate the extent rather than treating the three framings as equivalent. Total 5 points.

Answer key

QUESTION 1

Accept any of: "by organizing the Government on a system different in its bases from any heretofore known", "the wisdom of those who effected the change forever combined those qualities, the union of which had been considered as impossible heretofore", "in contemplating the dangers with which our Union was menaced it required no common portion of fortitude to look forward with hope to the end". The "forever combined those qualities" phrase is the strongest constitutional-success framing.

Monroe's framing claimed structural resolution that the simultaneous Missouri Compromise was explicitly denying.

QUESTION 2

Accept any of: "like a fire bell in the night, awakened and filled me with terror", "I considered it at once as the knell of the Union", "this is a reprieve only, not a final sentence", "a geographical line ... once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated". The "knell of the Union" phrase is the most direct prediction of destruction.

Jefferson's "fire bell in the night" framing is one of the most-quoted American political statements. AP students should be able to identify the structural prediction.

QUESTION 3

Source A claims the U.S. constitutional system has resolved structural divisions that earlier generations thought impossible to combine - the implicit framing is that the Missouri Compromise is a successful constitutional resolution of the slavery-extension question. Source B claims the same Compromise is "a reprieve only, not a final sentence" - the geographic line drawn will dominate every subsequent slavery dispute until the Union breaks apart. The two framings are politically incompatible: the first treats the Compromise as a final resolution; the second treats it as a temporary postponement of an inevitable confrontation.

AP students should recognize that Monroe's 1821 framing was politically optimistic in ways that Jefferson's contemporaneous analysis directly contradicted.

QUESTION 4

The omission was strategically significant. Mentioning the Missouri Compromise explicitly would have required Monroe to take a position on whether the compromise represented a successful resolution or a dangerous postponement. By not mentioning it, Monroe implied resolution without explicitly claiming it - leaving the political work to the compromise itself rather than to executive endorsement. The framing tells you that Monroe was treating the Missouri question as politically settled at the institutional level (Congress had voted, the territories were drawn, the slave-state / free-state balance was maintained) even though everyone involved knew the underlying division remained. The omission matters because it shows the structural limitation of Monroe's one-party governance: the Era of Good Feelings could absorb sectional crisis at the procedural level but had no rhetorical apparatus for resolving it at the constitutional level.

AP students should be able to analyze the omission as a deliberate political choice with structural consequences.

QUESTION 5

Accept any two of: (1) The 1832 Nullification Crisis (South Carolina's nullification of the federal tariff, which Southern leaders treated as the constitutional analog of the slavery-extension dispute). (2) The 1846-48 Mexican-American War and the 1846 Wilmot Proviso (proposal to ban slavery in territory acquired from Mexico). (3) The Compromise of 1850 (admitting California as a free state, popular sovereignty in Utah and New Mexico, the Fugitive Slave Act). (4) The 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act (repealing the Missouri Compromise's 36°30' line). (5) The 1857 Dred Scott decision. (6) The 1859 John Brown raid. The Kansas-Nebraska Act is the strongest single confirmation because it explicitly repealed the geographic line Jefferson predicted would dominate slavery politics.

Jefferson's prediction is structurally important. AP students should be able to identify the 1820-1854 chain that confirmed it.

QUESTION 6

36°30'.

The Missouri Compromise banned slavery in remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36 degrees, 30 minutes north latitude - Missouri's southern boundary. The line dominated American sectional politics for 34 years.

QUESTION 7

Henry Clay.

Speaker Henry Clay of Kentucky was the primary architect of the Missouri Compromise. His broker role earned him the nickname "the Great Compromiser." He would later broker the Compromise of 1850.

QUESTION 8

Open-ended thesis sketch. Acceptable answers should: (1) state a clear position on the resolved-vs-contingent-vs-inevitable axis, (2) avoid treating them as equivalent, (3) signal at least one piece of evidence from each source. Award credit for any defensible thesis that meets these three conditions.

The thesis sketch is preparatory. The LEQ rubric evaluates the full essay.