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Topic 1: Barbary Wars

Background:

The first thing that one needs to know about the Barbary Wars is why they were fought. The Barbary States of North Africa were a group of four nations that thrived on piracy. The States’ main source of business was pillaging ships and profiting through their goods. The piracy in the region is said to have begun through religious persecution of Muslims in Spain and subsequent revenge attacks on Spanish ships. Spain responded with military force, and the Turkish government helped the small military states fend off the attacks and eventually drive the Spanish out of Africa. The Turkish governmental influence on the region only lasted about 75 years before the states revolted and became reliant on piracy.

Fortunately for the pirates, who had up until this point been using galleys (boats with oars), they were taught how to build ships using European methods. This allowed the pirates’ fleets to be faster, cover more water, and grow the pirates’ influence. In response to increased pirate activity, range, and effectiveness, European powers began to send naval vessels to protect merchant vessels. Sometimes, ships would illegally fly the flag of a country known to be at peace with the pirates in order to sneak past the pirates. Other methods of evasion included sailing in groups to diminish the chance of a pirate attack. Although this greatly decreased pirate activity, it did not end the tradition of piracy. Eventually, the European powers decided it would be less expensive and more effective just to pay tribute to the pirates in exchange for safe passage of that nations’ merchant vessels. Additionally, some nations requested that the pirates harass other nations’ ships. They payed more tribute, but were more effective competitors in the international market.

US Involvement:

By 1800, the US has treaties with each of the four Barbary States. Thomas Jefferson, the President, has experience with these pirate states, as he was Secretary of State and the US Minister to France. He learned that tribute or war were the only ways to secure safe passage through the Mediterranean. Jefferson suggested the assembly of a navy to secure passage instead of tributary. Congress didn’t like the idea of war, and instead authorized money to be used in negotiations for peace. The Moroccan Government accepted the deal with few changes, but Algeria and the other two States weren’t so enamored with being paid off. They relied much more heavily on piracy and the goods captured. As a matter of fact, Algerian pirates had already captured two American ships. The envoy to negotiate a treaty and ransoms for the ships and crews failed on both accounts, and relations with the Barbary States grew ever more volatile.

In 1793, Portugal signed a treaty with Algiers, allowing the pirates to focus more on American ships. A total of eleven were captured, and the US began to put more effort into keeping the pirates at bay. A treaty with Algiers was signed in 1795, a treaty with Tripoli in 1796, and a treaty with Tunis in 1797. In all of them, the US agreed to pay tribute in exchange for kidnapped crews. However at the same time the US was paying tribute to the Barbary States, they were also creating a navy of their own.

By 1801, the Tripolian State was angry with the US for not paying tribute at the same amount as the other Barbary States. The Pasha, or ruler, had threatened the US with war if the tribute was not increased. Jefferson sent the newly formed US Navy, composed of three frigates and a schooner, under Commodore Dale into the Mediterranean and to Tripoli with a letter for the Pasha expressing Jefferson’s desire for peace and commerce to continue. Unfortunately, however, the Pasha declared war on the US while the letter was travelling across the Atlantic. Commodore Dale then proceeded to engage in war: blockading ports, escorting US merchant vessels, and occasionally engaging Tripolian ships. At the end of the year, Jefferson gave an address to Congress asking for the approval of war on the Barbary Coast, and official funds to expand the war effort. It was granted, and throughout the year 1802, both diplomatic solutions to the conflict were tried as well as more navy vessels being sent to the Mediterranean to aid the effort. Sweden, whose ships has also been harassed by the pirates, was backing the US in their efforts. With the US and Swedish Navy presence in the Mediterranean, the other Barbary States have begun to side more and more with Tripoli.

Solutions:

Although the US and the Barbary State of Tripoli are at war with each other, I believe that this conflict should be solved through peace, not war. The current war should end. The US Navy and Pirates should stop fighting one another. That is not how peace should be achieved. Although piracy is the main source of revenue for these Barbary States, they should begin to develop other forms of revenue too. With help from its neighbors in and around the Mediterranean Sea, these nations can prosper through means other than piracy.

I propose a system be set up in which the Barbary States agree to peace. This will be achieved through the participation of other nations. Ten years from the time the treaty is signed, the Barbary States will stop collecting tribute. During those ten years, the infrastructure and other necessities of these Barbary States will installed and trade connections established. Through this peaceful network of trade and systematic integration into a stable economic setting, these Barbary States can be established as nations in full that do not rely on piracy.

Topic 2: Federal Judiciary System

Background:

The Judicial Branch is the branch of government responsible for interpreting and applying the laws of the US. In addition, it is a mechanism for solving disputes between two parties. Since its’ inception, it has been given little to no power in having any say over whether or not laws should be passed. But this could change. A court case has come up, in which the Supreme Court ruled neither in favor of the plaintiff or the defendant, but instead ruled that it could not properly give a ruling. In what Chief Justice John Marshall calls ‘judicial review’, the Supreme Court can rule on certain cases or aspects of laws as unconstitutional and therefore nullify their power. This granted the Supreme Court equal power in the federal government, as it can now void laws it deems unconstitutional, and further ingrained the concept of separation of powers within the government.

The whole case started when Federalist President John Adams appointed a great number of other Federalists to positions within the government on the last day of his presidency. When Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson came into office the next day, he told his cabinet to ignore all the appointments and instead appoint Democratic-Republicans to those positions. When one of the people who had been appointed by Adams, William Marbury, was denied his commission by Secretary of State James Madison, he demanded a court order, or *writ of mandamus*, from the Supreme Court forcing Madison to abide by Adams’ decisions. The crux of the issue was whether or not the Supreme Court could even write the document, seeing as how although the Judiciary Act of 1789 gave the Supreme Court the power to write the document but the Third Article of the Constitution specified that the judicial powers extended only to “all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls”. Seeing as Marbury was none of these, the Supreme Court had a tough decision on its’ hands.

Marshall’s decision to rule that the Supreme Court didn’t have the power to write the *writ of mandamus* allowed for the extension of the power of the Supreme Court, while at the same time solving the problem of the case and upholding the founding principles of our country.

The Judiciary Act of 1801 sought to further define the national judiciary system. Article III of the Constitution only vaguely outlined the roles and responsibilities of the system, and so the Judiciary Act of 1789 and the Judiciary Act of 1801 were trying to fill in the gaps and create an effective system that worked well and got the job done. Although the Judiciary Act of 1789 gave much more definition to the powers and responsibilities of the court system, like expanding the range of federal jurisdiction to intra-state conflicts, it wasn’t the most effective solution to the problem. The Judiciary Act of 1801 changed several things about the Judiciary Act of 1789 that Congress thought would ease the burden and streamline the court system. The number of Supreme Court Justices dropped from six to five, and the number of justices on circuit courts increased from three to six. Supreme Court Justices were granted more time off of the circuit courts and thus more time to focus on cases that reached the Supreme Court. The strength of the federal judiciary system grew stronger as more aspects of the law were brought under federal jurisdiction. Additionally, circuit courts’ powers were greatly strengthened and the circuit courts themselves were expanded to sixteen judgeships in six judicial circuits. Lastly, the ease with which cases were classified as ‘Federal’ as opposed to ‘State’ or ‘Local’ was increased by expanding the criterion for the constituents of a federal case.

The passing of the bill was heavily debated and came down to the divisions in party lines, but it was passed. However, now that Jefferson is President, debate around judicial reform has reopened.

Solutions:

The issue of who interprets the Constitution is a difficult one. Each individual with knowledge of the Constitution’s language and the wisdom to understand it has their own interpretation. The fact remains: the Justices of the Supreme Court are elected based on merit. They have proven themselves as capable and trustworthy individuals who have had experience with the Law of the US. The Supreme Court is the highest ‘power’ in the land. Based on our system of Checks and Balances, outlined in detail in the Constitution, the Courts are given the power to preside over disputes. But if the laws themselves which have instigated those disputes are befouled by language that is in direct violation of the Constitution, who is able to say that those laws are invalid? Who is to say that the laws that created these disputes should be fixed? Well, Chief Justice John Marshall stepped up and said, “The Courts have that power” and the logic within his argument is sound. The Legislative and Executive Branches can’t have the power, for they are directly responsible for the drafting and passing of the laws. The issue of whether or not the Courts are composed of Federalist or Democratic-Republicans should be less important than that of whether or not the Courts get this power in the first place. I say yes: because it abides by the Constitution, fits perfectly into the system of Checks and Balances, and makes sense that the Constitution should take a higher standing than ordinary laws.

As for the debate over who has seats on the Courts, obviously each side will have their opinions because of which party they are involved in, I propose an equal split of each party in each of the 6 circuit courts, with a nonbiased tie-breaker to sit in for the duration of each case. This way, each party gets what they want, and we have an even and fair division between policies and ideas.

Topic 3: The Louisiana Purchase

Background:

The Louisiana Territory was established on April 9, 1682. Frenchman Robert de La Salle erected a cross by the mouth of the Mississippi and claimed the entirety of the Mississippi River Basin for France after naming the territory Louisiana after Prince Louis XIV. As settlements began to form, the Mississippi became a vital resource for food, transportation, and water. The importance of one city in particular, New Orleans, was unquestioned. It was a vital hub of trade and transport, and had access to the Gulf of Mexico and the whole of the territory through the Mississippi River.

After the territory was claimed by La Salle, it was bartered around the European powers to influence politics or create alliances. It was settled by many different ethnic groups, such as French, Spanish, Acadian, German, and Americans, as well as already having been inhabited for centuries by Native American tribes. Trade between Europeans and Natives was incredibly influential: some tribes traded more frequently with settlers and gained the upper hand it technology. Trading outposts are common along the Mississippi, and these are crucial to economic stability. The local tribesmen know the land the best, and as the French have good relations with the Natives, they have profited greatly from this. American settlers don’t have the best of relations with the Natives, but everybody gets along relatively well. Additionally, America is divided on the topic of slavery, but both black slaves and free blacks are scattered throughout the region. New Orleans is a hub for the slave trade, both for the collection and dispersion, and for both black and Native slaves. In terms of religious backgrounds, most Native Americans have their own cultural traditions, but Catholicism has been creeping into the territory, and is spreading. This shift in religion allows for the Natives to be more susceptible to ideas from settlers.

The economic activities in the territory are mainly agricultural. All the produce that is harvested and is supposed to be shipped to other regions of the globe must first travel through New Orleans, which created a huge risk of corruption or mismanagement in the governance of the city destroying the way of life in the territory. Like the agricultural products, all the fur trade with the Natives also had to go mostly through New Orleans. However, unlike the agricultural side of the economy, the fur trade was open for competition. The British, Spanish, French, and Americans all want a piece of the profits, and the fur trade is an incredibly profitable business. Cheap trading between goods like guns, knives, beads, blankets, clothing, and other items for pelts that could be turned into valuable coats, clothing or hats all added to the revenue flowing from the trade. In addition to these two aspects of the territory, the raw natural resources like lumber, deposits of minerals and ores, and tar for ships all increased the value of the land.

US Involvement:

As the territory stands west of America, it is undeniably subject to Manifest Destiny. Pressure is on Congress to expand the US into the territory, as it is rich in potential. The only problem is, the French control the entirety of the Louisiana Territory. Napoleon wants to strengthen his grip on the Americas, both in the Caribbean and the Louisiana Territory. He sends men to accomplish this goal, but unexpected losses sway his interests away. Meanwhile, the port of New Orleans has been closed to Americans, who disagree on paying taxes to store their goods in the city. Ideas of taking the city back by force and then the whole of the territory have been proposed, although those ideas are mostly folly.

As the territory is massive, the purchase of it would almost double the land size of the US, it costs a lot of money. Napoleon has suffered losses in the Caribbean and seems to be relinquishing his hold and interest of territory in the New World. His foreign minister has offered New Orleans and the whole of the territory to the US, and negotiations over price are being held at the moment. Debate between the purchase, economic and political implications of the territory, foreign policy, and slavery in the region is heated and absolutely necessary, as the future of America depends on this choice.

Solutions:

The Louisiana Territory should be bought. It’s been made readily available for us, we are being asked for the expansion of our country, and people will settle there regardless of who owns the land. It is incredibly rich in resources and opportunities, all of which would be ours if we bought the territory. Addressing the issues with buying the territory: negotiations over price have already commenced. The territory would be divided up and under the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, plans to incorporate the territories and eventually have them become states would be the best plan. Economically, the region is already focused on sending things down the river, so all we would need to do is build railroads to send items to the coast. Addressing slavery, I do not believe that slavery should be incorporated into the territory, but seeing as it already exists there, it should be allowed to stay where it is now, but not allowed to grow and spread all over the interior of the continent.

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