

Lesson Forty-Nine

John Quincy Adams

LESSON IDEA

To show how the statesmanship of John Quincy Adams guided our foreign policy in the early 1800's and helped us settle a serious crisis in Florida.

PREPARATION

Have the map from last week's lesson available. Be prepared to explain the concept of "privileged sanctuaries" that was implemented during Korean and Vietnam wars as part of our foreign policy establishment's "no-win" strategy in both conflicts. Also cite example of present-day U.S. foreign policy that appease world opinion rather than promote legitimate our (and constitutional) national interests.

IN 1817, Spain was the most painful thorn in the side of the United States. Ambitions of the swaggering bullies of Europe, France and England, had been checked by the Louisiana Purchase and the War of 1812. But Spain's influence remained in Florida, Texas, New Mexico, California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and the southern edges of Mississippi and Alabama. [The map from last week's lesson shows the large western area held by Spain.]

The border between Florida's Spanish blue bloods and America's southern pioneer farmers was the most volatile. Seminole Indians roamed between the two national powers, a ragtag aggregation largely comprised of misfits and rejects from other tribes. An Indian who could claim no other tribe became a Seminole. The tribe had attracted so many castoffs, including fugitives from the defeated Creek nation and disgruntled English traders, that it had become little more than a guerrilla gang.

In Florida, Spain was too weak to adequately discipline even its own adventurers, so let the Seminoles do as they pleased, which including shooting, scalping, and massacring Americans. The risk of retaliation by their pioneer enemies was slight, since the Seminoles had only to retreat into Spanish territory, where they could not be pursued without creating an "international incident."

There is a name for this type of strategic

retreat. So you know what it is? Do you know what it is? [The term "privileged sanctuaries" was used during the Korean War to describe the communist tactic of retreating behind the boundary that General Douglas MacArthur was prohibited crossing. The same technique was used to give an advantage to the communist side of the Vietnam war. From its privileged sanctuary, a warring group can safely regroup for a new offensive because its opponents are prohibited from attacking its bases, supply lines, or scattered forces.]

General Andrew Jackson, Southern District Commander of the American Army in 1817, clearly understood the problems posed by privileged sanctuaries. When he was ordered to end massacres by Indians on the Georgia border, he offered his own solution. Since his superiors could not command him to enter Spanish territory in pursuit of the enemy (for that would have been an act of war), he would do the job without official orders. All he asked was an unofficial wink of approval from President Monroe.

Whether the wink was given remains a matter of debate to this day. But it is not debatable that the hero of New Orleans moved rapidly to the Florida border with an impression that his government wished him to clean up the mess in the most expeditious and thorough manner possible.

Jackson's troops quickly broke the power of the Seminoles in northern Florida. Then they burst into Spanish territory to destroy the privileged sanctuaries. General Jackson seized the Spanish fort of St. Mark's, then moved on to the town of Pensacola. When the Spanish governor fled to Fort Barrancas at the mouth of the harbor, Jackson bombarded the fort and forced it to surrender. The Americans captured an Englishman named Ambrister (who had commanded parties of hostile Indians) and a Scotsman named Arbuthnot (who had warned the Seminoles of approaching American troops). Both men were given a speedy trial and convicted. Ambrister was shot; Arbuthnot hanged.

