HENRY CLAY AND THE PECULIAR INSTITUTION

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The major concern of this study is an attempt to analyze the attitudes of Henry Clay, United States Congressman and Senator from Kentucky, 1807-1852, and three time presidential candidate, concerning the institution of slavery by examining its effects upon his political career from 1798 to 1850.

Among the more important primary sources consulted for the study were the published papers and letters of Henry Clay and other contemporary political figures of the era including Thomas Hart Benton, John C. Calhoun, James G. Birney, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, and Thurlow Weed. Congressional records and contemporary newspapers were also used extensively as source materials.

The study follows a chronological pattern with the exception of the second chapter, which is a topical treatment of the American Colonization Movement. The study begins with a brief examination of the Clay family slaveholdings and Henry Clay's first encounter with slavery as a political question during his career as a young lawyer in Kentucky. Also treated in Chapter I are Clay's actions regarding slavery while serving in the national government prior to 1820. Chapter II deals with the American Colonization
Movement, the reasons why Clay joined the Society, and what he hoped to gain by association with the movement. Chapter III discusses the rise of the antislavery movement as first exemplified by the Missouri controversy of 1820 and later by the evolution of abolitionism. Central to these discussions is Clay's attempt to be a moderating force between pro and antislavery forces. Chapter IV narrates the presidential politics of 1840 and 1844 with emphasis on the role of the slavery issue on the Whig nominating convention of 1839 and the general election of 1844. Chapter V briefly discusses the effects of slavery upon Clay's career from 1845 until his death in 1852 and concludes with an evaluation of Clay's actions regarding slavery during his political career and the motivation behind those actions.

The major conclusions of this study are that early in his life Clay made an intellectual commitment that slavery was wrong and maintained this abstract view of the institution until his death. However, Clay never took an active stand against slavery for three reasons: he believed that an antislavery stand would destroy his political career; he realized the explosiveness of the slavery issue as early as 1799, and his misguided love for the Union forced him to attempt to suppress the issue; and Clay was a racist who did not wish to see the United States populated with a sizable number of free blacks.
HENRY CLAY AND THE PECULIAR INSTITUTION

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CHAPTER ONE

EVOLUTION OF A PROBLEM

Few eras have been as turbulent for the United States as the first half of the nineteenth century. The period began with the apparent triumph of Jeffersonian democracy and ended with the nation preparing for the final quarrel that would almost destroy the Union. With the exception of a brief period, Americans were continuously squabbling over events of both international and domestic import. The nation fought two declared wars, one with Great Britain, the other with Mexico. Neither received great popular support. The United States added new territory which more than doubled the geographic area of 1800. But not all Americans were sure that this had been done in a legal fashion, or that such growth would be profitable. Although these international concerns were important, domestic issues were becoming more significant. The growing pains of the new nation were reflected in every phase of life. But as the century progressed there arose a distinction with respect to domestic concerns. The quarrels of the first twenty-five years were a continuation of the Hamiltonian-Jeffersonian struggles. Presidential powers, the courts, and the Bank of the United States were all argued on ideological lines. However, the second quarter century witnessed the emergence of a strong sectional...
conflict in domestic affairs among the North, South, and West. But the growing chasm between the North and South gradually eclipsed the role of the West in these quarrels.

Foremost among the sectional issues was slavery. The prominence of the slavery controversy in the decades prior to the Civil War is difficult to exaggerate. The magnitude of the problem created discord between churches, friends, and families. No matter how much an individual might wish to avoid the subject, it could rarely be avoided, and prominent politicians of the era were usually forced to take stands on the issue.

With respect to political influence, Henry Clay was one of the most prominent politicians of this age. He was a strong nationalist and lover of the Union. His moderate political voice was heard on issues of internal improvements, international peace, tariff regulations, and slavery. For the most part he achieved a great deal of consistency in his policies. However, few politicians had a more paradoxical attitude toward slavery and the black man. Clay saw in the black man the "most vicious" element of the population, but he also viewed him as a potential missionary, carrying Christianity and civilization to Africa.1 By his own

admission he abhorred slavery as "the greatest of human evils," but he could not bring himself to accept or condone the cause of immediate abolition. He hoped that at some future date the United States would be free of the "darkest spot" on its national character, but through his political compromises he probably did more than any other politician of his period to foster the expansion of slavery. During his lifetime Clay held both personal and field slaves, but on more than one occasion he volunteered his legal services to aid the slaves of other owners in suing for their freedom. By the 1840's he was convinced that it was his Christian duty to retain his slaves rather than abandon them "to their fate" without means of support. Nevertheless, as late as 1849, Clay championed the cause of emancipation in Kentucky and, in the following year, he helped to create the political circumstances that would allow slavery to spread into the new territories acquired from Mexico.

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2Glyndon G. Van Deusen, The Life of Henry Clay (Boston, 1937), p. 136; Blatimore Niles' National Register, LI (September 3, 1836), 40. (Hereafter cited as Niles' Register.)


4The Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850; see Eunice Fuller Barnard, "To Henry Clay Comes Paradoxical Fame," The New York Times Magazine, April 10, 1929, p. 6.


6J. Winston Coleman, Slavery Times in Kentucky (Chapel Hill, 1940), p. 35.

Clay's ambiguous attitude toward slavery and the black was the result of a number of factors. Much of the answer could be found in the nature of Clay's politics. In general his political views and actions were temperate. He gained renown as the "Great Pacificator" and spent much of his political career appealing to statemen of divergent political ideologies to adjust and compromise their respective views to preserve the Union. As time elapsed the preservation of tranquillity within the Union became the paramount directive of his political career. Clay wanted slavery to disappear but, out of fear for the Union, he hoped to delay any solution for as long as possible.8

But the threat that slavery presented to the Union does not totally substantiate Clay's position on the peculiar institution. There is little doubt that Clay wanted to be President, but in a nation half free and half slave, he could not enhance his political stature for that office by taking an extreme position in the slavery controversy. However, there was more than preservation of the Union and a desire to be President that formed Clay's attitudes on slavery. There was also a subjective feeling that would drive him to say in 1836 that slavery could be excused or justified only if a "necessity, a stern political necessity alone . . . a necessity arising from the fact, that, to give

freedom to our slaves that they might remain with us, would be doing them an injury, rather than a benefit—would render their condition worse than it is at present."9

Henry Clay's background was deeply rooted in the slave tradition of America. One John Clay, who may have been Henry's great-great-great grandfather, came to Virginia soon after the founding of the initial settlements. Shortly after his 1613 arrival, Virginia land records indicate the issuance of a land patent to John Clay for 1200 acres in Charles City, County, now named Prince George.10 When the first census was taken in Henrico County in 1677, Henry Clay's great-great grandfather, Henry Charles Clay, was residing there.11 The precise slaveholdings of either of these Clay relatives is unknown, but Clay's home county, Henrico, by mid-eighteenth century had a larger slave population than free, and thus,

9Niles' Register, LI (September, 1836), 40.

10Zachary Smith and Mary Rogers Clay, The Clay Family (Louisville, 1899), pp. 64-65; W. G. Stanard, "Abstracts of Virginia Land Patents," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, III (October, 1895), 186. It is questionable whether the John Clay, John Clay as recorded in Hotten's List of Emigrants to America, 1600-1700, was an ancestor of Henry Clay. Smith and Clay claim that he was a relative. Thomas Hart Clay, Henry Clay's grandson, agreed with the Smith-Clay position. However, there is some evidence that the Clay line can be traced back no further than 1677 and Henry Charles Clay. See Smith and Clay, The Clay Family, p. 65; Clay, Henry Clay, p. 16; Review of The Clay Family by Smith and Clay, American Historical Review, V (December, 1899), 402-403.

it is reasonable to assume that John Clay, with some 1200 acres to work, owned some slaves.\(^{12}\)

Henry Clay's father was named John and according to tradition he was a man of great vigor and exemplary virtue, who gave up the role of dancing master for the Baptist ministry.\(^{13}\) But being a man of God in Virginia presented no restrictions on owning slaves. Both John Clay and his father (also named John), were slaveholders as is evidenced by the will of Henry Clay's grandfather. At his death John Clay, Sr. willed to John Clay "400 acres of land and 3 negroes, Hoges, Daniel, and Lucy."\(^{14}\) The tradition of slaveholding also came from the maternal side of the family. Elizabeth Hudson Clay was the daughter of George Hudson, a man of means, and inspector of tobacco in Hanover County. Among his possessions were thirty-one slaves and 464 acres of land, all of which was divided between his two daughters according to his will.\(^{15}\) By 1777, the year of Henry Clay's birth, John and Elizabeth Clay had put their inheritance to work by living on the land Elizabeth Clay had received working that land with twenty-one slaves. John Clay died in 1781, and the following year


\(^{13}\)Colton, ed., Works of Clay, II, 17-18; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 4.

\(^{14}\)Smith and Clay, The Clay Family, p. 78.

\(^{15}\)J. E. Warren, "Tompkins Family" William and Mary Quarterly, Series Two, X (July, 1930), 236; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, pp. 4-6.
the Virginia census recorded that the family's slaveholdings had diminished by three, probably as a result of the payment of debts. When Elizabeth Clay married the second time, she once again married a slave owner. Henry Watkins possessed more than adequate means among which were seventeen blacks.\(^6\) In later life Henry Clay liked to refer to his background as one of poverty. With the slaves the family possessed, it is difficult to conceive of Clay ever having been poverty stricken.

Clay was born in the state where slavery began in British North America, but it was also a state rich in the heritage and tradition of the law. One of the first political figures that Clay idolized was Patrick Henry, who was also from Hanover County, where Clay had received his primary education. Surrounded with the legal and political spirit permeated by men like Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, Clay began in 1793 a study of the law under the direction of one of Virginia's most renowned attorneys, George Wythe.\(^1\)\(^7\) He began as Wythe's amanuensis and gradually extended his activities to a study of law. It was probably at this time that Clay encountered his first conflict over slavery. Wythe was a firm and outspoken critic of slavery, and Clay's

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Daniel Mallory, ed., The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay (New York, 1844), II, 572. (Hereafter cited as Clay Speeches.)
family background must have clashed with Wythe's views. Judging from Clay's later actions, Wythe did have a strong influence on him, and although Clay failed to take strong action against slavery, he always maintained that slavery was morally wrong. In 1897 Clay left the tutelage of Wythe and entered the office of former governor Robert Brooke to complete his studies, which he did in November, 1897, when he passed the bar examination.

A month after Clay had completed the bar examination, he made the decision to follow his mother and step-father to Kentucky. In Richmond competition among lawyers was heavy, and new state of Kentucky offered greater opportunities. Clay chose to settle in Lexington, a small community in Fayette County in the northeastern part of the state. It was shortly after his arrival that Clay began his political career and purchased his first slaves.

Clay arrived penniless but quickly established his law practice. Evidently he met with immediate success, because

18 Clay's views and attitudes toward slavery and the black were remarkably similar to another of Wythe's students, Thomas Jefferson. See William Cohen, "Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery," The Journal of American History, LVI (December, 1969), 503-526. According to Vernon Parrington, "When Clay left Virginia he carried with him the Jeffersonianism of Wythe; but he was wanting in the trained intellect of his preceptor and his views were inadequately grounded." See Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: The Romantic Revolution in America 1800-1860 (New York, 1927), p. 142.

a Lexington native recalled that Clay's great oratorical ability aided his quick rise to popularity, and "in little time he was at the head of the Bar and was employed on one side of almost every suit in the Fayette courts."\(^{20}\) He was prosperous enough by 1803 to have acquired his first slaves. By 1805 he had begun to purchase the property that eventually became known as Ashland, and he was working his land with eight slaves.\(^{21}\) At some time during this early period of personal property growth, Clay found it necessary to hire an overseer to manage his increasing holdings while he devoted himself to his law practice and politics.\(^{22}\) The exact number of slaves that Clay held at any one time is not certain. By 1811 he owned eighteen, and by 1842, approximately fifty.\(^{23}\)

By the standards of nineteenth century southern slaveholders, Clay was known as a kind and benevolent master.

\(^{20}\)Robert B. McAfee, "The Life and Times of Robert B. McAfee and his Family and Connections," Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society, XXV (June, 1927), 219.

\(^{21}\)Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 71, 29-30; Coleman, Slavery in Kentucky, p. 22. Coleman maintains that Clay had only six slaves by 1805 rather than the eight as claimed by Van Deusen.


\(^{23}\)Coleman, Slavery in Kentucky, p. 22. In 1842 Clay admitted that he owned about 50, who are probably worth $15,000." See Mallory, ed., Clay Speeches, II, 600. Troutman maintains that Fayette County records of 1846 show that Clay held sixty slaves which was probably the highest number; see Troutman, "Clay and His Estate," p. 164.
His slaves received adequate care in pleasant surroundings, and, unlike most of his peers, Clay housed his slaves in brick cottages rather than in log cabins or frame houses.\footnote{Colton, ed., Works of Clay, II, 33-34; Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization (New York, 1961), p. 60.} A visitor to Ashland in 1845 remarked that the slave houses were "very neat, surrounded by better gardens, and more flowers and shrubbery than one half of the farm houses in the county."\footnote{Niles' Register, LXVIII (June 21, 1845), 246.}

Clay also extended benevolence to a few slaves in the form of manumission for faithful service. As early as 1808 he was known to have emancipated a slave.\footnote{Richard L. Troutman, "The Emancipation of Slaves by Henry Clay," The Journal of Negro History, XL (April, 1955), 179-180.} He was especially prone to emancipating body servants. Aaron, who served for years as Clay's personal body servant, and Aaron's son Charles, who served in the same capacity after his father, were both freed, although Charles continued to perform his duties for wages.\footnote{Colton, ed., Works of Clay, II, 34.} Clay freed six slaves in all during his lifetime.\footnote{Troutman, "Emancipation of Slaves by Clay," p. 181.}

Clay's entrance into politics was ironically connected with slavery and stood as a contradiction to his rise as a slave owner. During the Kentucky legislative session of 1796, there arose a great degree of dissatisfaction with the state constitution of 1792. Although the immediate cause of
the unrest was a result of the state senate's rejection of a land bill, there had been a growing desire to change the basic document for a number of other reasons. The senatorial structure of the state government was becoming too aristocratic in the opinion of many people. However, a second major area of discontent came from the growing ranks of antislavery Kentuckians. The antislavery element wanted to strike out the constitutional provision against a general law of emancipation. By 1797 these forces had created enough pressure that the legislature agreed to a plebiscite on the question of a constitutional convention. In May of that year a partial and irregular vote was taken and of the 9814 votes cast, 5446 called for a constitutional convention.

The antislavery movement had been growing in Kentucky for several years. This element found acceptance and ready expression of its views in the leading religious denominations of the state, which by 1790 included the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists. Some churches within these denominations had as early as 1788 withdrawn from the Salem Association, a general association of Kentucky's Protestant churches.

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29 Many Kentuckians felt that the senate had become too remote to represent the people. The senate elected the governor and filled its own vacancies. See Mann Butler, A History of the Commonwealth of Kentucky (Louisville, 1834), pp. 261-262.

30 Ibid.; Mayo, Henry Clay, p. 64.

31 Butler, History of Kentucky, p. 280.
because of the association's refusal to condemn slavery. By the mid-1790's antislavery proponents felt that they were strong enough, if given the opportunity, to convince Kentuckians to outlaw slavery altogether. Thus in many counties following the 1797 vote, emancipation became the chief issue in discussions for and against holding a constitutional convention.

By the spring of 1798 the center of the antislavery agitation was Fayette County. Clay had only been a resident of the area for four months, but his zeal for politics thrust him into the fray. Writing in the Kentucky Gazette under the pseudonym of Scaevola, Clay called for a convention on two grounds. The first reason, he claimed, was that the activities of the senate needed to be curbed. He felt that a unicameral legislature might be a major step in correcting the senate's abuses. The second reason a convention was needed was to restrict slavery. Clay pointed out numerous evils that could be attributed to slavery, and asked whether "any human man [could] be happy and contented when he [saw] near

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32Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, pp. 18-19.

33Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery (New York, 1960), p. 12. The process of emancipation varied from state to state in the South, although it was always restricted. In most states the owner had put up a bond to guarantee to the community support of the former slave. In more than half of the slaveholding states, the freed slave had to leave the state; see Albert Bushnell Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 1831-1841 (New York, 1906), p. 134.

34Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 28.

35Mayo, Henry Clay, p. 66.
thirty thousand of his fellow beings around him, deprived of all rights which make life desirable . . . ?"36 The people of Kentucky were too enthusiastic over the cause of liberty to allow slavery to continue in their midst. "All America acknowledged the existence of slavery to be an evil, which while it deprived the slave of the best gift of heaven, in the end injured the master too . . . ."37 However, Clay was not advocating "an immediate and unqualified liberation of slaves." The enemies of the convention were only trying to represent this as his antislavery view. Clay's answer to the slave question was a plan of gradual emancipation. But it would be sufficient at this time if the article in the 1792 constitution prohibiting general emancipation were removed. This would allow emancipation to evolve at its own pace.38

In January, 1799, the proslavery faction met at Bryan's Station near Lexington. Anticipating a positive vote for a constitutional convention, they formulated plans to halt the emancipation move and nominated candidates for the convention. They issued a statement calling for no emancipation

36James F. Hopkins and Mary Hargreaves, eds., The Rising Statesman, 1797-1814, Vol. I of The Papers of Henry Clay, 3 vols. (Lexington, 1959), 5. (Hereafter cited as the Papers of Clay, I.) Clay's figures on the slave population of Kentucky were somewhat low. In 1800 the slave population was 40,343; see Ivan McDougle, "Slavery in Kentucky," The Journal of Negro History, III (July, 1918), 218.

37Hopkins and Hargreaves, eds., Papers of Clay, I, 6.

38Ibid.
of either an immediate or gradual nature. Clay responded for the antislavery forces to the Bryan's Station meeting. Once again the statement appeared in the Kentucky Gazette addressed to the "Citizens of Fayette." Much of the article contained pure political propaganda against the proslavery element, although Clay once again argued strongly for gradual emancipation. "There is a part of the people who are degraded below brutes. The justice which is due from us and the good state, require that we should emancipate their posterity ..." The specific effect of Clay's appeals is impossible to determine, but the May elections returned a larger majority for a convention than had the contest of the previous year. But it must be remembered that another year had brought further dissatisfaction with the Senate. All indications were favorable for reform in Kentucky in the spring of 1798. The proposal to hold a convention had passed by a three to one margin. More and more the people were

39 Ibid., 14n; Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 29.
41 Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 28. The vote was 8804 for a convention and 2709 against. The Fayette County vote was 1357 for, 622 against; see Mayo, Henry Clay, p. 69n. Joseph Howard Parks maintains that Clay was the primary force in developing the emancipation sentiment, but that the sentiment never became too great. However, Parks' views concerning Clay's influence and the amount of antislavery feeling that existed in 1798 are open to question. Nevertheless, it might be assumed that Clay's writings had a positive effect on the ultimate convention vote, since most slaveholders probably voted against a convention. See Parks, Felix Grundy: Champion of Democracy (Baton Rouge, 1940), p. 10, and Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 28.
turning their attention to the question of slavery. More and more the people were finding it difficult to reconcile the institution of slavery with the principles of liberty. However, events of the summer of 1798 dealt a great blow to emancipation. The interest in state reform was swept aside by the uproar over the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts by the Federalist-dominated Congress. The leading political figures of Kentucky, including Henry Clay, forgot about local problems and threw themselves into the fight against Federalist extremism. The eclipse of state issues created a need for strong leadership, and the people returned to those established leaders who were also closely associated with the proslavery element. Thus in January, 1799, the old leadership remained strong, and they were successful in electing a majority of candidates to the constitutional convention.42

The long-anticipated constitutional convention assembled in Frankfort on July 22, 1799. The extent of the antislavery strength at the convention was not sufficient for effective action even though Clay later claimed that a large minority sustained all emancipation proposals.43 He had hoped for either a constitutional provision for the ultimate extinction

42 Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 30. Ivan McDougle maintains that had it not been for the excitement generated by the Alien and Sedition Laws and the resulting Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, the emancipationists would have been successful; see McDougle, "Slavery in Kentucky," p. 313.

43 Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 32.
of slavery or at least a resolution that the future power to
grant emancipation be given to the legislature. This had
been done in Virginia, Clay had argued, and that state
legislature had not abused the power. 

But the emancipationists were left with nothing. All proposals and attempts
to change slavery in Kentucky had failed, and, the convention
left the constitutional protection of slavery intact. Clay
later claimed, as indications of some success, the inclusion
in the new constitution of certain clauses which gave the
legislature power to prevent the importation of slaves
into the state as merchandise and the power to pass laws
compelling humane treatment of slaves.

Clay's first venture into politics had been unsuccessful
to the extent that he did not accomplish his goal. But he
had learned that slavery was deeply rooted in the tradition
of Kentucky and the South. It could not be attacked lightly.
He always looked back on his actions during the constitutional
controversy with favor. In a speech delivered on December 17,
1829, at the anniversary of the Kentucky state colonization
society, Clay stated that "among the acts of my life, which
I look back to with the most satisfaction, is that of my
having cooperated, with other zealous and intelligent friends,

44 Hopkins and Hargreaves, eds., Papers of Clay, I, 6.
45 Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 31.
46 Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 21.
to procure the establishment of that system [gradual emancipation] in this state."^47 Clay's subsequent development as a slaveholder makes his actions of 1797-1799 somewhat difficult to comprehend, although he promoted the cause of gradual emancipation throughout his life.

In the following years the question of slavery and emancipation became less significant for Clay and Kentucky. Clay married Lucretia Hart in 1799 and concentrated on his law practice. In 1803 he entered politics on a full-time basis by successfully running for the state legislature. In 1807 he was appointed to the unexpired senatorial term of John Adair. It was during this appointed term that the issue of Slavery again involved Clay. Congress had to deal with the constitutional provision which provided for halting the importation of slaves. In a speech that John Quincy Adams, Senator from Massachusetts, recorded as "ardent," Clay addressed the Senate in favor of stopping the trade.^48 Congress approved the restriction of slave importation on March 2, 1807, and as Clay later pointed out, it was his "happy lot" to vote for the bill.^49

As the first decade of the nineteenth century ended, Clay's influence in national politics rose. In 1810 he


^49African Repository and Colonial Journal, VI (March, 1830), 5; (Hereafter cited as African Repository).
completed another unexpired senatorial term, and later that year was elected to the House of Representatives. The rising influence of the West and the growing Anglophobia aided his election to the position of Speaker of the House. He became the leading spokesman of the "War Hawks" when hostilities broke out with Great Britain, and President Madison appointed him to the peace commission at the conclusion of the fighting. Upon his return from the peace negotiations at Ghent, Clay returned to the House for his third term.

In 1818 Clay was beginning his fourth term as a United States Congressman. One of the first orders of business for the House of Representatives of the Fifteenth Congress was a bill attempting to strengthen existing fugitive slave statues.\(^50\) The introduction of this bill was indicative of the problems that were to prevail in American politics in the decades ahead. Northern interests attempted to alter the bill when Congressman Charles Rich of Vermont introduced an amendment aimed at protecting the "free people of color."\(^51\) Southerners responded that no such explicit protection was needed. Benjamin Adams of Massachusetts warned that the bill must be rejected because "the bill contained provisions dangerous to the liberty and safety of free [blacks] in other sections in the Union; and that, in securing the rights of

\(^{50}\)Annals of Congress, 15th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 819.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., p. 825.
one portion of the community, he could not consent to jeopardize those of another." The final outcome resulted in the passage of the bill without the amendment, and Clay found it necessary to address himself to the measure. However, unlike the Congressman from Massachusetts, Clay came to the conclusion that, although slavery contained many evils acknowledged by almost all citizens, the nature of slavery and the rights of slaveholders necessitated passage of the bill. Clay's position in the debate was consistent with his respect for established civil law. But the social views of Henry Clay, slaveholder, obviously had some influence on Henry Clay, politician.

Slavery had been the issue which presented the opportunity for Clay to enter politics and he had been forced to deal with it on two occasions in his first two decades of service in the federal government. In essence he was consistent in his approach, claiming dislike for the concept of human bondage and promoting the idea of gradual emancipation. However, the actions of Clay were less consistent than his words. He aided the growth of the slave system by buying and selling his own slaves and those of others. And once Clay had entered

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52 Ibid.; p. 837.

53 Ibid., p. 828. Clay may have concluded that slavery had many evils, but he was not above offering rewards for his own runaway slaves; see Washington Daily National Intelligencer, December 1, 1817; (Hereafter cited as National Intelligencer).

54 Hopkins and Hargreaves, eds., Papers of Clay, I, 558.
national politics he did not instigate any investigation or legislation that might aid in ending an institution which he considered a "curse." Possibly Clay was anticipating the potential explosiveness of the slave question. Nevertheless, in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the concept of gradual emancipation was Clay's answer to slavery, and he found a means of promoting this idea rather subtly in a formal organization.

55 *Niles' Register*, LI (September 3, 1836), 40.
CHAPTER II

CLAY AND THE COLONIZATION MOVEMENT

By 1800 many white Americans firmly believed that all blacks created a nuisance or even a menace to society. Both northern and southern leaders saw slavery as a national problem that required a solution. On the other hand, the growing numbers of free blacks created fears of insurrection in the minds of southern slaveholders and produced frustration and fear of competition among northern workers. One of the first results of this response was the emergence of a segregation policy toward the blacks similar to that applied to Indians. By 1816 there were suggestions of removing the free blacks to some place beyond the Rocky Mountains.¹

The idea of removing free blacks from society had first been proposed in 1714. In that year a resident of the colony of New Jersey had suggested that blacks be returned to their native Africa. During the colonial period many courts ordered the deportation of blacks convicted of crimes not punishable by death. After the Revolutionary War, when numerous northern states began to prohibit slavery, deportation came to be

regarded as the necessary aftermath of manumission. This was especially true after 1786 when the British established their freedman's colony of Sierra Leone in Africa.\(^2\)

Virginia took the lead in proposing that the removal of free blacks be an undertaking of the national government. During the first administration of President Thomas Jefferson, the governor of Virginia, James Monroe, at the request of the state legislature, wrote to Jefferson seeking a territory "for the colonization of the free people of color."\(^3\) Although the national government took no action on Virginia's proposal, Jefferson probably viewed it with favor, for in 1787 he had proposed a similar plan in his Notes on the State of Virginia. He had then argued that the free blacks must be removed "to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper" because they were, physically and morally different from whites. If blacks remained in America they would only suffer from the "deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites."\(^4\)

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\(^3\) African Repository, I (March, 1825), 1. The colonization concept had been growing in strength in Virginia for a decade. In 1790 Ferdinando Fairfax, one of the charter members of the American Colonization Society, first proposed that the Virginia legislature seek Congressional aid in colonizing free blacks and voluntarily freed slaves. See Sherwood, "Early Deportation Projects," p. 490.

Although concepts of removal and colonization were well-known in the early 1800's, there was no formal organization to propagate these ends. Antislavery groups existed, but they did not remove any freed slaves. It was not until a clergyman from New Jersey took note of the living conditions of free blacks in his state that a formal organization came into existence.

The Reverend Robert Finley was a man driven by a need for identification with a cause. In 1816, the year of the formation of the American Colonization Society, he confided to a friend: "when I considered what many others have effected for the benefit of their suffering fellow creatures at an earlier age than mine, I am humbled and mortified to think how little I have done."\(^5\) Finley found his cause in the free blacks, and with aid of Elias Caldwell, his brother-in-law and clerk of the Supreme Court, and Francis Scott Key, a District of Columbia lawyer, began to campaign for a colonization society which, they claimed, was a great national object "deserving of federal assistance."\(^6\)

A brief organizational meeting was held on December 16, 1818, in Washington, D.C. The only positive action taken

\(^5\)Quoted in Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, p. 17.
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 26; National Intelligencer, December 14, 1816; African Repository, (March, 1825), 1-2; Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, p. 24.
was a decision to meet again when more supporters could be present. The second meeting, held the following week, marked the formal birth of the colonization organization. The meeting was well attended, and delegates included many prominent citizens. Among those present at the meeting were Bushrod Washington, nephew of George Washington, John Randolph of Roanoke and Henry Clay, who had been asked to preside. Clay chaired an assembly of lawyers, politicians, clergymen, and businessmen, all concerned with finding a means of removing blacks from American society. They were willing to give what sounded like an impractical plan a fair trial and voted to establish a society that would assist the federal government in founding a colony for free blacks in Africa or any other suitable place. They met again on December 28, adopted a constitution, and formally assumed the title "American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color in the United States" (ACS). Among the thirteen vice-presidents of the society elected at the meeting was Henry Clay.

Fox, Colonization Society, p. 46. There seems to be some question as to whom was present at this meeting. Fox lists Clay, Randolph, and Washington among those attending. However, Staudenraus does not mention the meeting. Colton devotes considerable attention to the meeting of December 21, but fails to consider the earlier meeting. Van Deusen also overlooks the earlier meeting.


National Intelligencer, December 31, 1816. Although the society adopted the formal title of the "American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color," it was generally referred to as the American Colonization Society. The latter title will be used in this work.
The ACS was generally popular with whites in its early years. Most people looked upon it as a beneficent organization and a national undertaking. Its early growth was fostered by the acceptance of its goal by President James Monroe, who apportioned federal funds to the Society by a liberal interpretation of the Slave Trade Act of 1819. The goal of an African colony was realized in 1822 with the founding of Libera. In 1823 the Society was reorganized and instigated a drive to establish auxiliaries in every state. Within a year local chapters were begun in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, and Virginia. Five years later the ACS began to add female auxiliaries. Clay then gallantly thanked "our fair Country-women" who gave "their cheering countenance and encouragement to the movement."
The most prosperous and enterprising years of the Society followed the appointment of Ralph Gurley to the post of secretary upon the death of Elias Caldwell in January, 1825. Two months later appeared the first issue of the Society's official publication, The African Repository and Colonial Journal. Gurley undertook an extensive missionary campaign to acquaint all sections of the nation with the ACS and its goals. Within ten years the Society included seventeen state societies and more than 200 local auxiliaries. However, by 1840 the American Colonization Society had lost much of its early appeal because of the decided shift in the nature of the antislavery controversy and an internal change within the Society. Southern border state support dwindled as southern leaders strongly defended slavery from abolitionist attacks. Furthermore, leaders of the colonization movement were becoming more concerned with building a model republic in Africa than in colonizing blacks.

Throughout its existence the ACS faced a shortage of operating funds. Within a year of Liberia's founding, the Society faced bankruptcy. The chief source of income for the Society was always private donations, principally the annual July 4th collection. After a reorganization in 1823 and the appointment

14 Ibid., pp. 94-103, 149. Ralph Randolph Gurley was the son of a Connecticut Congregationalist minister. A quiet, efficient, romantic young man, he was devoted to the idea of colonization and served as the Society's New England agent before coming to Washington to work in the national office. Ibid., p. 78.

15 Fox, Colonization Society, p. 12.
of Gurley to the Secretary's post two years later, income rose somewhat, but it never approached what was needed to complete the goals that the founders had envisioned. During the 1820's income increased from a low of $800 in 1822 to a high of $20,000 in 1829. Even though Clay declared that the new prosperity meant that "The God of Heaven . . . is with us," by the early 1830's the Society was again operating at a deficit.

The Society's reliance on private donations was not by design. Finley had intended from the beginning to seek federal assistance, hence, his decision to locate the Society's headquarters in Washington, among the politicians. The first formal meeting had passed a resolution stating that the Society would cooperate with the national government. The delegates also decided to appoint a committee which would present a memorial to Congress requesting federal aid in securing territory and transporting colonists. The committee was formed a week later and included among its eight members Caldwell, Randolph, and Key.

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16 Niles' Register, LII (June 17, 1837), 242; Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, p. 68; Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment (New York, 1944), p. 478.

17 Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, p. 116; Fox, Colonization Society, p. 102.

18 Quoted in Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, p. 116.

19 National Intelligencer, December 24, 1816; Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, pp. 19, 76; Fox, Colonization Society, p. 46.

20 National Intelligencer, December 31, 1816.
the committee, headed by Randolph, presented its memorial seeking federal aid to Speaker of the House of Representatives Henry Clay.21

Within a year after formal organization of the ACS, Clay was working to promote federal aid. In a letter to President Monroe, he stated that "the object of this institution, indicated by name, is to promote the colonizing of the free people of color in the United States, with their consent, in Africa or wherever else the wisdom of the General Government may recommend."22 Clay also pointed out that America had much to gain from such a project, although there would be a considerable loss of population, for this loss would be absorbed by the arrival of Europeans who would be "more homogenous with the mass of the population." Furthermore, no one would disagree that the removal of the free blacks would result in a "general improvement in the morals of the country."23

Monroe responded favorably to the Society's proposal, and with passage of the Slave Trade Act of 1819, the federal government cooperated with the board of managers of the Society in selecting a site on the western coast of Africa

21Ibid., January 18, 1817.
23Clay to Monroe, September 22, 1817, Ibid., 382.
for relocating Africans captured from illegal slave traders.\textsuperscript{24} However, no further federal aid was forthcoming, even though more memorials, one of which was authored by Jefferson, were introduced.\textsuperscript{25}

During the years Clay served as Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams, 1825-1829, his efforts to secure federal funds for the ACS all but stopped. No longer a member of Congress, he was unable to influence legislation concerning any of the memorials sent to that body. In 1827 he addressed the Society's annual meeting and recommended that the ACS continue to seek both federal and state funds for carrying on its work, but he took no action to see that the Adams' administration would aid the program in Congress.\textsuperscript{26}

Clay began his most dynamic effort to procure federal aid for the Society in March, 1832. By now a United States Senator, he presented a memorial from the citizens of Kentucky requesting Congressional aid for colonization.\textsuperscript{27} A month after presenting the memorial, Clay introduced to the Senate a bill calling for the distribution of revenue from the sale of public lands among the states according to population. The

\textsuperscript{24}House Committee Report No. 283, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 2. Monroe's personal attitude toward the Society was extremely positive. He believed that colonization was a sound and simple means of ending slavery. See Ibid., p. 936.


\textsuperscript{26}Colton, ed., Works of Clay, V, 572.

\textsuperscript{27}Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 641-644.
funds were to be distributed for a five year period and were to be used by the states for either education, internal improvements, colonization of blacks, or the reduction of state debts.\textsuperscript{28}

Undoubtedly, Clay had many motives for introducing his distribution bill, the least of which was funding the Society. In the spring of 1832, the National Republicans had nominated Clay as their presidential candidate to oppose Jackson in the forthcoming election. Jackson had committed the Democratic Party to opposing (at least officially) federally-financed internal improvements in 1830 when he vetoed the Maysville Road Bill. However, Federal aid for internal improvements was an integral part of Clay's American System, and, thus, Clay believed that such an issue, along with the quarrel over rechartering the Bank of the United States, might consolidate East-West support and enable him to defeat Jackson.\textsuperscript{29}


\textsuperscript{29}For the distribution bill being a political issue in 1832 see Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years' View, I (New York, 1854), 282; Parks, Felix Grundy, p. 276; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 254; Clay to Francis Brooks, March 28, 1832, Colton, ed., Works of Clay, IV, 330-331. According to certain historians, Jackson's veto of the Maysville Road Bill was more an attack on Clay than on internal improvements. Jackson's principal objection to this particular bill was that it lay wholly within the state of Kentucky and could not, as his critics claimed, be considered an extension of the national road. See James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, III (New York, 1897), 1046. (Hereafter cited as Messages and Papers of the Presidents); Van Deusen, The Jacksonian Era (New York, 1959), pp. 51-52; George Rogers Taylor, The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860 (New York, 1968), p. 20.
The distribution bill produced considerable debate in the Senate, centering on the question of whether or not the government had the power to distribute funds for an undertaking such as colonization. Clay insisted that such a question was a moot point since the funds were to be given to the states, and they were to use the money in whatever manner they saw fit. Over the objections of some senators who attempted to have the purposes removed from the bill, the act passed the Senate in July and was sent to the House. In the House the land bill failed to pass before the end of the session, and, as soon as the second session of the twenty-second Congress began, Clay again introduced his bill to the Senate. Once again the bill passed the upper house and was sent to the lower house. That body amended the bill by taking away the specific designations for the use of the funds. The bill was returned to the Senate which concurred in the House action. However, Jackson pocket-vetoed the bill.

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31 Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., p. 1174.

32 Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 362-363; Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 1907-1911.

The action during the Congressional sessions of 1832-33 was the closest that the colonization movement came to receiving substantial federal aid. Clay reintroduced the land revenue bill in the twenty-third Congress, but once again it failed. On two more occasions he introduced the same concept in slightly different bills, but on both instances it was defeated.

There were a variety of reasons for the failure of the Society to achieve federal aid. Many Congressmen doubted the practicality of the colonization scheme. Furthermore, there was suspicion that the plan would eventually lead to the federal government subsidizing slave manumission. The growth of the abolitionist movement in the 1830's caused a general loss of strength for the movement, a condition which hurt it in Congress. But the strongest objection centered around the question of whether or not the federal government had the constitutional power to underwrite such a project. Probably federal funding to some degree would have been achieved if the constitutional objection could have been overcome.

During Clay's association with the colonization movement (from 1816 until his death in 1852), he was the Society's

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35Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 649-658, 707-708; Niles' Register, XLIX (November 7, 1835), 153.
36Fox, Colonization Society, pp. 86-88.
greatest political asset. This close affiliation with the colonization movement can be explained by a number of factors. The presence of the free blacks bothered him, and their removal would, he thought, improve the basic structure of American society. Also, Clay's political standing could not be hurt by the support of such a "moderate" organization. But above all, regardless of what he would say openly, Clay believed that the colonization movement would help bring an end to slavery and the presence of the black in the United States.

Clay's concern with the presence of the free blacks in the United States had been instrumental in overcoming his reluctance to accept an invitation to the organizational meeting of the ACS. However, from the first, Clay spoke of his concern over the free blacks. Addressing the meeting of December 21, 1816, he pointed out that free blacks were neither slaves nor were they genuinely free. They occupied a place that "partook in some degree of the qualities of both." It was obvious, he told the assemblage, that they could never be part of America and that colonization was truly a noble cause for "it proposes to rid our own country of a useless and pernicious, if not dangerous portion of its population, [and] contemplates the spreading of the arts

37Colton, ed., Works of Clay, V, 573; Niles' Register, LI (September 3, 1836), 40.

38National Intelligencer, December 24, 1816.
of civilized life . . . to a benighted quarter of the globe."  
Clay never changed his attitude substantially about the free blacks. Addressing the tenth annual meeting of the American Colonization Society in 1827, he told the delegates that "of all descriptions of our population, that of the free colored, taken in the aggregate, is the least prolific, because of the checks arising from vice and want."  
There was a "moral fitness" in returning to Africa "her children."  
Ten years later, upon the occasion of his first address to the ACS as its president, Clay still found the Society beneficial to the United States because it removed from her shores the "most corrupt, depraved, and abandoned" elements of the population.  

Clay's attitude toward blacks put him in full sympathy with the goals of the Society. He never admitted that the aims of the ACS were impractical as many critics claimed. As late as 1838 he maintained that more than a sufficient number of black immigrants were volunteering for colonization, and, if funds were available, the Society could do more.

39 Ibid.  
41 Ibid.; p. 581.  
On an earlier occasion, Clay had stated that the ACS had never imagined it to be practical to colonize every free black in the United States. This would not be necessary to accomplish the object of "domestic tranquility" and create a "homogenous people." According to Clay, whose logic on this point was extremely vague and ill-conceived, all that was necessary to accomplish these goals was to keep the African population stationary during a period when the white population was doubling.

Assuming the period of thirty-three and a third, or any other number of years, to be that in which our population will hereafter be doubled, if, during that whole term, the capital of the African stock could be kept down, or stationary, whilst that of European origin should be left to an unobstructed increase, the results at the end of the term, would be most propitious.\footnote{Colton, ed., Works of Clay, V, 576.}

He believed that the Society was accomplishing this goal.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 575-576.}

As Clay worked for the Society, he also let the Society work for him. After 1824 he was a frequent candidate for the presidency, and such a campaign demanded a broad base of support. The ACS helped in establishing such a base. Resolutions passed by state legislatures supporting the colonization movement came from the middle states, free and slave, with little support from New England and none from the deep South.\footnote{House Committee Report No. 283, 27th Cong., 3rd Sess., pp. 926-927; Fox, Colonization Movement, p. 49; Eaton, Growth of Southern Civilization, p. 94.} Furthermore, as the slavery question
became more agitated in the 1830's, the moderate and allegedly compromise position of the Society found ready acceptance with Clay.

By 1827 the Society's president, Benjamin Latrobe, was aware of Clay's use of the Society for political purposes. In that year Latrobe wrote Secretary Gurley that "Clay . . . has been helping himself to a ride on our shoulders--but as he has no doubt been of service to us I will not scrutinize too closely into his motives." At the same time many state's rights men in the South viewed the Society as an ally of the Adams-Clay machine, and, this undoubtedly hurt Adams in 1828, but not enough to have affected the outcome of that election. Between 1828 and 1832, the view was common in the northern and western states that the Society was part of the Clay machine. His consistent support of the Society brought it into any contest in which Clay was a leading personality. After 1832, Clay's persistent attempts at public land revenue distribution continued to relate the Society to politics.

One of the strangest facets of Clay's association with the Society was his conception of the relationship of the ACS to slavery and emancipation. He appears to have never satisfactorily arrived at a standard acceptable to himself.

47Quoted in Fox, Colonization Society, p. 83.

48Ibid., p. 84; Staudenraus, Colonization Movement, p. 174.
Clay made it clear at the December 16, 1816, meeting that he had attended only on condition that the Society not concern itself with emancipation or abolition in any form. At the annual meeting the following year, he forcefully stated that "it was proper again and again to repeat, that it was far from the intention of the Society to affect, in any manner, the tenure by which . . . " slave property was held.

He advocated this same position before Congress in arguing for his land bill in 1832. By 1836 he declared that not only did the Society leave slave property alone, but that it also aided slavery by rendering "the slave more docile, manageable and useful." The realization that Clay was connected with the Society was sufficient in many areas to assure citizens that it was not an antislavery movement.

Clay's public position on the relationship of the Society to slavery proved contradictory on more than one occasion. There is little doubt that both the Society and Clay believed that the movement could help bring about an end to slavery. From its inception the American Colonization Society worked to colonize free blacks and exert moral pressure in favor of emancipation. Furthermore, many early northern auxiliaries

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49 *National Intelligencer*, December 24, 1816.


52 *Niles' Register*, LI (September 3, 1836), 41.

53 Staudenraus, *Colonization Movement*, p. 139.
considered themselves basically antislavery, a vestige of early deportation attempts.\textsuperscript{54}

In his address to the Society in 1827 (the same year that the ACS began to concentrate on colonizing recently-emancipated slaves), Clay admitted that Society members entertained the hope that the states would adopt colonization with regard to slaves, and "thus ultimately rid themselves of a universally acknowledged curse."\textsuperscript{55} In the following years, Clay elaborated upon his views of why the Society was seeking to achieve voluntary emancipation: the removal of the free black would allow white labor to increase; the more that white labor increased in number, the cheaper it would become until it was cheaper than slave labor; this would cause the value of slaves to decline and, thus, more owners would emancipate their slaves for colonization.\textsuperscript{56} The Society might have nothing to do with a formal campaign against slavery, but Clay was certain that the time for general emancipation was imminent, and the ACS could provide the answer of what to do with the freed slaves.\textsuperscript{57} Clay had


\textsuperscript{55}Colton, ed., Works of Clay, V, 578; Fox, Colonization Society, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., p. 23; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 137.

\textsuperscript{57}Niles' Register, LI (September 3, 1836), 41.
firmly expressed his belief that slavery would eventually cease in 1827, when he proposed that those who wished to perpetuate slavery:

must go back to the era of our liberty and independence, and muzzle the cannon which thunders its annual joyous return... they must penetrate the human soul, and eradicate the light of reason and the love of liberty. Then, and not till then, when universal darkness and despair prevail, can you perpetuate slavery, and repress all sympathies, and all humane and benevolent efforts among freemen, in behalf of the unhappy portion of our [sic] race doomed to bondage.58

In September, 1836, at the twentieth annual meeting of the Soceity, Clay reviewed the two decades of its existence with pride. He believed that the ACS had succeeded in its goals and had been directed by "an over ruling Providence."59 Of course, the Society had not been as successful as he had imagined. And yet it had aided in achieving the emancipation of thousands of slaves and might have been more successful if it had not been for the rise of the abolitionist movement and the rapid expansion of slavery into the southwest.60 The basic concept of the Society had evolved over a period of a century and was, as Clay viewed it, a requirement of the times.61 Yet this basic concept contained racist attitudes and always remained deeply rooted in racism. It was a racism that could

59Niles' Register LI (September 3, 1836), 40.
60Fox, Colonization Society, p. 11.
61Ibid., p. 39.
find no place for the black in white society. Clay hoped that colonization would remove slavery, "the darkest spot in the map of our country," but unless emancipation were accompanied by some form of colonization, he would oppose it.

Clay belonged to the American Colonization Society for thirty-six years. He was the Society's greatest political asset. He was a frequent speaker at its anniversaries and always pushed the goals and ends of the Society. And yet he never emancipated one of his own slaves for colonization.

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64 William Goodell, Slavery and Antislavery; A History of the Great Struggle in Both Hemispheres; with a View of the Slavery Question in the United States (New York, 1852), p. 344.
CHAPTER III

THE RISE OF A NEW POLITICS

The year 1820 had a momentous impact upon the United States. Although the final disposition of the Missouri controversy came in 1821, politicians negotiated the first and most important compromise in 1820, and it was largely the work of Henry Clay. The Missouri Compromise ended eighteen months of Congressional debates over Missouri's application for statehood. The repercussions of the controversy were almost immeasurable. It was the first occasion for the growing forces of sectionalism to test their respective strengths. The threats and prophecies delivered on the floor of Congress foreshadowed the events of the decades ahead. Not since the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of a quarter-century before had the relationship between the federal and state governments been so severely tested. Senator Henry A. Wise of Virginia saw the year of 1820 as the beginning of sectional and racial warfare that ended in "secession and in sacrifice of civil liberty in men, and of sovereignty in States."\(^1\) Thomas Hart Benton, who was to represent the new state of Missouri in the United States Senate for three

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\(^1\) Henry A. Wise, *Seven Decades of the Union* (Philadelphia, 1881), p. 70.
decades, marked the year as the beginning of the slavery agitation which plagued domestic politics until the Civil War. And for Henry Clay the Missouri controversy injected the slavery issue irrevocably into national politics, the one place that Clay believed it did not belong.²

The Missouri territory had met the requirements for statehood, including minimum population, by 1816, and in the following year petitioned Congress for admission to the Union. The first session of the Fifteenth Congress failed to act on the petition, but, at the opening of the second session, Clay presented a similar petition dated November 21, 1818. On February 13, 1819, the House resolved into a Committee of the Whole to consider Missouri's request and a similar petition from the Alabama territory.³ On that day the controversy began. James Tallmadge, Representative from New York, moved to amend Missouri's request by restricting the growth of slavery with a gradual emancipation proposal. Representing northern free soil sentiment, Tallmadge proposed to prohibit the "further introduction of slavery or involuntary


³National Intelligencer, February 15, 1819; Moore, Missouri Controversy, pp. 33-35.
servitude" and to have all slave children freed upon reaching the age of twenty-five.  

In what resolved itself into a defense of states' rights, Henry Clay, the great nationalist, opposed the Tallmadge amendment because it interfered with the right of Missouri to determine whether slavery should exist within her borders. Furthermore, Clay called upon all to see that from a humanitarian standpoint blacks would be better off in Missouri if slavery were permitted there, for, under slavery, blacks would be "better fed, clothed and sheltered." John W. Taylor, Tallmadge's colleague from New York, attacked Clay as a friend of slavery. "True humanity," he charged, "disowns his invocation. The humanity to which he appeals is base coin." Clay may have thought that Missouri would be better off with slavery, but he was unable to prevent Tallmadge's amendment from passing the House.

The passage of the Missouri bill did not remove the slavery issue from the House. The southern part of Missouri territory (Arkansas) was seeking to establish itself as an

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4Annals of Congress, 15th Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 1166, 1170. The Tallmadge amendment was an obvious attempt to check the expansion of slavery. Without a staple crop economy, Missouri could never become an influential slave state and thereby threaten northern economic interests. The slave population was small (10,200 out of 66,586), and slaveholding was more indicative of a social position rather than an economic system. See Jonas Viles, "Missouri in 1820," Missouri Historical Review, XV (October, 1920), 37-40.

5Hopkins and Hargreaves, eds., Clay Papers, II, 670.

independent territory. Once again the slavery question entered into the debates as Taylor, following Tallmadge's lead, introduced an amendment to restrict slavery in the proposed Arkansas territory. Taylor's proposal met with initial success, but on February 19, pro-slavery forces introduced a motion calling for recommittal of the bill to a select committee in order to strike the slavery restrictions from the bill. The pro-slavery element mustered enough support to gain a tie vote on the recommittal proposal. Speaker of the House Henry Clay, who had made it clear that he opposed any attempts to restrict slavery in either Missouri or Arkansas, cast the tie-breaking vote for recommittal. Clay's action in the Arkansas debates went beyond states' rights. He attacked free soil interests as attempting to "coop up" the slaveholders and prevent the spread of their economic well-being. In contrast to his previous stand of promoting the gradual extinction of slavery, he had now voted for expansion of the institution.

Meanwhile the Senate had returned the original House Missouri bill with the antislavery amendment stricken from the bill. On two occasions the House refused to concur with


the Senate's action on the bill, leaving the territory without statehood as the Fifteenth Congress adjourned in March, 1819.⁹

Clay's position on the status of slavery in Missouri never changed. When the Missouri question reappeared in the Sixteenth Congress, he advocated the same position he had in the previous session. However, it was during the new Congress that Clay used his powers as Speaker to manipulate the bill that became known as the Missouri Compromise through the lower house.¹⁰ Although Congressman John Taylor and Senator Jesse B. Thomas of Illinois proposed the basis of the Compromise, Clay maneuvered the bill past southern opposition. Having already conceded that the territory north of 36° 30' be forever closed to slavery in exchange for slavery in Missouri, pro-slavery Congressmen led by John Randolph of Virginia, sought to have the bill recommitted in order to withdraw all slavery restrictions. Through parliamentary procedure Clay stalled Randolph until the Senate had received the Compromise Bill. Thus the first session of the Sixteenth Congress closed

⁹Moore, Missouri Controversy, p. 59.

¹⁰The Missouri Compromise of 1820 had three basic provisions: (1) the Senate withdrew its amendment to the Missouri Bill which allowed Missouri to form its constitution and state government without slavery restriction and prohibited slavery in the territory north and west of Missouri, (2) both the houses agreed to strike the slavery restriction clause from the House Missouri Bill, and (3) slavery would be forever prohibited north of 36° 30' in the Louisiana Purchase with the exception of Missouri, See Moore, Missouri Controversy, p. 100.
having granted Missouri the power to compose a state constitution and to form a state government.\textsuperscript{11}

In the months preceding the convening of the second session of Congress, northern sentiment began to rise against the Missouri Compromise. When Missouri submitted her proposed constitution to Congress, the gathering opposition threatened to nullify the work of the previous Congressional session and renew the sectional quarrels that, according to Clay, had found the "words civil war, and disunion," being uttered "almost without emotion."\textsuperscript{12} The Missouri constitution contained two provisions that the antislavery element found repugnant. Both were contained in Article Three, Section Twenty-Six. One clause prohibited the Missouri Legislature from passing a general law of emancipation. The other considered the most obnoxious by the antislavery forces, directed the state legislature to pass a law as soon as possible, "to prevent free negroes and mulattoes from coming to and settling, this state, under any pretext whatsoever."\textsuperscript{13} Such a stipulation was totally unacceptable to most northern Congressmen.

\textsuperscript{11}M. P. Follett, The Speaker of the House of Representatives (New York, 1896), pp. 73-74; Annals of Congress, 16th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 734-735, 841, 1173; Moore, Missouri Controversy, pp. 84-128; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, pp. 139-140.

\textsuperscript{12}Clay to Adam Beatty, June 22, 1820, Colton, ed., Works of Clay, IV, 61.

On December 12, 1820, the Senate passed a resolution accepting Missouri as a state, and national attention turned to the House, where antislavery sentiment was the strongest. Because of personal problems Clay had resigned the speakership and was absent from the House when the new controversy arose. Upon his return to Washington in January, he found the House deadlocked, and the Kentuckian quickly resumed the role of compromiser which he had assumed during the previous session. On January 29, under the prompting of Clay, the House took up the Senate resolution granting Missouri statehood. Clay favored the Senate resolution although there was a supposed contradiction in the Missouri constitution to the federal constitution. The House debate ended with the resolution being sent to a committee chaired by Clay, and, two weeks later, February 10, Clay reported the committee's findings. The stipulations by which Missouri was to render the Union "ought not to be disturbed." However, the provision in the constitution seeking to prevent "free negroes and mulattoes" from settling in the state, should be voided by an amendment to the Senate's resolution. According to this amendment Missouri would be admitted to the Union upon the "fundamental condition she shall never pass any law preventing any description of persons"

from entering and settling in the state "who now are, or hereafter may become, citizens of any of the states of this Union."  

Antislavery Congressmen would not support the Clay proposal. They believed that the amendment contained a toleration of slavery, and, above all else, it did not require that Missouri remove the offensive clause. Once again the House was deadlocked.

In the following days the House controversy subsided somewhat because of the need for Congress to make the official count of the electoral vote on February 14. When the House returned to its normal business, the deadlock remained. At this juncture Clay made another proposal. On February 22, he secured House approval for a committee of twenty-three to be appointed to confer with a Senate committee on the Missouri situation. The Kentuckian also succeeded in attaining his desired committee membership, thus assuring his influence over the committee.

15Ibid., pp. 27-28; National Intelligencer, February 12, 1821.

16Moore, Missouri Controversy, p. 148.

17The Missouri question even intruded upon the electoral vote count. The problem was over whether or not the Missouri electoral votes should be counted. The Clay-Barbour compromise which allowed for two returns, one with the Missouri vote, the other without, finally settled the issue. It was a meaningless compromise since the Missouri vote could not have affected the results of the election, as Monroe was unopposed for re-election. See Ibid., pp. 152-153.

18Hopkins and Hargreaves, eds., Clay Papers, III, 46-47; Moore, Missouri Controversy, pp. 154-155.
The committee report reflected Clay's thinking and contained the essence of the final compromise. Missouri was to be admitted on an equal basis with the original states upon the condition that it never pass a law infringing the rights of citizens of any other state and that the state by "solemn public act" agree to the conditions. By a margin of six votes, the House agreed to the committee recommendations, and the Missouri question was settled.

Although in the legislation concerning the admission of Missouri, the slave states had tacitly accepted Congressional control of slavery in the territories, the Missouri compromises had been victories for slavery, and Clay had played a key role in those victories. His actions during the Missouri debates were to haunt him in his later political career. They would be used by leaders in both the North and South to substantiate claims that he favored one section over the other. But in 1820 he had cooperated in a victory for the expansion of the peculiar institution, and William Plumer, the former governor of New Hampshire, predicted that the expansion would produce "a dismemberment of the states."

19 Hopkins and Hargreaves, eds., Clay Papers, III, 49.
20 Schurz, Clay, I, 194.
Yet the rights of slaveholders were not the only motives for Clay's actions. Undoubtedly he was deeply concerned with the peace of the Union. When the controversy was at its height, he expressed fear that within a few years the Union would be divided into sectional confederations. He believed that any successful attempt to prevent the extension of slavery into the territories would have serious political repercussions.22

The Missouri controversy had forced abandonment of Clay's desire to keep slavery out of politics. However, another development was also forcing slavery into politics. The growing antislavery ranks were consolidating and moving away from the aim of gradual emancipation and toward the goal of immediate abolition. In the years ahead those dedicated to the immediate end of slavery exerted their influence in every political decision that involved the peculiar institution.23

The emergence of abolitionist feelings with the Missouri controversy was the culmination of decades of growth. As early as 1775 an antislavery society existed in Pennsylvania. By 1792 the ideals of the American Revolution had fostered the growth of societies from Massachusetts to Virginia. In 1794 various abolition societies, mostly from southern states,


formed the "American Convention of Delegates from [sic] Abolition," and met annually to discuss and direct their program. This society changed its formal title in 1818 but was still conducting meetings for abolitionist ends. Soon after formation of the American Colonization Society, many northern auxiliaries began operation under the assumption that their primary goal was abolition not colonization.

Following the Missouri Compromise the abolitionist movement gained a momentum which continued until it emerged in a national organization in 1833. In December, 1833, at a meeting in Philadelphia, a number of concerned individuals formed the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS). The formation was partly the work of William Lloyd Garrison, who had been campaigning for abolition through the press for more than two years. Writing at first for other abolitionist editors, Garrison published the first edition of his own paper, The Liberator, on January 1, 1831, and dedicated it to the sole purpose of immediate freedom for slaves.24

The abolitionist program of Garrison and the AAS was different from earlier antislavery efforts. With few exceptions the abolitionists of the pre-Garrisonian era had confined their activities to religious organizations.

Openly militant, the new abolitionists directed the weight of their movement to influencing politics and politicians. However, the movement operated in a larger context. It was part of the reform fervor of the era. While abolitionists worked to end slavery, other reformers worked to improve education, the conditions of the insane and imprisoned, and curb the evils of "Demon Rum." But as the enthusiasm of the other reform movements subsided, that for abolitionism grew, aided by the thrust of religious fanaticism, until it consumed much of the dynamism of the other movements.

The first object of the new abolitionism was the destruction of the American Colonization Society. In articles that appeared in February and March of 1830, Garrison in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* launched an attack on the Society. Using an address of Henry Clay's before the ACS, Garrison denounced colonization, slaveholders, and racism. "I deny the postulate, that God has made, by an irreversible decree, or any inherent qualities, one portion of the human race superior to another," as many colonizationists had claimed. Slaveholders could not reason correctly about slavery; therefore, their alleged benevolence was a "bare


26Ibid., p. 7.
maintenance." The ACS was "overrated to a disastrous extent" and had not made "visible impression upon the growth of slavery." In 1832 Garrison renewed his attacks upon the ACS with the publication of Thoughts on African Colonization. This pamphlet contained quotations from leaders of the ACS, including Clay, which Garrison claimed proved that the Society was not really concerned with the welfare of blacks. Using Clay's statement that it would be better not to emancipate slaves if they could not be colonized, Garrison accused the Society of being friendly to slavery and apologizing for the institution and slaveholders. Again quoting Clay he concluded that the Society increased the value of slaves and, thus, aided the slaveholder and not the slave.

In the following months Garrison continued his attacks. He urged blacks to examine the ACS closely because it was not what it appeared to be. Furthermore, the Society was under the control of slaveholders, not one of which "had emancipated his slaves, and sent them to Liberia." Garrison's

27 Ibid., p. 8.
28 Ibid., p. 9.
30 The Liberator, March 2, 1833, April 6, 1833, October 19, 1833.
attacks brought the desired results. Late in 1832 a group of colonizationists at Western Reserve College wrote Secretary Robert Gurley that prior to Garrison's attacks the student body had supported the Society. Now the student body and faculty were split over the sincerity of the movement. In New York one of the most wealthy and influential ACS members, Lewis Tappan, resigned because of Garrison's writings.

Clay avoided the initial quarrels between the ACS and Garrison. However, after his election as president of the Society in 1836, he did try to soothe abolitionists attacks by placing the ACS in a more moderate position. Clay assured Society members and the nation that there was no connection between colonization and abolition. The two led in different directions. Whereas abolition was responsible for violence and mobs, the Society attacked no person or association. It did not align itself with those who thought slavery a blessing or a curse. The ACS did not agree with or wish to cooperate with the abolitionists because "it believes that the agitation of the question of abolition is unwise and unhappy, alike destructive to the harmony of the white and injurious to the cause of the blacks."

31 Fox, Colonization Society, p. 137.
33 Niles' Register, LI (September 3, 1836), 40-41; African Repository, XIV (January, 1838), 18.
Clay's first direct contact with the abolitionist movement had come in 1834. James G. Birney, a lifelong friend, sought his assistance for a new emancipationist program in Kentucky. Clay had been a frequent visitor to the Birney home for years, seeking friendship and political advice from Birney's father. On numerous occasions Birney had listened as his father and Clay discussed political issues. Birney became captivated by the Kentuckian's politics and worked in Clay's campaign in 1815 for the House of Representatives and in the presidential attempt of 1824. Like Clay, Birney had a deep dislike of slavery and followed his idol's lead. He joined the Colonization Society and the Gradual Emancipation Society of Kentucky. But abolitionist attacks upon the ACS forced a change in Birney's thinking. By 1834 he was ready to abandon colonization altogether, and, in a letter to the ACS in March, 1834, he rejected his election as a vice-president of the Society. "My opinions of colonization ... have undergone a change so great, as to make it imperative on me no longer to give to the enterprise that support and favor which are justly expected from all connected with it." In June, 1834, Birney took the final step toward abolition by freeing his

35Ibid., p. 29.
own slaves. Later that year in a letter to New York abolitionist, Gerrit Smith, he explained the transformation of his thought: "it is the total failure of gradualism to lay hold of men's consciences, that render it ineffectual for the extermination of Slavery."\(^{37}\)

Birney realized that any emancipation movement in Kentucky needed prominent leadership. Henry Clay could provide this need. On September 16, 1834, Birney visited at Ashland. Reminding Clay of his 1799 stand, he outlined his proposed strategy for accomplishing at this time what had failed then. Birney found Clay unreceptive to his proposal. Clay maintained that slavery in Kentucky was so weak at this time that it scarcely deserved attention as a "great evil." The greatest obstacle to emancipation in 1799 had been man's interests in property rights. In 1834 this would be an even greater barrier to emancipation. But the real fear that Clay expressed concerning the emancipation movement and his support of it would be the damage done to his political career. Robert Breckenridge and John Green, two promising Kentucky politicians, had destroyed their "political usefulness" by advocating emancipation. Disillusioned, Birney left Ashland with "the

\(^{37}\)Birney to Gerrit Smith, November 14, 1834; Dwight L. Dumond, ed., Letters of James Gillespie Birney (New York, 1938), I, 148; (Hereafter cited as Birney Letters). In the same letter Birney accused the colonization movement of doing more than anything else to "rock the conscience of the slaveholder into slumber, and to make this slumber soft and peaceful."
impression . . . that Mr. C [sic] had no conscience about
the matter, and therefore, that he would swim with the
popular current."38

Birney was not ready to accept total disillusionment
about Clay. He continued to hope that Clay would have a
reversal of attitude. Within the next few years this final
hope vanished. In an 1836 address to the Colonization Society,
Clay attacked the growth of abolitionism and abolitionist
espousal of racial equality. The abolitionists were
responsible for the violence and disorder that were rife
in some sections of the country. No one who loved the Union
could be part of such a movement.39 Birney's response to
Clay was vehement. He wrote to Lewis Tappan that "in my
paper of next week, I shall take notice of Mr. Clay's Con'l
[sic] Speech. Friend as I have been of him, I am more the
friend of liberty and righteousness. I shall deal with him
according to the truth, and this not very tenderly. Slavery
will rob him of the fame . . . that he has acquired as a
friend of liberty."40

Politically, the final break between Clay and Birney
came in 1838. Emancipationists had stirred enough interest
in Kentucky to cause talk of a new constitutional convention

38 Ibid., p. 135; Fladeland, Birney, pp. 93-95.

39 National Intelligencer, September 10, 1836.

40 Birney to Tappan, January 7, 1836, Dumond, ed., Birney
Letters, I, 297.
to discuss the possibility of emancipation. Conservative interests were able to defeat the move, and the convention never met. Birney wrote to Clay expressing his regrets that the convention movement had been defeated and that Clay had not publicly supported it. Clay's response contained both condolences and chastisement, but it was also an attempt to save a friendship. Clay attempted to explain that he had never been for abolition. What he had proposed in 1799 was a plan for gradual emancipation, similar to that of Pennsylvania, which would have freed all slaves at age twenty-eight. He still favored such a plan in areas where blacks would not outnumber whites. Furthermore, his lack of support did not defeat the emancipation campaign in Kentucky. Recent abolitionist agitation in the North had prevented development of sufficient support in Kentucky for a convention. Clay was sure that the cause of gradual emancipation was "thrown back fifty years."41

Kentucky was not the only place that Clay was forced to deal with the growing abolition movement in the 1830's. By 1835 abolitionism appeared in Congress in the form of anti-slavery literature and petitions. Soon after the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Association, its directors began a gigantic propaganda campaign to arouse national emotions against the evils of slavery. Publication and distribution

of periodicals grew from a modest number in 1834 until it reached over a million in circulation by 1836. A major portion of the literature attacked slavery as an evil that deprived the slave of liberty and opportunity and declared slavery to be a moral wrong that was contrary to the Bible and the spirit of Christianity. This literature also attacked the slaveholder. The man who held other humans in bondage was a "chain-forging Christian" whose heart was "cankered, festered and pestilent." Among the southern slaveholders who fell into this category were Senators Thomas Hart Benton, George McDuffie, and Henry Clay, and President Andrew Jackson.

The major portion of the antislavery literature was intended for distribution in southern states and many of those states began to respond with legal measures against the "vile literature." In South Carolina it became a crime punishable by a year's imprisonment and a $1000 fine to be caught with abolitionist literature. Blacks, free or slave, caught with this material could be sentenced to death. Other measures taken against the abolitionist literature included grand jury indictments for inciting riots against individuals who had never been in the South and attempted boycotts of northern goods in an effort to have northern


43Ibid., pp. 375-76.
states punish the publishers of the material. None of the measures taken slowed the flow of literature to the South.

The influx of periodicals and pamphlets eventually led to trouble. In August, 1835, the Charleston (South Carolina) *Patriot* called the publications a "monstrous abuse of the public mails" and demanded action by the government or anyone else to stop the "moral poison" which permeated the publications. The citizens of Charleston took action by seizing a recent shipment of publications from the post office and burning them.

Alfred Huger, Charleston postmaster, sought the advice of Postmaster General Amos Kendall. In order to avoid further trouble, Kendall advised Huger to hold in the post office all such pieces of literature until proven subscribers claimed them. Meanwhile Kendall persuaded President Jackson to seek Congressional legislation to stop the literature. In Jackson's seventh annual address in December, 1835, he called the legislators' attention "to the painful excitement produced in the South by attempting to circulate through the mails inflammatory appeals addressed to the passions of the

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45*Niles' Register*, XLVIII (August 8, 1835), 402.

slaves." He hoped that Congress would take action to curb the "interference with the constitutional rights of the South."48

In the Senate the President's suggestion was sent to a select committee. On February 4, 1836, John C. Calhoun, South Carolina's great defender of slavery, reported the committee's findings. The committee proposed a bill to prohibit postmasters in any state, territory, or district that outlawed antislavery literature from "receiving or transmitting through the mails" such literature.50 The constitutionality of the proposed bill was questioned immediately, but Calhoun believed that the bill was constitutional and pointed to an analogy with the Sedition Act of 1798. The Sedition Act had been intended to prevent the rise of circumstances which could lead to rebellion against the United States government. The postal bill would do the same for the states by allowing them to protect themselves against material that was intended "to excite rebellion or insurrection." Furthermore, the power of determining which

47 Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, III, 1394.

48 Ibid.

49 John C. Calhoun had successfully lobbied for the proposal to be sent to a select committee and bypass the Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads because it was dominated by Senators from states in which abolitionist sentiment was strong. See Wiltse, Calhoun: Nullifier, p. 274.

50 Register of Debates, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 383; Niles' Register, XLIX (February 6, 1836), 391.
publications were excitable "falls to the States," for if Congress "had such power it would also have the power to abolish slavery."\(^51\)

Clay could not agree with Calhoun and was instrumental in defeating his proposal. Addressing the Senate at length, Clay maintained that the bill was "totally unnecessary and uncalled for by public sentiment." The problem could only be handled satisfactorily on the state level. The passage of Calhoun's bill would in essence be passing a federal law in order to carry into effect state policy. Furthermore, the Jackson-Calhoun proposal was clearly unconstitutional because Congress could not pass a law interfering with the mails. "It is too often in the condemnations of a particular evil," the Kentuckian pointed out, "that we urged on to measures of dangerous tendency."\(^52\) Clay and seven other southern Senators voted against the postal bill, and it failed to pass.\(^53\)

Clay had defended the right of abolitionists to publish and mail antislavery literature. He did not agree with their actions, but to allow the national government to interfere with the mails would be a greater evil than allowing the mailing of material that many slaveholders believed to be dangerous to slavery. In defending the mails from punitive

\(^{51}\)Ibid., p. 409.

\(^{52}\)Register of Debates, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., pp. 1728-1729.

\(^{53}\)Ibid., p. 1737; Schurz, Clay, II, 86.
legislation, Clay did not anticipate what was to follow. Abolition had been recognized and debated on the floor of Congress and further action was now inevitable. Immediately, Clay found himself caught in another debate centering around the abolitionists. And once again he found himself defending the rights of those whom he believed to be meddling with a southern institution and forcing the question of slavery into politics.54

As the mails controversy came to a conclusion, the abolitionists, led by the poet John Greenleaf Whittier and by Theodore Weld, one of the earliest and most dedicated abolitionists, renewed their petition campaign to Congress for the end of slavery in the District of Columbia. Abolitionists had first petitioned Congress for this action in 1828. In the intervening years the number of petitions increased, and, with the renewed concentration in 1836, the petitions became so numerous that to debate all of them would have consumed all of Congress' time.55

Led by Calhoun, southern Senators responded angrily. Receiving the petition would be a wedge that would allow the eventual attack upon slavery in the southern states. Calhoun urged the Senate not to receive the petitions. However, Thomas Hart Benton, also speaking for slave interests, argued

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54 Register of Debates, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 779.
55 Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, p. 508.
that the abolitionist's petition "could best be silenced
by a treatment of studied neglect."  

Clay agreed with both Senators to a degree, but his
thinking went deeper on the issue, and he found himself
in a dilemma. He held to the position that slavery should
be kept from the realm of political action, but he was also
convinced that a failure to receive these petitions "would
be a violation of the right of petition as secured by the
constitution."  

The dilemma continued to grow. Clay
believed that slavery in the states was outside the juris-
diction of the Congress, but these memorials dealt with
an institution in the nation's capital which was directly
controlled by Congress, and, on the basis of the Missouri
settlement, Clay was forced to admit that in federally
controlled areas Congress could and should control slavery.

In 1836 Clay could only hope to postpone the final
solution. He advocated rejection of those petitions relating
to abolition in the District of Columbia on three grounds:
they had not come from residents of Washington, D.C.; the
states of Virginia and Maryland, both of which tolerated

56 Benton, Thirty Years View, I, 576-580; Elbert H. Smith,
"Thomas Hart Benton: Southern Realist," American Historical
Review, LXIII (July, 1953), 797; Henry Cabot Lodge, Daniel
Webster (Boston, 1885), p. 311; Charles G. Sellers, James

57 Register of Debates, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 779.

58 Ibid., pp. 779-780; Eaton, Clay, p. 127.
slavery and had donated the land for the District of Columbia, would be adversely affected if Congress received the petitions; the acceptance of these petitions would "spread alarm" among those states which tolerated slavery and "disturb the harmony between them and other members of the confederacy."^59

Within the next two years, it became obvious that the final solution could no longer be postponed. In December, 1837, Garrett D. Wall, Democratic Senator from New Jersey, presented a petition from 115 ladies of that state, asking for the immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. In a passionate appeal regarding the new petition, Clay expressed grave concern over the growing strength and influence of the abolitionists. It was evident that through their work, the issue of slavery in the nation's capital was "extending itself in the public mind." There was no doubt that more people were becoming concerned with slavery. However, the Kentuckian was unwilling to believe that all those who signed the petitions were strict abolitionists. Many did not intend the abolition of slavery at all. Rather they wished to test the right of petition. The abolitionists had mobilized this concern to bolster their own ends. They had to be separated from the other petitioners so that fanaticism would not overcome reason. The fanatics had to be exposed "to the overwhelming force of the united opinion of all who

desire the peace, the harmony, and the union of the confederacy." The Senate must act to quiet the public mind and reverse the growing strength and agitation of the abolitionists. If they were allowed to continue on their present course, there was danger that slaveholders might be excluded from holding federal office, something Clay understandably feared. Success in that respect would only lead to numerous other "encroachments" by them.

Clay believed at this time that the best manner of weakening the abolitionists would be to receive the petitions and refer them to the Committee for the District of Columbia which could then recommend action regarding the petitions. Clay personally advised that the committee suggest that in the future such petitions be received and laid on the table. Once again the Kentuckian attempted to settle an explosive issue with a compromise measure. The petitions would be received, but nothing would be done about them.

Abolitionist intrusion into politics had placed Clay in an awkward position. He had been forced to defend the constitutional rights of those who in his eyes espoused "fanaticism" and possible destruction of the Union. He was even accused of being sympathetic to them because of his defense.

61 Ibid., Appendix, p. 57.
62 Eaton, Clay, p. 129.
of their rights.\footnote{\textit{Niles' Register}, L (April 16, 1836), 117; Schurz, Clay, II, 155. In a letter to Willie P. Mangum, Senator from North Carolina, Clay referred to the attempts to link him with the abolitionists as being the work of the "Calhoun School." Clay to Mangum, May 13, 1838; Henry Thomas Shanks, ed., \textit{The Papers of Willie Person Mangum} (Raleigh, 1952), II, 526. On the occasion of Clay's later attack upon the abolitionists, Calhoun congratulated Clay on his "conversion." See Wiltse, Calhoun: \textit{Nullifier}, p. 397.} But in 1836 the free discussion of the slavery issue was more important than fear of being associated with the movement that was forcing that discussion. By late 1837 Clay's thinking was beginning to change about the extent to which abolitionist rights should be defended. He was becoming convinced that the activities of antislavery movement had become so dangerous to the peace of the Union that they must be stopped. Clay believed that an attack upon these fanatics might slow their momentum, but it would also reassure his supporters, both northern and southern, that he was not a member of the movement. As the presidential election year of 1840 approached, such reassurance was necessary.

In February, 1839, Clay presented a petition from a District of Columbia resident opposing the abolition of slavery there.\footnote{\textit{Congressional Globe}, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., p. 355. It became common knowledge in Washington that Clay was the actual author of the petition. See Filler, \textit{Crusade Against Slavery}, p. 150.} Clay was not satisfied with a mere presentation of the petition. He launched a vehement attack upon the abolitionists. He denounced them as reckless and unreasonable. Destroying the power of government and the
rights of property meant nothing to them. They were, embarked on a destructive course which would bring "civil war, a dissolution of the Union and the overthrow of a government in which was concentrated the fondest hopes of the civilized world."66 They had allowed singleness of purpose to rule their ways and abandoned "the instruments of reason and persuasion."67

By his attack upon the abolitionists with its indirect defense of slavery, the Kentuckian recognized the "bearing of the slavery question upon the presidential election of the following year."68 The speech aided the Great Compromiser in the South, but it offended many influential politicians in key northern states whose support was instrumental in enabling Clay to secure the Whig nomination for 1840.69

67 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

ABOLITIONISM AND THE PRESIDENCY

No other politician of his day ran as frequently for the Presidency of the United States as did Henry Clay. One of the most popular politicians of the nineteenth century, the Great Compromiser built his presidential aspirations on positions of moderation. On three occasions political coalitions supported him for the high office. Two other times he narrowly missed being chosen as a candidate. A strong nationalist and experienced politician, few men have been better qualified to be President than Henry Clay, but the office he so ardently sought was never to be his. It is impossible to point to a single factor as being the cause of his defeat in the numerous presidential attempts he made. However on two occasions in which his chances of winning the coveted office appeared to be the most favorable, 1840 and 1844, the Kentuckian's position on slavery severely hurt him and played a decisive role in his failure to receive the nomination in 1840 and his defeat in the election of 1844. In the crucial days and months prior to the Whig nominating convention in 1840 and the general election in 1844,
antislavery forces eroded Clay's support in key northern states and assured his defeat.

Clay and the Whigs looked forward to the election of 1840. The Democratic administration of Martin Van Buren, Jackson's chosen heir, had lost support with a wide basis of the populace. Van Buren's Independent Treasury Plan had alienated the business interest, and the depression of 1837 had weakened urban and agricultural support. The Whigs believed that their chances of winning their first national election were excellent and Henry Clay, chief spokesman of the party, emerged as the leading candidate.

Clay's popularity had grown steadily in all sections of the country since his disastrous defeat of 1832. In the South his mellowed attitude on a protective tariff and a national bank, which he no longer espoused unless the people favored it, had overcome much of the distrust of the earlier years and campaigns. By 1838 prominent southern Whigs including Henry A. Wise of Virginia, Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee, and Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina, were willing to accept Clay as the standard bearer in 1840.

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3 Ibid., pp. 118-119.

Among the southern states only Georgia, where Clay was unpopular because of the Missouri Compromise, offered organized resistance to his nomination. 5

The border states also gave his candidacy strong support. Missouri, Maryland, and of course Kentucky were solid Clay states. 6 In the northwest and northeast there was support, although his position there was not as favorable as in the South or the border states. Whig leaders in the important states of Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York viewed Clay as a potentially poor presidential nominee. 7

Common to the Whig leaders of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York was their desire to have a candidate who could attract the vote of the masses, principally the farm-labor vote. They were unsure of Clay's ability to do this. 8 However, leaders in each state had particular reasons for wishing to reject Clay. In Pennsylvania the Whig Party was in danger of splitting over Clay's nomination because a sizable minority of Antimasons (part of the Whig coalition) would have no part of a Clay nomination. Whig leaders

Paul Murray, The Whig Party in Georgia, 1825-1853 (Chapel Hill, 1948), p. 89; Alexander H. Stephens, Whig representative from Georgia and the future vice president of the Confederacy, referred to Clay at this time as "a traitor to our cause." Ibid.


Ibid.
believed that if Pennsylvania were to be carried, the party must present a united front to the Democrats. Thus they were forced to turn to a compromise candidate, and their support went to William Henry Harrison, the hero of Tippecanoe.  

The Antimasonry issue also hurt Clay in New York, and the Kentuckian's attack upon abolitionism made Whig leaders there and in Ohio reappraise Clay as a candidate.

By 1839 abolitionism had made little impact upon Ohio politics. But Joshua R. Giddings, Whig Congressman from Ohio's Sixteenth District, had run a large part of his 1838 campaign on the antislavery issue. Giddings, who represented three counties in the Western Reserve, had made it known that he believed that slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C., were illegal and disgraceful. He came to Congress in 1838 with great respect and admiration for Henry Clay. The great Whig leader embodied the political principles to which Giddings subscribed, and, when Clay delivered his attack on abolitionism in 1839, it stunned Giddings. The Ohioan knew that the attack "would disappoint the expectations of the people" he represented. He attempted to get Clay to renounce his attack, but was in turn attacked by Clay's

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supporters for challenging the Whig leader. Giddings surmised that his only course of action was to withdraw his support of Clay. An antislavery stand was one of the few issues that could make Clay more appealing to Ohioans than William Henry Harrison.\(^{12}\)

Clay's attacks upon abolitionism had much greater impact upon Whigs in New York. As early as 1832 Clay's popularity with anti-Jackson forces in the Empire State had begun to lose ground to the Antimasons, and by 1836 Antimasons combined with abolitionists to oppose Clay.\(^{13}\) In that year Thurlow Weed, mastermind of the Whig Party in New York, failed to give full support to Clay for the presidential nomination because of the growth of these two anti-Clay factions in the northern and western part of the state.\(^{14}\) In 1838 Clay supporters, principally from New York City, favored William Henry Seward for the gubernatorial nomination over Francis Granger, fearing that Granger's nomination would lead to an abolitionist-Antimasonic delegation to the Whig national

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\(^{12}\)Julian, Giddings, pp. 66-67; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 318.


convention, slated for the following year. Taking this into consideration, Clay's February, 1839, speech must have been based on advice that antislavery strength was not as great in New York as anticipated and that Clay could carry the state without it.

In an effort to bolster sagging support and mend political fences, Clay undertook a campaign trip to New York in the summer of 1839. He received a warm and enthusiastic welcome. He believed that the response was indicative of great support, but Governor Seward disagreed. The growing antislavery sentiment was also anti-Clay, and without this faction the Kentuckian could not win the state in the general election. Clay dismissed the warning, claiming that during the trip many abolitionists had told him that they still preferred him. If, in truth, this support did exist, Clay destroyed it in August. He had received a letter from a number of Nansemond County, Virginia, Whigs thanking him for his stand against the "full demon of abolition." In a public reply, Clay said that he "recognized that the arrival of political abolition if successful would cause the Union to be convulsed throughout, and finally broken into fragments."

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16Nevins, ed., Hone Diary, I, 415-16; Julian, Giddings, p. 65.
17Van Deusen, Seward, p. 61; Gunderson, Campaign, p. 46.
18National Intelligencer, August 14, 1839.
Congress had no authority to act against slavery. "Slaves were recognized as property" and as such must be protected.\textsuperscript{19} Abolitionists concluded that property rights were more important to Clay than human rights.

Clay's anti-abolition speech convinced Weed that Clay could not possibly carry New York state, where many of the western and northern leaders had converted to abolitionism.\textsuperscript{20} Whig failure to carry the Empire State could give the election to the Democrats. Weed journeyed to Saratoga to visit Clay, who had stopped there during his campaign trip. Weed attempted to convince Clay that a Masonic slaveholder would not fare well in New York. Clay did not agree. He thought that their "apprehensions in other respects [antimasonic and anti-slavery resentment] would disappear when the national convention would have placed its ticket in the field."\textsuperscript{21}

Clay was unwilling to withdraw because of Weed's prompting, but he made it known that he would withdraw in favor of party harmony and success.\textsuperscript{22} By November, 1839, a month prior to the convention, pressure was building from many sides that he withdraw in favor of William Henry Harrison or General Winfield Scott, the latter being favored by both

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20}Gunderson, \textit{Campaign}, p. 39.
\textsuperscript{21}Weed, \textit{Autobiography}, I, 480-481.
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{National Intelligencer}, July 26, 1839.
Weed and Seward. Still Clay refused to withdraw. The "people" would make the decision at the national convention to be held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in December, 1839.

At the convention Clay led on the first ballot, but his plurality in voting came from states which the Whigs could not carry in the national election, and slowly his support waned as both Harrison and Scott gained momentum. On the third day of balloting, the shift of votes in the New York, Michigan, Vermont, and Illinois delegations gave the nomination to Harrison.

Clay supporters were furious. Clay had lost through the "basest double-dealing and treachery," and the Whigs had not even nominated one of their own but a "State-Rights Democratic [sic] of the Jeffersonian school." Extremely disappointed, Clay lashed out in a caustic attack upon his supporters. "My friends are not worth and powder and shot it would take to kill them. If there were two Henry Clays one of them would make the other President of the United States." He was convinced that no other man in the course of American politics had been as unfortunate. "Always run by my friends when sure to be defeated, and now betrayed for

23 Niles' Register, LVII (December 14, 1839), 250-251; Van Deusen, Seward, p. 61.
25 National Intelligencer, December 13, 1839.
a nomination when I, or anyone, would be sure of an election."27
Loyal to the Whig Party, Clay recovered from the remorse of his defeat and announced his support for the Harrison-Tyler ticket and worked hard to assure its success.28

Many factors had combined to deprive Clay of the nomination. He had failed in two previous elections and thus carried the stigma of a loser. His general unattractiveness to the common voter also hurt him. Petty jealousies within the Whig Party cut potential support.29 And in New York, a pivotal state, antislavery forces had eroded traditional support. The abolitionists heralded the defeat of Clay as a victory. Gamaliel Bailey, abolitionist leader in Ohio, wrote Birney in February, 1840, that "General Harrison was selected in preference to Henry Clay, for this, among other reasons, that he was less offensive to Abolitionists."30
The abolitionists had achieved a great victory. Harrison knew that his election was dependent upon the free states where a large portion of support would come from the antislavery element. As Bailey wrote to Birney, "If elected he [Harrison] will know that one reason was that Abolitionists gave him countenance," and he must be receptive to their

27 Wise, Seven Decades, p. 172.
28 Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 334.
29 Wise, Seven Decades, pp. 165-166.
desires. Lewis Tappan wrote to his English friend, Joseph Sturge, that it was no secret that "Clay's defeat was owing chiefly to the increase of abolitionists in this [New York] and other states, who would not vote for him. It is a most righteous blow after his pro-slavery speech in the Senate . . . last year." Politicians other than abolitionists attributed Clay's defeat to that group. James Buchanan was sure that Clay "was sacrificed by the Whigs, to propitiate the Anti-masons and Abolitionists. He was too proud and too honest to declare himself an Antimason, and his speech against abolition in the session of 1838-39, utterly destroyed him with that fanatical party." Philip Hone, New York financier and Whig leader, was disgusted that the tribute due Clay had been withheld because of "an apprehension that opposition of the abolitionists in Western States, and in large portions of the State of New York, would destroy his chance of success, and that General Harrison, being the favorite of the Whigs of the 'free states' would run better."

Although the abolitionist took credit for Clay's defeat and other elements were willing to credit them with the feat,

31 Ibid.


34 Nevins, ed., Hone Diary, I, 438.
whatever part they had played in the Kentuckian's demise had been achieved without benefit of a forceful political organization. But the groundwork had been laid in 1840 for a formidable third party effort in 1844.  

The American Anti-Slavery Society had from its beginning shunned the idea of direct political action. The Society attempted to revolutionize the civil and social conscience of America through a program of moral agitation. This revolution would be accomplished by moral reformers who would act as pressure groups on politicians to force them to recognize and act on the antislavery demands of the people. By 1839 the solidarity of the AAS on the political issue as well as on other issues had begun to crumble. The Garrisonians, and the Tappanites (followers of Lewis and Authur Tappan) were splitting over the issues of women voting in the Society and the place of religion within the movement. Garrison favored the women's role but no longer believed in the need for the religious element in the Society. To the evangelical Lewis Tappan, who opposed Garrison on both issues, the Boston editor and his followers were bordering on the infidel. As for the political approach,

35Birney, the Liberty Party candidate in 1840, received about 7000 votes. See Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 336.

36Wyatt-Brown, Tappan, pp. 269-270.

37Ibid., pp. 190-193.
a third faction, led by Gerrit Smith and John Greenleaf Whittier, was ready to abandon the role of moral persuaders and enter the political arena. 38 Smith believed that the notion of moral suasion had not met with enough success to warrant its continuance. If the antislavery movement was going to make the desired impact, it would be necessary to change plans and attempt direct political influence. At approximately the same time, James G. Birney came to the same conclusion. 39

The first time that political action was suggested for the AAS was at the annual meeting in May, 1837. Whittier presented two resolutions on the subject. The Society rejected direct action but did sustain a Garrisonian motion that members not support any candidate who did not stand for the right of petition and the abolition of slavery in the nations' capital. 40 The following year the executive committee of the AAS reported that there was a need for a statement on political action to unify the antislavery movement. Finally, in 1839 at the executive committee meeting, the Society took the final steps toward political organization. A national antislavery convention was called to meet in Albany, New York, in July. 41

39 Ibid.; Fladeland, Birney, p. 175.
40 Harlow, Smith, p. 138.
41 Ibid.
On July 31, 1839, the Albany convention assembled with 500 delegates in attendance. The delegates agreed to support only those candidates who favored immediate abolition. Although the general tenor of the meeting was unfavorable to an independent political movement, the decision to support only pro-abolition candidates for national and state offices was a decisive step because it virtually eliminated every Whig and Democratic contender and left the way open for independent nominations. This was Birney's goal. He had long since concluded that men opposed to slavery would not vote for a pro-slavery man if there were available an antislavery man of equal stature. For this reason should a third party movement develop, the selection of a candidate would be a crucial decision. Thomas Morris, Democratic Senator from Ohio, and ex-president John Quincy Adams, now a Congressman from Massachusetts, had both distinguished themselves to abolitionists during the petitions quarrel and would make acceptable candidates. However, as the election drew near, it was obvious that neither would accept a third party endorsement.42

In November, 1839, a small abolitionist meeting at Warsaw, New York, attempted to force the issue of independent nominations. Birney and Francis J. LeMoyne of Pennsylvania received nominations, but both refused them when it became

42Fladeland, Birney, pp. 176-181; Harlow, Smith, pp. 145-146.
apparent that the action was premature and would be divisive.43 There is little question that the movement for independent nominations was "making havoc" for the Society. Both Lewis Tappan and Garrison were in strong opposition, however Birney privately believed that most of the agitation would subside if the Society could find a "known politician" to support.44

In spite of the opposition of the Tappanites and the Garrisonians, Smith and his followers called for a new nominating convention to meet at Albany on April 1, 1840. Delegates from six northeastern states met and adopted the formal title of the Liberty Party. Unable to find the "known politician," the convention renominated Birney and selected Thomas Earle of Pennsylvania as his running mate.45 Birney and the Liberty Party received approximately 7000 votes in the election, principally in New York and Massachusetts. It was an insignificant showing in comparison with what was to come.46

43Gamaliel Bailey to Birney, November 28, 1839; Francis J. LeMoyne to Birney, December 10, 1839; Birney to Myron Holley, Joshua H. Darling, and Josiah Andrews, December 17, 1839, Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, I, 508-516. /
46Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 336.
The emergence of political abolitionism hurt Clay in 1840. The failure of the New York delegation at the nominating convention to support him could be directly attributed to the abolitionist and Antimasonic influence in the state. Clay's shrewdness as a politician must have led him to conclude that these were two forces, especially antislavery, that he would have to deal with again. In previous political situations the Great Compromiser had worked to moderate his position to gain support. However, with reference to the abolitionists he did not seek to gain their support, but, rather, in the years following his 1840 defeat, he continued to attack them.

In 1842 Clay received a letter from an abolitionist asking for his opinion regarding the movement. In response Clay wrote that he considered "the movement of the Abolitionists as altogether unauthorized and most unfortunate."47 Their agitation in the free states had done only harm, and while the majority of abolitionists were sincere, their leaders were merely using them to gain public office. Abolition was a delusion that could not last. "In pursuit of a principle ... it undertakes to tread down and trample in the dust all opposing principles, however sacred." Clay closed the letter with a plea that the abolitionists should cease agitating a question that "divides, distracts, and

inflames the community; which tends to array man against man, State against State, and section against section, and threatens . . . the dissolution of the union of these States."  

An opportunity for a conciliatory gesture toward the abolitionists came later in 1842. On a speaking tour in Indiana, Clay was addressing a large crowd at Richmond, when a Quaker abolitionist named Mendenhall approached him. The Quaker presented him with a petition praying for the release of Clay's slaves. Mendenhall's petition stated that according to the Declaration of Independence, Clay held his slaves illegally.\(^{49}\) The Kentuckian's response at first was calm. He reasserted his position that gradual emancipation with colonization was the only possible solution to the slavery question. Furthermore, his slaves were well cared for and most would not accept freedom if it were offered to them. As Clay continued his response, he became more angry until he attacked the abolitionists for their destructive ways which would bring violence and race conflict. Abolitionists did not understand the nature of the Union. Clay declared,  

\[\text{I know well, that you and those who think with you,}
\text{controvert the legitimacy of slavery, and deny the right of property in slaves. But the law of my state and other states has otherwise ordained. The law}
\text{may be wrong in your opinion, and ought to be repealed;}
\text{but then you and your associates are not the law-
makers for us, and unless you can show some authority}\]

\(^{48}\text{Ibid., p. 466.}\)

\(^{49}\text{National Intelligencer, October 29, 1842.}\)
to nullify our laws, we must be excused for asserting the rights which sanctions, authorizes, and vindicates. Clay concluded the speech by telling Mendenhall to go home and mind his own affairs.

As the election year of 1844 approached all indications were that Clay's chances were sound for the nomination and the election. President John Tyler had lost support over his vetoes of Whig economic legislation including two bank bills and a tariff bill, and it was obvious that he would not be nominated by the Whigs. Clay's strength had risen. He had resigned from the Senate in 1842 and gone into "retirement" in order to facilitate his political maneuvering for the nomination. By that year he controlled the Whig Party, as is indicated by his securing the resignation of all Whigs from Tyler's cabinet, with the exception of his old rival, Secretary of State Daniel Webster. In the South

50Mallory, ed., Clay Speeches, II, 596.
51Ibid., p. 600.
52Peter B. Porter to Clay, October 11, 1843, Colton, ed., Works of Clay, IV, 478.
53Roseboom, Presidential Elections, p. 124. Tyler never had wide support in the Whig Party. He had been a member of the Democratic Party but resigned over a quarrel with Jackson. Still a states' rights southerner, he was an attractive candidate for the Whigs in order to balance the 1840 ticket with Harrison and appease the Clay faction of the party. See Carolyn L. Karrer, "John Tyler and the Whig Legislation of the Twenty-Seventh Congress," unpublished Master's thesis, Department of History, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, 1967, pp. 9-10.
Clay had gained strength. New England supported him. In the middle states Clay's strength was above that of the probable Democratic candidate, Martin Van Buren. The only questionable states were Ohio and New York, where abolitionism had made significant gains since 1840. Nine-tenths of the abolitionists in those two states were old Whigs and still hostile to Clay. Clay did not wish to underestimate their strength in this race. They had to be discredited. In September, 1843, he wrote to his friend and future biographer, Calvin Colton, urging him to prepare a paper that would expose and debase the movement. He suggested that Colton's paper indicate that abolitionist agitation of the slave question in the free states could only lead to discord and eventual disunion. This in turn would lead to perpetual warfare, extinction of the black race, and ultimately, despotism.

Not all of Clay's political cohorts agreed with his abolitionist strategy. John Davis, Whig leader in Massachusetts, wrote Clay the following month urging that he simply ignore the abolitionists. Davis was sure that the public had settled on Clay as the best candidate for president, and this was enough. The abolitionists were already committed to leaving

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the Whig Party. The best way to avoid any problems with them which could cause Clay "some peril" was to let them alone.\footnote{Davis to Clay, October 14, 1843, Ibid., p. 480.}

Davis was correct in asserting that the abolitionists were " disinclined to all connection with the Whigs," and Clay in particular. Ohio abolitionist leader and former law partner of Giddings, Benjamin Wade, disliked Clay and had called Clay's 1842 attack upon the abolitionists an "unpardonable sin against the North."\footnote{Stewart, Giddings, p. 94.} Birney was convinced that Clay's election, which seemed likely, would be a setback to the antislavery movement, even though some antislavery people believed that the Whigs would not nominate Clay.\footnote{Birney to the Liberty Party, January 20, 1845; Joseph P. Gazzan to Birney, February 7, 1843, Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, 11, 899-902, 712; Theodore Clarke Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest (New York, 1967), pp. 71-72.}

Prospects for political success for the Liberty Party were better now than in 1840. Lewis Tappan had brought his following into the party, and Thomas Morris of Ohio, whom Birney had sought for the 1840 nomination, had also joined the movement.\footnote{Wyatt-Brown, Tappan, p. 271; Roseboom, Presidential Elections, p. 131.} Although there was opposition to Birney's heading the ticket, principally from Tappan and Salmon P. Chase, a rising Ohio political figure, political action stood a good chance of consolidating the faction-ridden
abolitionist movement. In August, 1843, at a convention in Buffalo, New York, the Liberty Party again nominated Birney for president and selected Thomas Morris as its vice-presidential candidate.

If the aging Clay had had his own way, the Liberty Party with its implications of the slavery issue would not have been in the campaign of 1844. But he would have preferred to run a low-keyed race against Martin Van Buren with the major issues involving domestic matters. The only goal that Clay achieved was his own nomination. The Democrats turned from Van Buren and nominated James K. Polk, a Jackson protege from Tennessee.

The major issue of the 1844 campaign became expansion. The Democrats rallied to the cries of "54° 40' or fight" and "Tyler and Texas," demanding the "reoccupation" of Oregon and the "reannexation" of Texas. For Clay and the Whigs, who queried "Who is James K. Polk?," the crucial issue was Texas because of its implications regarding the expansion of slavery. A significant number of Whigs had become committed to opposing the expansion of slavery, and Clay had to hold their votes in order to win the election.

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The Texas issue had first appeared in 1836 when Texas secured its independence from Mexico and applied for annexation to the Union. The application set off a fury of protest from northern antislavery interests, which was countered by southern demands led by John C. Calhoun. Clay argued that the combination of annexation and slavery was unfortunate and that the two issues had to remain separate in order to deal with them in their proper perspective. To deny annexation at that time solely because of the possibility of slavery expanding into the area would be to deny the rights of states as guaranteed under the Constitution.61

The question of Texas changed significantly between 1836 and 1844. Eight years had created a more favorable expansionist attitude in the country. Tyler had attempted to force an annexation bill through Congress within a year of succeeding Harrison. In 1844 there was also the interests of England in the Texas Republic that had to be considered. As Clay made a political swing through the South in the early spring of 1844, he became aware of the growing annexationist desires. Although he believed that a minority of the populace entertained these aspirations, he realized that a large number of votes could be gathered if he could convince

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southerners that his stand on the Texas issue would do them justice.62

The day after Clay completed his southern journey, he arrived in Washington from Raleigh, North Carolina. Immediately he issued a letter to the *National Intelligencer* expressing his views on the Texas question. Known as the "Raleigh Letter," Clay stated that he was unwilling to involve the country in a "foreign war" for the object of acquiring Texas. There were a number of political leaders who wanted Texas only to gain the balance of political power in the Congress, but such action "would menace the existence, if it did not certainly sow the seed of dissolution, of the Union."63 With a large and respectable portion of the country opposed to annexation, Clay concluded that "annexation of Texas, at this time," would do harm to the Union.64

The Raleigh letter temporarily appeared to aid Clay's position. The Whig convention on May 1, 1844, overwhelmingly nominated him. Joshua Giddings and other antislavery Whigs returned to him rather than go over to the Liberty Party.65 Clay believed that his stand was the correct move made at

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63 *National Intelligencer*, April 17, 1844.
64 Ibid.
precisely the right time. He wrote to Thurlow Weed that he was convinced that his Texas stand would do him no harm with southern voters. When Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, a pillar of the Democratic Party, advocated approximately the same position on Texas as Clay, it appeared that Clay had beaten the Democrats to their own platform.

Other forces were working for Clay's success. Former President John Quincy Adams, while not publicly advocating the Kentuckian's election, privately favored him as did his son Charles Francis Adams. Clay's old rival, Daniel Webster, was working hard in New England trying to persuade antislavery voters that a vote for Birney would in effect be a vote for Polk and thus insure annexation. Even in New York Seward, who four years earlier had opposed Clay, was working among the abolitionists to achieve the elder statesman's election.

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66 Clay to Weed, May 6, 1844, Weed, Autobiography, II, 120.


69 Claude Moore Fuess, Daniel Webster (Boston, 1930), II, 146.

Not all antislavery men in the North were willing to accept Clay's position of the Raleigh Letter at face value. Lewis Tappan, in a letter to an English friend, John Scoble, pointed out that although Clay professed to oppose annexation, there was little doubt that the man "who carried through Missouri compromises by which slavery was extended," would also lead the annexation of Texas if it were politically expedient. In the South Clay's favorable position of early summer was slipping. Southern democrats accused Clay of courting the abolitionists and sacrificing Texas to them. Clay vigorously denied the charges, maintaining that "no man in the United States has been half so much abused by them as I have been."

Despite the denials the attacks began to weaken Clay's strength in the South. Furthermore, the Democratic nomination of Polk and his subsequent pro-annexation stand was creating unrest in the ranks of Southern Whigs. In an effort to offset the increasing popularity of Polk and a possible desertion by the southern wing of the party, Clay attempted to modify his position on Texas. In a letter to the editor of The North Alabamian on July 1, 1844, the Great Compromiser

72 Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 371.
73 Clay to Stephan H. Miller, July 1, 1844, Colton, ed., Works of Clay, IV, 490.
stated that he would "have no objection to the annexation of Texas; but I certainly would be unwilling to see the existing Union dissolved or jeopardized [sic] for the sake of acquiring Texas." A second letter followed on July 27. He could not help but believe that the annexation of Texas, "at this time," would be a black mark on the national honor, involve the country in war, and threaten the existence of the Union. Unable to leave the issue alone, on September 23, Clay sent a third letter, this one to the National Intelligencer, defending his previous positions.

The "Alabama Letters" proved disastrous to Clay's campaign. Prior to their issuance he had not seriously offended the antislavery Whigs, and there was some hope that he might get a degree of abolitionist support. But the letters gave evidence that he might be hedging on his anti-annexation stand and be willing to change it. The possibility of any antislavery support now seemed remote. Giddings wrote Clay that the letters had produced an unfavorable reaction with the Ohio electorate. Tappan picked the

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74 As cited in the National Intelligencer, August 8, 1844.
75 As cited in Niles' Register, LXVI (August 31, 1844), 439.
76 As cited in the New York Tribune, July 3, 1845; Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 375.
77 Greeley, Recollections, p. 166; Julian, Giddings, p. 158; Fladeland, Birney, p. 234.
the letters apart, discerning that Clay, "this wary politician, this great compromiser, no where asserts that he is opposed to the annexation of Texas." The letters gave enough indication that Clay, once elected, might concede to the slave interests as he had done in the Missouri controversy. Birney's campaign document, Headlands in the Life of Henry Clay, which summarized Clay's past services to the slave powers, gave further credence to Clay's fickleness. Clay had endeavored to straddle both sides of the issue. In an attempt to retain southern support, he alienated many northern voters and lost his last chance for antislavery votes.

Issues other than Texas and slavery confronted the candidates of 1844. The tariff issue was still important, and, in the crucial state of Pennsylvania, Democrats were able to convince many protectionists that Polk was as strong a tariff advocate as Clay. Native Americanism, an anti-foreign, anti-Catholic movement, was also important. Both major candidates wanted their vote but not their open support. Clay's running mate, Theodore Frelinghuysen, who had been connected with the movement in New Jersey, gained


79 During the campaign Birney denied any personal animosity toward Clay. He opposed Clay's election as he did Polk's. Neither candidate, he believed, was committed to the "paramount object of the Union, the perpetuation of liberty for all." See Fladeland, Birney, p. 244.
some votes for the ticket in this respect, but he also cost the Whigs Irish-Catholic votes in Pennsylvania and New York. But the main issue of the campaign for the Liberty Party and the major portion of the country was expansion and slavery, and ultimately, this decided the outcome of the election in favor of James K. Polk.

In retrospect probably Clay's chances for victory were never as bright as they seemed. John J. Crittenden, a political confidant of Clay's for years, believed from the beginning of the race that Polk's nomination presented the Whigs a "great battle to fight." A shrewd analyst of southern and southwestern sentiment, Crittenden had opposed Clay's Raleigh Letter, sensing better than Clay the deep pro-annexation spirit in those regions.

With the exception of the upper slave states of North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware, Polk carried the South. In the northwest where Clay surprisingly carried Ohio, the other expansionist-minded states voted for Texas, Oregon, and Polk. In the northeast the Whigs

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80 Roseboom, Presidential Elections, p. 132; Clay also lost Irish Catholic votes in Pennsylvania because of a report circulated that he had proclaimed that "there can be no peace until Catholics are exterminated from this country." See Mueller, The Whig Party in Pennsylvania, p. 111.


82 Van Deusen, Life of Clay, pp. 365-367.

83 Roseboom, Presidential Elections, p. 133.
ran strongest with two exceptions, but those two exceptions were decisive. The Democrats carried Pennsylvania and New York by slim margins and with these two key states won the election.

The campaign had been waged in Pennsylvania primarily on the tariff, and the Democrats were able to convince the protectionist-minded Pennsylvanians that Polk, who had never been for more than incidental tariff protection, was as strong a protectionist as Clay. The failure of the tariff issue to carry Clay to victory was enough to combine with the rural and Antimasonic vote to place the state in Polk's column. Many problems worked to discredit Clay in New York, not the least of which were the "Alabama Letters." Horace Greeley believed that Clay would have carried the state if he had only stayed with his position of the Raleigh Letter. The Whigs tried to offset Birney's use of the Alabama Letters by attacking him personally. But in early September Weed was pessimistic of Clay's chances in the Empire State. By October Seward was convinced that New

85 Greeley, Recollections, p. 166. Greeley believed that the nomination of Silas Wright for governor also hurt Clay because it united the Democrats against Clay rather than for Polk. Many voters supported Polk simply because they were Democrats. See Ibid., p. 161.
York was lost, despite the revelation in that month that Birney had accepted a Democratic nomination for the Michigan legislature. Birney denied charges of a Liberty-Democratic bargain to defeat Clay. He had been forced to accept the Democratic nomination because of local politics. The charges of a Liberty-Democratic coalition were heightened by the appearance immediately prior to the election of a forged letter, known as the Garland forgery, in which Birney supposedly gave his word that, if elected to the Michigan legislature, he would not agitate the slavery question. The letter hurt Birney's standing, but he was still strong enough in New York to play a decisive role. Birney received 15,812 votes in New York, and Clay lost the state by 5,106 votes. Most Liberty Party votes had come from ex-Whigs who had converted to abolitionism. The New York Tribune reported that in four years since the 1840 elections, the Whigs had lost more than 19,000 votes in the state. Without the opposition of the Liberty Party, Clay would probably have carried the state.

As in 1840 Clay's supporters were convinced that his defeat was primarily the work of abolitionists. Horace Greeley attributed the Kentuckian's loss to this alienation.

87 Ibid., p. 376; Roseboom, Presidential Elections, pp. 131-132.
88 Schurz, Clay, II, 430.
of the antislavery voters through his annexation stand.90 Philip Hone wrote Clay that "the slaveholders of the South and the Abolitionists of the North have gone against us."91 Frelinghuysen attempted to console Clay by writing that "the alliance of the foreign born [Irish Catholic] and the most impractical of all organizations, the Abolitionists, have defeated the strongest national vote ever given to a Presidential candidate."92 Both Millard Fillmore, defeated Whig candidate for governor of New York, and Ambrose Spencer, a staunch Clay supporter in New York since 1832, conveyed the same sentiments.93

As a result of the election the Whigs and Clay bitterly attacked the abolitionists. The Whigs cried that the abolitionists deserved to be damned as a group of fanatics.94 Clay launched such a bitter, personal attack upon them that it brought a rebuke from his nephew, Cassius M. Clay, who was himself an abolitionist but had campaigned for his uncle in the presidential race. The younger Clay wrote to his uncle that whatever the results of the abolitionist actions had been, Henry Clay should be the last man to complain,

90Greeley, Recollections, p. 165.
91Nevins, ed., Hone Diary, II, 719.
92Colton, ed., Works of Clay, IV, 495.
93Ibid., pp. 497, 501.
94Julian, Recollections, pp. 42-43.
"for, if I remember aright, you said that the abolitionists should be set apart from, and denounced by all parties; so they but played the role you marked out for them."^{95}

In New York the issue of the election had been expansion. The loss of the Empire State could be directly attributed to the antislavery vote, and probably the determining factor in that vote had been the Alabama Letters. But there is strong evidence that in the final analysis, the letters made no difference to the outcome of the election. If the antislavery vote had cost Clay New York and possibly Michigan, the state in which Birney was now residing, the letters probably helped Clay carry Tennessee and Kentucky. The winning of New York and Michigan with the loss of Tennessee and Kentucky would still have elected Polk.^{96}

The Texas issue damned the Great Compromiser. He could not have both votes. His position had been too ambiguous for either the antislavery voter or the expansionist. The antislavery voter could cast his ballot for Birney and be positive that he was opposing annexation in doing so. The expansionist could cast his vote for Polk, whom he knew strongly favored annexation. Clay assumed the middle ground, but the middle ground did not have enough votes in 1844 to elect him president.

^{95}Cassius Marcellus Clay, *The Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay* (Cincinnati, 1886), II, 103-104.

CHAPTER V

THE UNSETTLED ISSUE

The presidential campaign of 1844 was the culmination of Clay's political career, and his defeat had come as a devastating blow. Returning to retirement at Ashland, the Kentuckian surveyed the national political scene and found slavery to be the dominant issue. Polk's victory had assured the course of expansion and the extension of slavery, and it was simply a matter of time before the antislavery forces would mount an attack against such a course. Already manifestations of the quarrel were present in the Methodist Church. Although Clay was not a member of the church, a church member, Dr. W. A. Booth, sought his opinions on the impending controversy. Clay wrote to Booth in April, 1845, that it was with "deepest regret" that he had heard "of the danger of a division of the Church in consequence of a difference of opinion existing on the delicate and unhappy subject of slavery."

Not only would such action be bad for the Methodist Church, but it would also have deplorable political tendencies. It had been a long time since he had heard of anything which bothered him as much as this. Clay to Booth, April 7, 1845, Colton, ed., Works of Clay, IV, 525.
a possible separation of the Church "by a line throwing all the Free States on one side, and all the Slave States on the other." ² He did not wish to claim that a division of the church would cause "a dissolution of the political union of these States," but such action would be an example "fraught with imminent danger." ³ The church did not split at this time, and Clay's influence was partly responsible in preventing such action, but William Lloyd Garrison, who became one of Clay's most bitter critics in the Kentuckian's final years, commented on Clay's role in the dispute as unimaginable. "Only think of the advice of a politician like Henry Clay, being sought by the Church of Christ for its guidance in the path of duty." ⁴

Clay was too active a politician to remain in retirement and, when hostilities broke out with Mexico in 1846 over a boundary dispute with Texas, the Great Compromiser once again entered the political picture. Addressing a gathering at Lexington, Kentucky, he denounced President Polk as being responsible for the hostilities. Clay, who opposed the war, called for a Congressional investigation to determine the objects of the war and, if Polk refused to conform to

²Ibid.
³Ibid.
⁴The Liberator, May 16, 1845; Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 81.
Congressional demands, Congress should take whatever steps were necessary to end the fighting.\(^5\) Clay actually did oppose the war, but he was also attempting to provide an issue for the Whigs in the 1848 presidential campaign with himself as the candidate.\(^6\) The Kentuckian, who always had some support, would have loved to have received the nomination again, but his age (seventy-two), and his three previous unsuccessful attempts were two obstacles that were impossible to overcome.

However, there was another problem that stirred Clay from retirement, and it was directly related to slavery.\(^7\) By the summer of 1846, it became apparent that a victory over Mexico could bring significant territorial acquisitions. Free soil interest immediately anticipated the further expansion and growth of slavery, and, when Polk requested appropriations for negotiations with Mexico concerning possible territorial adjustments, the free soilers in the House of Representatives attempted to amend the appropriations bill. Introduced by David Wilmot, Democratic Representative from Pennsylvania, the amendment, which became known as the Wilmot Proviso, excluded slavery from any territory granted by Mexico to United States as a result of a treaty concluded

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\(^5\)John D.P. Fuller, *The Movement for the Acquisition of All Mexico, 1846-1848*, (Baltimore, 1936), pp. 89-81.

\(^6\)Ibid.

\(^7\)Charles Buxton Going, *David Wilmot: Free Soiler* (New York, 1924), 387.
with money from the appropriation bill. Although the amendment never passed the Senate, the debates and quarrels which surrounded it were indicative of what Clay had feared and had predicted in his 1844 campaign. The annexation of Texas, which had occurred in 1845, had already led to war, and now the possible extension of slavery was causing problems that threatened to "menace the existence . . . of the Union." The Kentuckian desired to lead the nation at this time of crisis, but the Whig party rejected his nomination at the 1848 convention and turned to General Zachary Taylor, popular hero of the Mexican War. Once again Clay was denied the nomination he so strongly desired, but as a loyal Whig he gave his support to Taylor, and in the following year he returned to the Senate to serve the administration and the nation.

The Great Compromiser served three and a half years in the Senate before his death in June, 1852. During most of that time he suffered from poor health but forced himself to attend the Senate sessions. In his final years the issue of slavery continued to press upon him. In his native Kentucky another emancipationist movement was underway, and Clay gave it his support. Garrison, the ever-present critic, thought

\[8\] Van Deusen, Life of Clay, p. 387.
\[9\] National Intelligencer, April 17, 1844.
\[10\] Martin, Anti-Slavery Movement, pp. 126-131.
Clay's letter supporting the project was sincere but contained nothing new.\footnote{The Liberator, May 4, 1849.}

In the Senate the status of slavery in the territories acquired from Mexico as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was the major issue of the session. However, the issue of slavery in the new territories was compounded by new northern demands for abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia and southern demands for a stronger fugitive slave law. Added to these issues was California's application for admission to the Union as a free state which would give the free states the balance of power in the Senate. The quarrels and hatreds that had inflamed the debates of thirty years before over the admission of Missouri were again present in Congress. Once again Clay assumed the role of Compromiser and was instrumental in gaining a settlement. On January 29, 1850, amid demands of both northern and southern leaders, Clay proposed what he hoped would be an acceptable compromise to both sides. A week later in a passionate speech that lasted nearly three hours, Clay appealed to the Senators to adjust their demands for the sake of the Union. Clay's suggestions eventually served as the basis of the Compromise of 1850. The most important elements of the final disposition were: California was admitted as a free state; New Mexico and Utah Territories
were organized without restriction of slavery; the slave trade was abolished in the District of Columbia; and a stronger fugitive slave act was incorporated. Although the final compromise was the culmination of months of work by many men, Henry Clay was foremost among them.\textsuperscript{12}

Clay's actions were attacked by antislavery leaders. Lewis Tappan accused him of "giving the South almost all she claimed."\textsuperscript{13} Garrison once again lambasted the Kentuckian, this time calling him "the great Satanic Compromiser."\textsuperscript{14} Garrison continued his attack on Clay, whom he had once admired, and in February, 1851, when Clay called for severe penalties against those who aided fugitive slaves, Garrison commented:

\begin{quote}
Henry Clay--with one foot in the grave, and just ready to have both body and soul cast into hell--as if eager to make his damnation doubly sure,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12}Van Deusen, \textit{Life of Clay}, pp. 398-413; \textit{Congressional Globe}, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., p. 244. The essence of Clay's thought on how a compromise was possible can be found in the \textit{Congressional Globe}, 31st Cong., 1st Sess., Appendix pp. 115-127. An interesting aspect of the final disposition of the slavery controversy in 1850 deals with the realtions between President Taylor and Clay. Taylor opposed Clay's actions and, if it had not been for Taylor's death in July, 1850, there was a strong possibility of a rift within the Whig ranks similar to the debacle of 1841. After Taylor's death Millard Fillmore, who succeeded Taylor, reorganized the cabinet with the advice of Clay in order to aid passage of the compromise. See Van Deusen, \textit{Life of Clay}, p. 409; Oscar Sherwin, \textit{Prophet of Liberty: The Life and Time of Wendell Phillips} (New York, 1958), p. 222.

\textsuperscript{13}Tappan to Scoble, April 24, 1850, Abel and Klingberg, eds., "Tappan Papers," p. 428.

\textsuperscript{14}Walter M. Merrill, \textit{Against Wind and Tide}, p. 255.
rises in the U.S. Senate and proposes an inquiry into the expediency of passing yet another law, by which every one who shall dare peep or mutter against the execution of the Fugitive Slave Bill shall have his life crushed out.  

The attack upon Clay by antislavery leaders continued and, at the time of his death, Boston clergyman Wendell Phillip stated that "there went up nothing but gratitude to God when it pleased Him to call that great sinner from this world--we cannot find it in our hearts, we could not shape our lips to ask men to do him honor."  

It was somewhat ironic that Henry Clay, who maintained throughout his lifetime that he hated the institution of slavery, should have alienated the antislavery movement. But it was also obvious that Clay's hatred of slavery, although sincere, was merely an intellectual exercise, and, being a southern Senator and plantation owner, he accepted it as a practical economic system and used it on his own plantation throughout his lifetime. He confided this view to the transcendentalist writer James Freeman Clarke in 1837 when he stated that he had hoped to see an end to slavery.  

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15 Quoted in Ralph Korngold, Two Friends of Man: The Story of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips and Their Relationship with Abraham Lincoln (Boston, 1950), pp. 218-219. Wendell Phillips had also been an admirer of Clay, but by the time of the Compromise of 1850, he could find "little good in a man who built his whole career on compromise, and he dismissed Clay as 'beyond redemption.'" See Irving H. Bartlett, Wendell Phillips: Brahmin Radical (Boston, 1961), p. 139.  

16 Quoted in Korngold, Two Friends, p. 183.
but cotton had become so profitable that the southern states would not give it up.17

Political expediency also prohibited Clay from taking a stand against slavery. In a union that protected slavery by its constitution and found approximately half of its states tolerating the peculiar institution, there was no advantage to a candidate for national office to alienate a large section of support by attacking its economic system. As Clay had told Birney in 1834, to take a stand would damage his political career.18 Thus Clay could claim that the Constitution and the law protected slavery, and he was powerless to act.19 On one occasion he had even tried to avoid the political question of slavery by blaming Great Britain for the presence of the institution in the United States.20

To criticize Clay's political stand on slavery on the basis of being motivated solely by a concern for his own career would fail to take into account his great love for the Union. To a great degree his campaign statement of 1844 revealed much of his motivation. In concluding the first of


20African Repository, VI (March, 1830), 5.
the "Alabama Letters," Clay stated: "If anyone desire to know the leading and paramount object of my public life, the preservation of the Union will furnish him the key." In light of this statement, the Great Compromiser's actions concerning the Missouri controversy, the petitions question, and the Compromise of 1850, are more readily understandable. But another factor must be taken into consideration. Clay was too wise a politician to think that his compromises were the ultimate solution to the slavery question unless he had convinced himself that both pro-slavery and antislavery men were willing to sacrifice their interests and convictions. Such disillusionment seems improbable, although Clay had a great facility for convincing himself that his desires and views were the same as the great majority of the people. If Clay had a failing in this devotion to the Union, it was his reluctance to face the explosive slave question squarely and push for an ultimate solution. Possibly no such answer existed in 1820 or even in 1850, but the Kentuckian appears to have never gone beyond his desire to please both sides in the quarrel.

Clay's love for the Union explains his attitude toward the abolitionists. In 1839 he had proclaimed in the Senate that they were fanatics bent on a destructive course that would

21 Niles' Register, LXVI (August 3, 1844), 372.
bring an end to the Union. Again in 1842 he had attacked them as being disrespectful of the law and doing only harm.  

There was no doubt that Clay firmly believed that they were a direct threat to the continuance of the Union. However, Clay probably never fully understood the abolitionist, for to a man who had built his whole public life on the spirit of compromise, a movement without a middle ground was alien. Furthermore, Clay was too astute a politician to have underestimated their political strength on two occasions, as he did if he really had comprehended the movement.

Clay's political motivation and love for the Union explain in large part his actions, but another element must be considered. While it is a truism to say that Clay was a product of his time, it does explain his attitude toward the black man. Nineteenth century America was a racist society, and few men escaped the effect of society's attitudes on their personal views. Clay was no exception. He admitted that he had been raised to believe that every man was entitled to freedom regardless of his color, but the thought of free blacks throughout the nation terrified him. The result of immediate emancipation would exceed

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23 Register of Debates, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., p. 779.
all the evils of slavery. In 1843 he wrote Calvin Colton that "the slave being free, would enter into competition with the free laborer . . . reduce his wages; be confounded with him, and affect his morals and social standing." Freeing slaves and allowing them to remain in America would "interfere with, degrade, and debase the laboring white," and reduce the white laboring man to the despised condition of the black man. Clay also pointed out that emancipation could only result in "a struggle for political ascending" between the blacks and whites which would end with the extermination or expulsion of the blacks.

Although the abolitionists denied that such problems would result from emancipation because the two races could live together, Clay disagreed. He told the annual meeting of the American Colonization Society in 1836 that he feared such harmony would lead to "amalgamation" of the races which was forbidden "by all consideration of regard to either . . . race." On another occasion he told a gathering that amalgamation was "that revolting admixture, alike offensive to God and man; for those whom He, by their physical properties, has made unlike and put asunder, we may, without

25Ibid.
27National Intelligencer, September, 10, 1836.
Ill
presumptousness, suppose were never intended to be joined
together in one of the holiest rites."\textsuperscript{28} As late as 1848
he repeated his position. It would be ridiculous, said Clay,
to attempt "what is so utterly impractical as joining together
those whom God himself by the differences of color, and
various other distinctions, has declared ought to be
separate."\textsuperscript{29} Clay was positive that America was a society
for white men and that blacks could not and "ought not to
be admitted to equal rights and equality in the United States."\textsuperscript{30}
In 1839 the Kentuckian had said much the same thing, when
during his attack on the abolitionists he proclaimed: "I
prefer the liberty of my own country to that of any other
people and the liberty of my own race to that of any other
race. The liberty of the descendants of Africa in the United
States is incompatible with the safety and liberty of
European descendants."\textsuperscript{31} Clay's dislike of slavery was
sincere but so was his racism. He could sympathize with
emancipation in the abstract order, but the practical results
that he foresaw from such action would be worse than the
evils of slavery. Whereas slavery hurt the black, Clay
believed that emancipation without removal would hurt the
white by damaging the social fabric of the United States.

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{28} Mallory, ed., \textit{Clay Speeches}, II, 599.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Colton, ed., \textit{Works of Clay}, III, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{30} The Liberator, February 4, 1848.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., Appendix, p. 359.
\end{footnotes}
The question of slavery and its manifold implications was one political issue for which Clay could never find an effective answer. From his first encounter with it as a political problem in Kentucky in 1798 until his death in 1852, (at which time he directed that his new-born slaves be freed and prepared for colonization), the slavery issue presented him with unanswerable problems. He was drawn to the colonization scheme because it appeared to solve the problem by removing the blacks. But the plan was impractical and, although Clay failed to admit this, he was too intelligent not to realize that it could never serve as a final solution to the slavery question, especially after the rise of the expansionist demands in the late 1830's. Although the slavery issue was not the sole issue which prevented him from achieving his greatest desire, the presidency, it did on two occasions, 1840 and 1844, present him with immeasurable political problems and contributed to his defeats. In essence the question of slavery played a large part in Clay's political fortunes in spite of his contention that it did not belong in the political sphere. It was a question that he could not avoid nor satisfactorily answer. The slavery question was just as much unanswered at the time of death in 1852 as when he had first attempted to propose a solution fifty-four years before.

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Nine years after the death of the Great Compromiser the question was answered by what Clay had feared most, a civil war.
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