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UNITED STATES HISTORY 1492-1865

07 August 20, 2023

Societal views in October 1st, 1823

In the early 1800s, the United States was entering an era of strong nationalism after ‘defeating’ England in the War of 1812 and sending out the Monroe Doctrine. These times were known as the Era of Good Feelings. Due to the Louisiana purchase, new states/territories were in the process of being added to the union which meant that the growing United States had to reason how it was going to add current political rules to new territories. As Mississippi was being added to the union, politicians from the North (North of Ohio River) argued that new states had to join as slave-free states, which made politicians from the South upset. A compromise was reached, but a divide in the nation was slowly created which eventually led to the important and historical American Civil War. The North and South’s opposing views on slavery can be simplified down to the North and South placing different amounts of value in human lives. The North places more value on human life than the South does in emotional and societal ways, which is reflected in their perspective on death and progressivism through front pages and poems in newspapers from New York and South Carolina from the day of October 1st, 1823.

In the 1800s newspapers were local so any non-advertising space used had to be something that people were interested in or reflected the values of the community. During these times, if many people disagreed with something, it was not uncommon for the people to tar and feather or riot. An anti-slavery newspaper in the south would not do very well. With this in mind, we assume that newspapers published things that were widely supported or accurately represented the views of the readers. We will use this frame of thought as we analyze the chosen newspapers. Also, we will compare on the basis that the way a society perceives death often reflects its value on life, and provides insight into its culture. For instance, funeral practices offer glimpses into a society's approach to grieving, and honoring the deceased. The societal view of death serves as a window into a collective psyche.

To compare the newspapers, we first approach with a general discussion of the first page, then we focus on poems from the newspapers. The first page of a newspaper is considered to be the most important because it sets the tone for the entire publication. The first pages are what people first read, so they likely contain the most important information to the community. We can learn a lot from studying the overall content of the first page. We begin with Charleston, South Carolina’s City Gazette’s first page which consists of: mainly general advertisements, followed by runaway slave bounties, jail sentences, sermons, tax executions, criminal updates and small amounts of personal publications (City Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) XLV, no. 14051, October 1, 1823). Considering the first page sets the tone and has the most ‘valuable’ information, Southern newspapers set a tone of greed and violence. Many ads and stories include crimes, slavery, or some type of economic event. For the North, we look at Ithaca, New York’s *Ithaca Journal’s* first page which mainly consists of general advertisements like the South’s (clothing, land sales, miscellaneous goods & services). However, the main differences are; no runaway slave ads, little to no tax or jail sentencing posts, many ads focused on gender-neutral education, military education, positive community entrepreneurship and large book sales (Ithaca Journal (Ithaca, New York) VII, no. 8, October 1, 1823: [1]). The South was more focused on the free-market, property, and crime, while the North was more focused on positive community building like education for all and no slavery. A general overview of what was happening is good, but a deep dive into personal publications can give specific information on what people thought and felt during these times.

The thoughts of people are a reflection of their surroundings, so we can learn about societal issues from analyzing people’s thoughts. A great way to learn about people’s thoughts is by their art and expressions like poetry. The skills of reading and writing poetry show a lot about the people of the time. They had to express and understand with emotional intelligence and creativity, and they had to explore the human experience and therefore showed strong empathy and introspection. The first poem we will analyze is from Charleston’s City Gazette where the context of the poem is that it was written by a ‘Lady’ about her friends expressing surprise at her declining an invitation to a ‘May Frolic,’ which leads to the author moving to a different city. The poem’s opening lines read “NO promis’d pleasured open’d to my view… My sicken’d senses turn’d from scenes of joy — The mourning mother wept her buried boy ("Poetry." City Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) XLV, no. 14051, October 1, 1823).” From these lines we learn that the author lost her son and because of that the author sees no ‘pleasures’ in her near future, so declines any invitations out. Using the context of the friend’s surprise and that the author left town, we can learn that the community of this town probably frowns upon declining invitations and places perceived status over people’s emotions. We can see this from the lines “No father waits to tend thee to thy tomb, But as tumultuous crowds around her throng, Thy mother winds her hapless course along ("Poetry." City Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) XLV, no. 14051, October 1, 1823).” These lines tell us that as the family tried to bury their son and grieve in peace, ‘crowds’ squeezed into their lives, so they had no choice but to try and keep living lives as before. This is highlighted in the poem’s last lines “Bids her pale lips wear resignations smile, And checks her own… ("Poetry." City Gazette (Charleston, South Carolina) XLV, no. 14051, October 1, 1823).” We are told the author tried to wear a smile to please people. Normally, empathetic people do not force others to fake a smile nor are surprised if a grieving person just wants to be alone. Considering the greed and violence toned first page, along with a poem that reflected a society of people that placed status over empathy, this evidence shows that the South valued outside luxuries more than the lives of other humans.

The Northern poem is called ''THE INFANT AND THE ROSE'' written by ‘MEMNON.’ No context is given, we only know that it is in a section called “THE MINSTREL. FOR THE JOURNAL.” and the section that is dated September 1823. The poem opens with “Beneath that flower an infant laid. I gaz’d on each with wild delight, For both were lovely to the sight ("Poetry." Ithaca Journal (Ithaca, New York) VII, no. 8, October 1, 1823: [4]. Readex: Early American Newspapers).” A more artistic and uplifting tone is set compared to the Southern poem. The poem then reads “... Autumn’s blast Had stript that rose of all its charms… And clasp’d the babe in icy arms. Now where the leafless rose-bush sighs, low in the grave the infant lies ("Poetry." Ithaca Journal (Ithaca, New York) VII, no. 8, October 1, 1823: [4]. Readex: Early American Newspapers).” We learn that the baby died due to the cold weather and the ‘icy arms’ mean that its caretaker also froze to death. The poem then states how cruel nature can be. How nature cuts short the beauty of the flowers and infant, and the author cries out to ‘nature’ in grief. The poem then ends with ‘nature’s’ ‘cheeringly’ reply “They both shall live and bloom again — The one in spring shall grace the grove, And one shall smile in the courts above ("Poetry." Ithaca Journal (Ithaca, New York) VII, no. 8, October 1, 1823: [4]. Readex: Early American Newspapers).” The main difference to the Southern poem, other than the tone, was how grief was handled. ‘Nature’ consoling the grieving person shows that the author understood compassion and care are expected and wanted. Although the Southern poem mentioned grief, the empathy-less reaction of the friend’s showed no compassion or consoling for the grieving author.

The front pages of the newspapers and the death specific poetry reveal how the North placed more value on life emotionally and socially than the South. The North saw death as a tragic moment to help a grieving neighbor and as hope for those in heaven, which is reflected in their compassionate and progressive way of living. The South saw death as something inevitable and that life should just go on, which is reflected in their lack of empathy and economic centricity. From this, we can conclude that the North values human lives more than the South, (which was obvious from the stance on slavery). A general newspaper comparison reveals the differences in how the North and South place importance on what they care about. A deep dive comparison into the thoughts and feelings of the people from the North and South support our conclusion.