AN APPEAL TO REASON: DANIEL WEBSTER, HENRY CLAY,
AND WHIG PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS, 1836-1848

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American politics from 1832 to 1848 underwent a profound transformation. Whereas in the early years of the republic politics had been based on deference and elitism, by the early 1830's a definite change in the political arena had occurred. With the coming of the "Age of Jackson," the political rules and styles of the older era began to change. The politics of deference began to give way to the politics of "availability."

While the Democratic party of Jackson, the party which usually appealed to the majority of the working class, attempted to gain the votes of the rapidly-expanding electorate through emotional appeals filled with divisive, class-conscious rhetoric, the great Whig party leaders, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, attempted to gain the presidency by employing appeals to the voters' intellect and sense of reason and logic. Unfortunately, in an age of mass politics and emphasis on personal popularity, their political strategy and appeals, reminiscent of the first American party system, fell largely on deaf
ears. When they were nominated for the presidency (1836 and 1844), the electorate rejected them. Even the Whig party, becoming aware of the politics of "availability," consistently bypassed them for more popular candidates. This study analyzed the attempts by Webster and Clay to gain the White House by means of appealing to the people's intellect and reason, and the consistent rejection of their candidacies by the new-style politicians and voters.

Because this study is a discussion, examination, and analysis of Webster's and Clay's "appeal to reason," the sources most heavily consulted were the published and microfilmed correspondence, speeches, and papers of these two statesmen. Other personal papers, correspondence, memoirs, and biographies of other central personalities of the middle period, both protagonists and antagonists, were used in order to place Webster and Clay in proper historical perspective. This dissertation is organized chronologically, and it traces and analyzes the evolution of the candidacies of Webster and Clay for the presidency from the early 1830's through the four presidential elections from 1836 to 1848. Each chapter includes an examination of Clay's and Webster's attempts to secure the Whig nomination and gain the presidency through forceful appeals to the voters' sense of logic and reason. Each chapter also includes a discussion and analysis of why these two men always failed.
Webster and Clay consistently appealed to men's higher faculties of intellect, logic, and reason as successive issues and crises developed between the early 1830's and 1850. While they remained powerful leaders in Congress, their appeals for preservation of the Constitution and the Union were too limited and too lofty in an age of democratic mass politics. Although considered "giants" of their party, even the Whig organization, sensing the changing political milieu, passed over them regularly in favor of lesser but more "available" men such as William Henry Harrison. When nominated as presidential candidates, the electorate rejected Clay and Webster and instead elected more popular candidates with less intellectual appeal but with an ability to sway the masses. The voice of reason diminished, and the forces of emotionalism emerged triumphant.
PROLOGUE

Presidential politics in the United States underwent a profound transformation in the years between 1832 and 1848. Whereas in the early years of the republic, politics was based on elitism and deference, by the early 1830's a definite change had occurred. With the advent of the "age of the common man," the political rules and styles of the older era began to be ignored. The politics of deference had begun to give way to the politics of availability. The leaders of the early republic tended to come from the wealthy elite and those educated according to the tenets of the Age of Reason. In the democratic age, the successful politicians were usually those whose primary political asset was their popularity with the electorate. These men were available to serve the interests of the masses, whereas politicians of the older style were not.

The Democratic party, officially led by Andrew Jackson, quickly developed techniques that would have great political success with the growing electorate. Emotion-laden rhetoric, class-conscious appeals, and populistic politicians became Democratic trademarks. In contrast, the early Whig party, as led by Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, attempted generally to appeal to the people's
sense of intellect, powers of reason, and faculties of logic. These leaders sought to promote themselves by speaking to men's minds more than to their emotions. Unfortunately, in an age of mass politics, their political strategy and appeal, reminiscent of the first American party system, fell largely on uninterested ears. When they were nominated for the presidency (1936 and 1844), the electorate rejected them. Even the Whig party, becoming aware of the politics of "availability," consistently bypassed them for more popular candidates. This study analyzes the attempts by Webster and Clay to gain the White House by means of appealing to the people's intellect and reason, and the consistent rejection of their candidacies by the new-style politicians and voters.

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and Webster and instead chose more popular candidates with less
intellectual appeal but with an ability to communicate with the
masses. After Clay and Webster died in 1852, the "voice of
reason" diminished as a political device, and the forces of emotion-
alism colored the emergent political style.
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CHAPTER I

NULLIFICATION AND EMERGING WHIGGERY, 1832-1833

The founding fathers did not relish the idea of political parties; to these men, the spirit of partisan politics was often contrary and detrimental to the best interests of republican government. Writing in The Federalist, James Madison noted that "party animosities [were] the disease most incident to deliberative bodies, and most apt to contaminate their proceedings," whereas "reason . . . ought to control and regulate the government." Alexander Hamilton also was concerned with the dangers inherent in political parties, which he believed were characterized by an "intolerant spirit." As he pointed out, "The habit of being continually marshalled on opposite sides will be too apt to stifle the voice both of law and of equity." To John Jay, "[T]he activity of party zeal [will] take advantage of the supineness, the ignorance, and the hopes and fears

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of the unwary. . . . \(^2\)

Despite the warnings of such eminent men, political parties did evolve in the early republic. Whether Federalist or Republican, the leaders of the first American party system were committed to a philosophy of deferential politics. They believed that politics was not a matter of profession but was a duty to be fulfilled by gentlemen of responsibility, whose main concern in life was planting, manufacturing, or other professions related both to socioeconomic and community leadership. \(^3\)

The wide appeal of the rising Jeffersonian party ultimately was to prove victorious over the more conservative, aristocratic, and anachronistic philosophy and ideology of Federalism; by the early 1800's, the party of Hamilton was politically dead. \(^4\) By the mid-1820's, Jefferson's party still existed, but it was in the process

\(^2\)Quoted in *Federalist Papers*, ed. Rossiter, pp. 34, 384, 391.


of such a profound transformation that only a relatively small faction could accurately call themselves true Republicans. The first American party system was already a relic of the past by the conclusion of James Monroe's second administration; however, it did provide a framework and model on which the second American party system was eventually to be constructed.  

Writing in the early 1830's, the French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville observed that while they are and always have been somewhat of a "necessary evil" by their very nature, "American has had great parties, but has them no longer." As the celebrated observer was writing of his travels and impressions of the United States, the second American party system was already in the embryonic stage of its development and ultimate evolution. Tocqueville perceptively noted, "[A]mbitious men will succeed in creating parties. . . ." By 1828, Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren

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7 Ibid., p. 185.
had created the nucleus of what became the Democratic party; within four years, the Whig party was to rise as the Democracy's great political adversary.  

The noted nineteenth-century British historian, Walter Bagehot, once observed, "[T]he fancy of the mass of men is incredibly weak; it can see nothing without a visible symbol. . . ." To a great many men, this symbol became Andrew Jackson, who functioned both as a leader and inspiration of his personalized and highly-organized Democratic party. Tocqueville stated that "The political parties that I style great are those which cling to principles rather than their consequences [and] to ideas and not to men." While the party of Jackson was still in its infancy, a great new party founded on principles and ideas was also emerging in a powerful if inchoate form.

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There was but one national party in the early 1820's; with the demise of the Federalists only the Republicans remained. Quickly, however, internal ideological differences and personality conflicts began to divide that party. One wing was a socially-conservative, business-oriented element, which favored economic and political nationalism. These "National Republicans" were fervent advocates of a strong central government that would promote internal improvements, utilize the power of the second Bank of the United States to provide fiscal and monetary stability and expansion, and would protect infant or weak American industry from foreign competition by means of a tariff. While not strong in the South, the National Republicans had considerable support in the northern and middle states. The primary leaders of the party were the ex-Republican Henry Clay of Kentucky, ex-Federalist Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, and John Quincy Adams, also of the Bay state, who had at one time or another belonged to both parties. 12

The second wing of the old Jeffersonian organization, the Democratic Republicans, was a more egalitarian, planter-yeoman farmer and workingman coalition that included many businessmen. This group favored both economy in government and a philosophy of

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limited national government. The two most influential men in what became known as the Democratic party were the popular military hero, Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, and the sophisticated politician from New York, Martin Van Buren. Their highly-organized party was essentially founded on a coalition of state parties, resting on a North-South political axis and bolstered by strong western support. With their emphasis on the condition of the common man, the Democrats enjoyed widespread support from the older Jeffersonians and their heirs.¹³

The National Republican candidate, John Quincy Adams, was soundly defeated by Andrew Jackson in the election of 1828. The issues in the election were not important; the contest was largely concerned with the personalities of the two opponents. The Democrats, utilizing their powerful network of closely knit state party organizations and skillfully promoting Jackson's reputation both as a military hero and a champion of the common man, easily won.¹⁴


¹⁴ Remini, Election of Jackson, pp. 11-30, 51-121, 181-204; idem, Making of the Democratic Party, passim. According to Remini, "the age of the professional politician had arrived." These Democratic professionals, he notes, would utilize virtually anything "that would appeal to the masses, even the worst forms of demagoguery." Ibid., p. 193.
Once Jackson took office, he immediately ran afoul of the National Republicans in Congress. He vetoed one of Henry Clay's pet internal improvements projects, the Maysville road bill. In addition, he dismissed numerous federal officeholders and replaced them with partisan supporters. Of infinitely more significance, he vetoed Clay's bill to recharter the second Bank of the United States. Finally, he threatened to use military force against South Carolina in the nullification crisis of 1832-33. Because of his unprecedented use of presidential power, Jackson was assailed by both the National Republicans and many Democrats, especially in the South. As his first term ended, the charge of executive usurpation became a rallying point for the growing anti-Jackson coalition that would ultimately become known as the Whig party.

The tariff had always had its enthusiastic proponents and its equally-fervent opponents. Since the days of Hamilton, the manufacturing interests, located primarily in the Northeast, had favored a protective tariff which would shield them from foreign competition. At the same time, many southerners admitted the necessity for a revenue-only tariff; however, since the vast majority of them were engaged in agriculture or related pursuits, they were opposed to a tariff with strong protective features. The results of a protective tariff policy, said its proponents, would be the development of a strong
industrialized economy in the United States, with great profits for the companies and high wages for the workers. Many southern agrarians countered the northern argument with the view that such a policy had no significant benefit for their section since they had little industry, and a protective tariff only kept prices artificially high for the manufactured goods which they bought. Being exporters of agricultural products, they strongly preferred a policy of free trade; the northern manufacturing interests were equally adamant in their call for protection. 15

Over the years, the debate intensified; all the while, the tariff rates were being raised. In 1828, a complex, controversial tariff bill was enacted; the average rates were set at 45 per cent, a significant increase over the previous and all other tariffs. Southern reaction was immediate. Vice-president John C. Calhoun of South Carolina published the "South Carolina Exposition and Protest," which was a biting indictment and condemnation of the "tariff of abominations." Adopting an extreme states' rights position, Calhoun, a former staunch nationalist, argued that having originally created the Union, the states had the power to declare null and void any law which they believed to be adverse or detrimental to their best interests.

Obviously, if Calhoun's theory were accepted, the concept of federalism would be severely weakened, if not destroyed. To him, however, nullification of a national law would only be an exercise of the power and privileges which each state possessed. The tariff, maintained Calhoun, was a clear case of national oppression of the best interests of the southern minority. The unchallenged power of the national government to enforce laws throughout the nation also could mean that the national government, in the future, might abolish slavery in the states where it existed; that thought, even more than the tariff, was foremost in the mind of Calhoun, states historian William W. Freehling. 16

Calhoun's philosophical argument was sound, at least from his point of view. Jefferson and Madison had taken somewhat similar grounds regarding the twin concepts of the "compact" nature of the Union and nullification in 1798. Whether Calhoun's motives were to exempt southern states from the tariff, protect the institution of slavery, preserve the sovereignty of all the states within the Union,  

or all of the aforementioned, a constitutional and political crisis had clearly developed. After 1828, demands for nullification of the "tariff of abominations" was increasingly heard, especially in South Carolina. While the nullifiers did not have significant support in the other southern states, it appeared by early 1832 that South Carolina and the federal government were headed toward a grave confrontation. 17

Largely because of the southern reaction to the tariff of 1828, another tariff law was enacted in 1832; while the rates were lowered slightly, the South Carolinian extremists still bitterly opposed what they considered to be an unjust, oppressive, and discriminatory tariff. In November, 1832, the South Carolina legislature passed an ordinance nullifying both the tariffs of 1828 and 1832. If the tariffs were to be enforced or the state otherwise coerced, South Carolina would consider that she had just cause for secession from the Union. After promulgation of the nullification ordinance,

South Carolina made preparations, including the mustering of the state militia, to resist any attempt by the federal government to enforce the tariff laws. As the state whose government was dominated by the nullifiers became more militant, so did the federal government. President Andrew Jackson, ordinarily a proponent of limited national government, sought and received from Congress its support for his determination to maintain and enforce the laws by whatever means necessary, even if it meant sending United States military forces to South Carolina and forcibly putting down what Jackson termed a rebellion. Clearly, by January, 1833, the most serious constitutional and political crisis in the nation's history was at hand. 18

As the confrontation developed, Senator John Randolph of Virginia observed that only Henry Clay could save the Union from imminent disaster. Clay, the defeated National Republican candidate in the election of 1832, had played an instrumental role in the creation of the Missouri compromises of 1820-21 which had resolved an earlier crisis. Once again, the Kentuckian was to be

Clay rose in the Senate on February 12, 1833, to offer the measures which he believed were the only alternatives to an impending civil war. Always aware of his critics' charges concerning his role in the "corrupt bargain" of 1824, Clay took great pains to reassure his colleagues in the Senate and to the people at-large that he was acting solely in the best interests of the country. He was "actuated by no motives of a private nature, by no personal feelings, and for no personal objects . . .," he said. Rather, Clay explained that he was moved only by the "sense of the duty which I owe my country."20

His appeal was two-fold: to preserve the protective tariff, and to restore good will and peace between the warring factions involved in the nullification crisis. He pointed out that a continuation of tariff protection for American manufacturers was absolutely essential for all groups, economic sectors, and geographical sections in the United States. As he forcefully insisted, "[T]he sudden repeal of the tariff policy would bring ruin and destruction on the whole


people of this country." To Clay, a "mutual accommodation," based on a fair and equitable basis satisfactory to all parties was the only viable solution to the dangerous confrontation between President Jackson and South Carolina, even if it meant lowering substantially his beloved tariff.  

After he outlined his plan for a gradual reduction of the tariff levels, Clay admitted to his colleagues that "[A]ll parties may find in this measure some reasons for objection." He was well aware that his protectionist friends would oppose any lowering of the levels of the tariff of 1832; at the same time, opponents of protection would attack the compromise bill because the rates would not be lowered sufficiently or rapidly enough. As he accurately observed, "It may be true that there will be loss and gain in this measure." However, any such gain or loss would be shared, he argued, "among our countrymen." Such an arrangement was fair, prudent, and "founded on that great principle of compromise and concession which lies at the bottom of our institutions . . .," including the Constitution. "There are an infinite variety of prejudices and local interests to be regarded," he said, "but all should be made to yield to the Union."  

\[21\text{Ibid., pp. 538-39.}\]

\[22\text{Ibid., pp. 543-46.}\]
In conclusion, Clay admitted that he believed "South Carolina has been rash, intemperate, and greatly in the wrong; but I do not want to disgrace her, nor any other member of this Union." The singular goal of the Congress was to restore harmony in the United States during this dangerous period. Clay said such a restoration of peace and amity in the country could be achieved, but only through the elimination of "party feelings and party causes," and a sincere, nonpartisan consideration of his proposed compromise tariff bill, which he had presented to the Senate in order to serve "the vast interests of this united people." 23

Henry Clay had been strongly opposed to President Jackson's forcefully-worded proclamation to South Carolina from the outset. To him, "Old Hickory's" course was full of danger.

As for the proclamation, although there are some good things in it . . . there are some entirely too ultra for me, and which I cannot stomach. A proclamation ought to have been issued weeks ago, but I think it should have been a very different paper from the present, which, I apprehend, will irritate, instead of allaying any excited feeling. 24

23 Ibid., p. 550; Clay's compromise tariff bill provided that all duties in the tariff of 1832 that were above 20 per cent should be gradually lowered at two-year intervals until 1840; in that year, two large reductions would take place. On July 1, 1842, the tariff rates were to be established at the rate of 20 per cent. See U.S., Congress, Senate, Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2d sess., 1833, pp. 462-86, 717-42.

Although the persuasive political and intellectual views of Henry Clay and his philosophy ultimately prevailed in the great crisis, the National Republican senator from Massachusetts, Daniel Webster, fought determinedly throughout this critical episode against the acceptance of Clay's compromise tariff. He based his opposition on the premise that the power and integrity of the federal government and the Union would be fatally weakened. Throughout the great debate, Webster's attacks on the compromise were founded in sound logic and presented with closely-reasoned, intelligent arguments. In opposing Clay's measures, Webster found himself in a rather strange, but only temporary alliance with Andrew Jackson, the leader of the Democracy. Webster's stance, however, was entirely predictable and consistent in view of the strong nationalism and Unionism which he had brilliantly exhibited in the Senate debates with Hayne in 1830.25

Writing in December, 1832, Webster had outlined some dearly-held principles on which no compromise could be accepted. Among them were a firm commitment "[t]o sustain the administration in executing the laws . . . and to counteract the proceedings in

South Carolina... with moderation and temperance, but with inflexible firmness... " He also promised not "to give up, or compromise, the principle of protection; nor to give any pledges, personal or public, for its abandonment at any time hereafter."

To Webster, a revision of the tariff of 1832 might possibly be considered, but any such revision would have to insure "the reasonable protection of labor and wages."  

Webster was determined to support Unionism, whether it was of the Jacksonian type or of his own; at all costs he was committed equally to continuation of the levels of the tariff of 1832. After Clay's compromise speech of February 12, 1833, Webster replied the next day that he was unalterably opposed to any such bill that would be injurious to "those domestic manufactures hitherto protected..." and which would adversely affect "the rates of wages and the earnings of American manual labor."

While Clay and Webster were staunch friends of both the protective tariff and the Union, the philosophical issue inherent in the concept of compromise had driven a wedge between them. Two weeks after Clay's introduction of his tariff bill and Webster's


27 Ibid., 14:158-59.
thundering reply, the two collided once more over the same fundamental question. In answering Webster's charges that his bill effectively abandoned the protection principle of the tariff of 1832 and that the proposed nine-year, step-by-step rate reduction to 20 per cent ad valorem rates would prevent Congress from exercising its Constitutional perogatives and duties of legislating for the changing economic needs of the country, Clay unleashed a closely-reasoned defense of this position.

The Kentuckian regretted his conflict with Webster, but he believed the tariff matter and the nullification crisis involved "vital interests, and perhaps the safety of the Union [itself]." Clay repeated his alarm concerning the critical state of affairs in the United States and reiterated the need for preserving both a protective tariff and of quieting the nullifiers by means of a compromise which must be arranged during that particular session of Congress.

Addressing the tense Senate, Clay argued

Let us not deceive ourselves. Now is the time to adjust the question in a manner satisfactory to both parties. Put if off until the next session, and the alternative may, and probably then would, be a speedy and ruinous reduction of the tariff, or a civil war with the entire South.  

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29 Ibid., p. 556.
Responding to the charges of Webster and others that he was proposing an abandonment of the protective tariff, Clay retorted that in reality, he was desperately trying to save the tariff from those whose policies would ultimately result in its destruction. Rather than witness the end of the tariff system of which he was a primary architect, he argued that he was only attempting to "place it on a bed of security and repose for nine years, where it may grow and strengthen, and become acceptable to the whole people." Clay asserted that his sole desire was

. . . to see the tariff separated from the politics of the country, that business men may go to work in security, with some prospect of stability in our laws, and without everything being staked on the issue of elections. . . .

However important the tariff question might have been to Clay, his most pressing concern was the search for an equitable and amicable solution to the greater problem of nullification. Answering those opponents who charged him with desertion of his old political principles and of comforting the nullifiers, Clay observed that "It requires as much moral courage to legislate under the imputation of a panic, as to refrain from it. . . ." As he inquired of his colleagues, "[I]s not the duty of every man who aspires to be a

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30 Ibid., p. 557.
statesman, to look at naked facts as they really are?"\textsuperscript{31}

Clay deplored, above all, the political aspects of the tariff question. He pointed out that for so long the nation had been kept in a condition of inflamed excitement because of the tariff matter. To Clay, this vital question must be removed from the political arena.

Conventions, elections, Congress, the public press, have been for years all acting on the tariff, and the tariff on them all. Prejudices have been excited, passions kindled, and mutual irritations carried to the highest pitch of exasperation, insomuch that good feelings have been almost extinguished, and the voice of reason and experience silenced among members of the confederacy. Let us separate the tariff from the agitating politics of the country and place it upon a stable . . . foundation.\textsuperscript{32}

If the tariff were to be depoliticized and the true advantages of a modified protective system for the entire nation promulgated and understood, most thoughtful citizens would come to desire and appreciate such a policy. As Clay stated,

Above all, I count upon the good effects resulting from a restoration to the harmony of this divided people, upon their good sense, and their love of justice. Who can doubt, that when passions have subsided, and reason has resumed her empire, that there will be a disposition throughout the whole Union, to render ample justice to all its parts.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., p. 561.
The president, the ultranationalists, and the nullifiers shared one common fault, said Clay: "Sir, they take counsel from their passion." He believed such emotionalism would inevitably result in civil war, unless it were checked by the forces of reason and logic. Concluding his speech, Clay argued that his proposed compromise tariff bill was the true embodiment of cool reason and good judgment, and as such, its passage was crucial to the future of the United States. 34

After Henry Clay had defended his proposed compromise, Webster rose to offer briefly the reasons for his opposition to the bill. He bitterly attacked Clay's measures, particularly those aspects which he believed would limit the traditional legislative powers of Congress. In yielding to pressure from the opponents of a high protective tariff, Webster argued that the compromise tariff "had

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34Ibid., p. 566. Passions indeed were inflamed. As Jackson prepared to send military forces to South Carolina and lead them personally if necessary to preserve the Union, extremist nullifiers were pledging to "STAND OR FALL WITH CAROLINA"; Jackson to Martin Van Buren, 15, 23 December 1832, Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on microfilm, North Texas State University; Pendleton (South Carolina) Messenger, 26 December 1832, quoted in Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, p. 264. The tariff and the attendant nullification controversy was "beyond reasoning" by 1832, states Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 1829-1839 (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1949), p. 135.
abandoned the policy of wise government, and the policy of our own government, and the policy always advocated by [Clay himself]."35

Webster stressed that if the compromise tariff, with its step-by-step graduated rate reductions over a nine-year period, were to be adopted, the power of future Congresses to create necessary legislation on critical tariff measures would be drastically impaired. Another result of Clay's bill, if it were to pass, would be an adverse effect on the working class. Lowering the tariff would inexorably "aim a deadly blow on the poor, the young, the enterprising--on the labor and the ingenuity of the country." He was not prepared, he asserted, to abandon his senatorial responsibility. In conclusion, Webster argued that he "would do as much to satisfy South Carolina as any man . . ., but [would not] rush into untried systems." As he observed, his constituents "would excuse [me] for surrendering their interests, but they would not forgive [me] for a violation of the Constitution."36

After Webster, Clay, Calhoun, and the other senators had concluded their remarks, the Senate voted on the crucial compromise tariff; the bill passed by a vote of 29 to 16. Clay, Calhoun, and a


36 Ibid., pp. 163-65.
majority of the southern senators gave the bill their approval; Webster and the other New England senators voted negatively. Senators from the middle Atlantic and western states were fairly evenly divided. In the House of Representatives, the tariff bill was approved by a vote of 119 to 85; the representatives also cast their votes along sectional lines. While the tariff of 1833 was not a particularly good bill from a purely economic perspective, it served politically as what appeared to be the sole remaining mechanism of averting a violent collision between the federal government and the State of South Carolina. Shortly after the passage of the compromise tariff, South Carolina nullified the "force" bill which gave Jackson the power to collect the tariffs; at the same time, it rescinded the nullification order regarding the tariffs of 1828 and 1832, which had started the ordeal. Thus, by the spring of 1833, the crisis seemed to have been resolved. The nation once again enjoyed internal peace; although Jackson did not have to use force to collect the tariffs in view of South Carolina's acquiescence and acceptance of the Clay compromise, the specter of nullification was not extinguished and ultimately reemerged in the form of secessionism in 1860-61.  

37 Senate, Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 1833, 2d sess., pp. 687-88; House of Representatives, Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 1833, 2d sess., pp. 1810-11; Frank W. Taussig, The Tariff History of the United States (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), pp. 110-11. One historian has succinctly expressed the essence of
Webster had believed for years in a growing southern conspiracy against the Union. As early as 1828 he had become aware that "the plan for a southern confederacy had been received with favor by a great many of the political men of the South. . . ."

Writing in the aftermath of the nullification episode in April, 1833, he told a correspondent that "the danger is not over. A systematic and bold attack . . . will be carried on . . . against the just and constitutional power of the government, and against whatsoever strengthens the Union of the States."

He predicted that this attack on unionism would continue for "years to come," but that if the friends of the Constitution and the nullification matter: "One side declared that the Constitution was a compact and therefore not binding; the other side declared that the Constitution was a compact and therefore binding." See Andrew C. McLaughlin, "Social Compact and Constitutional Construction," American Historical Review 5 (1900): 467-90. For an excellent contemporary discussion of the philosophical positions of such men as Webster, Calhoun, and Jackson, consult Alexander H. Everett, "The Union and the States," North American Review 37 (July, 1833): 235-49. One historian attributes Clay and Calhoun's desire for a compromise tariff more to their desire for the presidency than anything else. Since the extreme positions of Clay and Calhoun as the respective champion and foe of the tariff were so well-known, there was little possibility that either could become president; therefore, they compromised in hope of better future political advantages. See Frederick L. Nussbaum, "The Compromise of 1833: A Study in Practical Politics," South Atlantic Quarterly 11 (October, 1912): 337-49. The true compromiser was Jackson, says Major L. Wilson, "Andrew Jackson: The Great Compromiser," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 26 (Spring, 1967): 72-78.

Webster to Perry, 10 April 1833, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 17:534-35.
Union would persevere, "[W]e shall transmit to posterity an inheritance above all price." As he pointed out, the federal union "has many enemies, not easily subdued, and never to be reconciled." In a mood that reflected guarded optimism for the future, Webster observed, "All things have not happened as I could wish; but on the whole, I think the events of the winter have tended to strengthen the Union of the States, and to uphold the government."\(^{39}\)

Just as Webster had feared for the security of the nation years before the nullification crisis, Clay and his friends had also been deeply concerned with the uncertainty and apprehension which permeated the United States before the crisis had been successfully resolved. Senator Samuel Southard of New Jersey had written to Clay in December, 1832, and in a somber tone, said, "I fear that the Union and Government are gone. Nothing can save them but a wisdom and patriotism which I almost despair of finding, in the present day of madness." Nicholas Biddle had told Clay in August of 1832 that considering the state of the nation in those troubled times, "[A]t no period of your life has the country ever had a deeper stake in you."

\(^{39}\) Ibid.; Webster to William Sullivan, 19 April 1833, ibid., p. 537.
Union . . . " rested on the future actions of Henry Clay. 40

Clay's success in working toward a compromise solution to the nullification crisis of 1833 averted an extremely serious, possibly disastrous confrontation between the federal government and South Carolina, but his willingness to accept a lowered tariff and to seek the cooperation of John C. Calhoun, the symbol of nullification, threatened to drive Webster into a de facto ultra-nationalist political alliance with Andrew Jackson. Throughout the spring and summer of 1833, there was much discussion concerning the possibility of a new political realignment. Many people envisioned the creation of a new nationalist coalition to be led by Webster and Jackson in opposition to the Clay-Calhoun faction. 41

Whatever chances for the realization of a Webster-Jackson party collapsed in September, 1833, however, when Jackson issued his executive order for the removal of the government's deposits in the doomed, but still-extant second Bank of the United States. The president's actions in removing the deposits demonstrated Old

40 Southard to Clay, 1 December 1832, Clay, Works of Henry Clay, ed. Colton, 4:344; Biddle to Clay, 1 August 1832, ibid., p. 341.
Hickory's continuing obsession with his peculiar fiscal policy and thereby provided an issue in regard to which Webster was irreconcilably at odds with Jackson. The result of the president's ceaseless efforts to destroy completely the remaining influence of the bank had the effect of driving Webster back into his old philosophical and political association with Clay and the growing anti-Jackson coalition.

Any real, long-term political partnership between Webster and Jackson would have been impossible, in view of their respective backgrounds, training, and political philosophy. Only a severe crisis, such as the nullification episode, could bring about a nationalist-oriented alliance, and then only temporarily. When the crisis had passed, they inevitably reverted back to their original and respective parties. After 1833, the politicians of both sides resumed their earlier positions on the executive tyranny-legislative supremacy conflict. With the passing of the nullification crisis, Webster and Jackson had little if any common ground of agreement.

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43 Ibid., pp. 115-17; Fuess, *Daniel Webster*, 2:3-5; Nathans, *Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy*, pp. 61-73; Jackson's forceful messages to the nullifiers of South Carolina were nothing less than "the old Federalist doctrine, and Webster had no choice but to sustain it," says Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun: Nullifier*, p. 187.
Although Clay and Webster's political alliance had been severely strained by the events of 1832-33 and the aftermath, their relationship was hardly ended. Even at the height of the crisis, Clay wrote to Francis Brooke that "Mr. Webster and I came into conflict . . . [but t]here is no permanent breach between us." Writing again to Brooke after the passage of the compromise tariff bill, he said that "You may like to know that there is no breach between Webster and me. We had some friendly passes and there the matter ended." By the fall of 1833, these two giants had once again rejoined forces against their traditional common foe, Andrew Jackson.

The reputation of Clay and Webster, as men of principle and reason, had been strengthened as a result of the prolonged nullification debate. Clay reinforced his title as the "Great Compromiser," who appealed in an intellectual manner to men's sense of political reality and nationalism in a time of grave crisis. Webster, the "Defender of the Constitution," loomed even larger in the people's minds because of his resolution to stand firm during the crisis and to inspire in others through cool logic and good judgment his love of a


strong unionism, constitutionalism, and a sound tariff policy which would benefit a great majority of the citizenry, regardless of class, section, or occupation.

By the autumn of 1833, the anti-Jackson coalition, which was ultimately destined to emerge as the Whig party, was taking shape. While numerous groups and factions were to be included in the new party, the common denominator was a fervent, almost desperate opposition to the executive tyranny, real or imagined, of Andrew Jackson. The leaders of the Whigs were Daniel Webster and Henry Clay; their techniques of persuasion were founded on an intellectual, logical, and rational appeal to the minds of the people, and their philosophy of politics was at this time somewhat reminiscent of the deferential style which characterized the first American party system. Although many of the founding fathers had not approved of political parties, they nevertheless came to exist; by the winter of 1832-33, the emergence of a powerful new party was underway. While Tocqueville was lamenting the absence of great parties in the United States, one of the more important political organizations in American history was being conceived.

The term "Whig" was heard in the South as early as March, 1832; this venerable appellation was adopted by anti-Jackson men who feared his Tory-like usage of executive power. The
nullification crisis of the winter of 1832-33 and the president's alleged high-handed actions, whether real or imagined, during this critical period greatly alarmed the growing number of southerners opposed to the chief executive's usurpation of the legislative prerogative and the liberties of the states. By 1834 Whiggery in the South was largely characterized as a loose coalition of former National Republicans, nullifiers, and other states' rights advocates, as well as many former Democrats who had also become upset with Jackson's policies. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina emerged as the natural leader of this southern political combination; the focus of their collective wrath was directly aimed at the president.46 As the Richmond Whig exclaimed, "The people--the South especially--have already paid... the penalty of their blind partiality and irrational idolatry of General Jackson, in the overthrow of their principles."47

The national Whig party came into being in the spring of 1834; the name for the new party was probably first suggested by Colonel James Watson Webb, editor of the influential New York Courier and Enquirer. As in the case of southern Whiggery, the party took its name in order to give itself somewhat of a middle-class


47 As cited in the Washington United States Telegraph, 6 January 1834.
aura and to imply that the party of "King Andrew" was no different from the old hated Tories of England. Like southern Whiggery, the national party was also a coalition of rather diverse factions, including National Republicans, consolidationists, states' rights advocates, disgruntled former Jacksonians, and former Antimasons. From the party's earliest origins, the National Republicans served as its philosophical and organizational core. While this conservative element was always powerful, especially during the early years of the party, a highly-democratic spirit was injected into the party through the absorption of much of the Antimasonic party, whose former adherents gained increasing influence in the Whig party, particularly after the disastrous electoral defeat suffered by the Whigs in the presidential election of 1836.

During the era of its existence, the Whig party attracted many men of property and standing: planters in the South, industrialists in the middle Atlantic states, commercial interests in New England, and their counterparts in the West. Although numerous anomalies existed, men who favored the protective tariff, internal improvements, and the national bank tended to be Whigs, whether

they were farmers who desired better roads over which to ship their products to market, workers in industries vulnerable to foreign competition, speculators in western lands, ambitious lawyers, enterprising businessmen, or promoters of canalization. Whigs tended to find their greatest strength in commercial and urban centers. 49

The Whig party was essentially a socially-conservative organization. It was favored largely by those groups which had "arrived." Whiggery did not consciously cater to the lower socio-economic, uneducated elements of society, whether they were in the

city, at the farm, or on the frontier. 50

From its earliest beginnings, the leaders of the Whig party, particularly Webster and Clay, attempted to appeal to the more literate sectors of society on a basis of intelligence and reason. As Tocqueville said concerning Jackson's war on the Bank, "[T]he well-informed people rallied around the bank, [and] the common people around the President." The Whigs, however, ultimately realized that they must broaden their base of popular support because of political necessity; ex-Antimasons such as Thurlow Weed and William H. Seward were instrumental in widening the earlier, rather limited base of support of the Whigs through a more democratic appeal and approach to the electorate, a strategy which employed much of the Jacksonians own tools, weapons, and tactics in order to attract the votes of the masses. 51 While the new strategy of Weed, Seward, and other party realists gradually reoriented the Whig party toward a policy which would enable it to win, the leaders of original Whiggery, most notably Clay and Webster, continued to address themselves to a narrow, limited spectrum of the most


educated and well-informed people in the party and the nation through eloquent, reasoned speeches, letters, and campaigns.

The Whig party grew rapidly in membership after 1834 and particularly after the election of 1836 because of the change in party strategy; through such political shrewdness, two Whig presidents were ultimately to be elected. However, the two titans of the party, Clay and Webster, were never selected for the nation's highest office. Their appeal was too limited, their politics too deferential, their arguments too closely-reasoned, and their approach too intellectual for the electorate in the Jacksonian era. The "Great Compromiser" and the "Defender of the Constitution" were true Whigs, who, as Philip Hone observed, "[W]ill think for themselves, not like them [who] go straight forward right or wrong as they are bidden." 52

As Tocqueville remarked, "In the United States the people . . . do not fear distinguished talents, but they are rarely fond of them." Correctly perceiving political reality in the age of Jackson, he expressed his amazement that "[T]he ablest men . . . are rarely placed at the head of affairs. . . ." 53 Lord Bryce, the British nobleman and scholar, pointed out that "[T]he ordinary American


53 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, pp. 209-07.
voter does not object to mediocrity . . . and that he likes his candidate to be sensible, vigorous, and above all, what he calls 'magnetic,' and does not value, because he sees no need for, originality or profundity, a fine culture, or a wide knowledge. In his famous essay on American politics, Bryce argued that "Great men are not chosen Presidents . . . because great men are rare in politics. . . ." The presidents from Jackson to Lincoln were "intellectual pigmies [sic] beside the real leaders of that generation--Clay, Calhoun, and Webster." They were the "real leaders," but they were never chosen to be president.

Nevertheless, Clay and Webster attempted to persuade the populace for decades from the Senate, at a time when Tocqueville asserted that it contained "... within a small space a large proportion of the celebrated men of America." A statesman, according to Walter Bagehot, "ought to show his own nature, and talk in a palpable way what is to him important truth. And so he will both guide and benefit the nation." Clay and Webster never shrank


55 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

56 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 211.

from such responsibility; as Clay wrote to his frequent corres-
pondent, Francis Brooke, "Almost daily . . . I express in the
Senate what I have to say on public affairs." Under the leader-
ship of these two men, the Whig party for twenty years was the pri-
mary organ of nationalism, a source of stability and harmony
amidst increasing sectional jealousies, and the source of a long-
range vision of American economic greatness. When Clay and Web-
ster died, followed shortly by the dissolution of the Whig party, the
division of the Union was not far away.

The setbacks, political reverses, and crises suffered by the
National Republican-Whigs in 1832 and 1833 thoroughly depressed
both Clay and Webster; Clay's defeat in his 1832 presidential bid, the
veto of the Bank recharter bill, and the subsequent nullification con-
frontation seemed to spell the end of the early anti-Jackson coalition.
Clay was particularly disheartened by the political disasters which
had befallen him. Writing to Francis Brooke, in May of 1833, the
now twice-vanquished presidential candidate scotched an early move-
ment to have him named as the anti-Jacksonian nominee in the elec-
tion of 1836. Clay bitterly remarked that

58 Clay to Francis Brooke, 10 March 1834, Henry Clay,
The Private Correspondence of Henry Clay, ed. Calvin Coitton,
I have borne the taunts of the Jackson party and principles long enough. The country has not thought proper to sustain my exertions. Distinguished men, who could not possibly have viewed things differently from me, have stood by with a cold indifference, without lending any helping hand. What can one man do alone against a host?\(^{59}\)

Clay noted further that he had observed no change in public opinion which could encourage him to run once more for the presidency; moreover, he believed at that time that no candidate would be able to defeat Jackson's personally-selected successor. Whomever the Jacksonian candidate might be, Clay argued that "The press, patronage, and party will probably carry him triumphantly through." Clay obviously was depressed. Despite his efforts, the state of the country was

Bad enough, bad enough, God knows. But what can I do? Have I heretofore ceased to warn the country against it? Worn out and exhausted in the service, why should I continue to sound the alarm, with no prospect of my being more heeded hereafter than heretofore?

He concluded the letter in a melancholy tone and added that "the country had better try other sentinels, not more devoted or zealous, but who may be more successful than I have been."\(^{60}\)


\(^{60}\)Ibid., pp. 362-63.
Clay's emotional depression lasted through the summer of 1833. Writing in August, he stated that he had completely lost faith in the "virtue and intelligence" of the people who seemed determined to follow blindly the will of Andrew Jackson, regardless of the good advice of their representatives in Congress. He acknowledged that if Jackson

. . . were an enlightened philosopher, and a true patriot, the popular sanction which is given to all his acts, however inconsistent or extravagant, might find some justification. But when we consider that he is ignorant, passionate, hypocritical, corrupt, and easily swayed by the base men who surround him, what can we think of the popular approbation which he receives? 61

Jackson's obvious intention of selecting Martin Van Buren as his successor and the "general corruption" inherent in the Democratic party would mean inevitable ruin for the nation. If such a situation were not remedied, and Clay was certain that it would not be, he believed that "We shall have a state of things which will prepare the public mind for a dissolution of the Union, to which, unfortunately, there is less an aversion now than could be wished by those who love their country." Considering the refusal of the people to heed his warnings of national doom, Clay concluded sadly, "I should think seriously of a final retirement from the theater of public

61 Ibid., pp. 368-69.
That Henry Clay should feel depressed because of the people's lack of appreciation for his efforts in their behalf is understandable. He had appealed to the intellect, reason, and good sense of the people of the nation as a corporate whole, regardless of their class, occupation, or section, in his successful but exhaustive struggle to bring about the 1833 compromise tariff bill. While Clay had played an instrumental role in the pacific settlement of the nullification episode, his battles were not ended. Along with Daniel Webster and the new Whig party, he could continue to struggle with Andrew Jackson and his party on the great bank controversy for several years to come.

62 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

WHIGGERY CONFIRMED: BANKS AND POLITICS, 1832-1836

The presidential election of 1832, held on the eve of the nullification crisis, resulted in a great victory for Andrew Jackson and for the policies of the Democratic party. The Jacksonians' positions concerning the bank of the United States, tariffs, public lands, patronage, and rotation in office appeared to be those held by the masses to whom the Old Hero directed his persuasive appeals. The newly-established National Republican party, with its policies of political and economic nationalism inherent in the American System of its chieftain and presidential candidate, Henry Clay, was soundly defeated.

While Antimasonry was a substantial factor, the major issue in the presidential election of 1832 was the bank recharter question. Originally created in 1816 with a lifespan of twenty years, the charter of the Second Bank of the United States was due to expire in 1836. However, the bank's director, Nicholas Biddle, in 1831 persuaded Henry Clay to have a bill introduced in Congress which would call for an early recharter in 1832; Biddle convinced Clay that such a bill
would easily pass both houses of Congress and would be immediately vetoed by Jackson. Biddle reasoned that by vetoing the bank bill, Jackson would lose much of his popular support and probably would be defeated in the forthcoming presidential election. Unfortunately for Clay, the early recharter ploy failed; Jackson vetoed the bill in July, 1832, lost little popular support, and substantially defeated the Kentuckian in the subsequent election. While Jackson's veto did not result in his electoral defeat, it was ultimately to play a significant role in bringing about the evolution and development of the Whig coalition.

Confiding in his trusted lieutenant, Martin Van Buren, Old Hickory had exclaimed that "[T]he Bank, Mr. Van Buren, is trying to kill me, but I will kill it." Jackson did indeed destroy what he

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term the "hydra-headed monster," but in doing so, he invoked the wrath of his political foes, particularly Clay, Daniel Webster, and eventually, John C. Calhoun. The tone of their attacks on Jackson's bank veto message revealed the emergence of a new phenomenon, which prior to the Bank veto had not been pressed as a fundamental campaign issue or basic philosophical point of argument: a charge concerning alleged executive usurpation of the prerogatives and privileges of Congress. Jackson's veto message was purposely couched in emotional phraseology designed to rally the people to the president's position; informing their responses, Webster and Clay assumed a closely reasoned attack on Jackson's veto of the bank bill which would appeal to the intelligence of the electorate in general and to the traditional party leaders in particular.

In his veto of the recharter bill on July 10, 1832, Jackson had launched an emotion-laden attack on the Bank, which he had characterized as being a dangerous institution of financial centralization that contained both real and potential threats to the liberties of states and individuals alike. He also emphasized that many of the Bank's stockholders were foreign citizens, who would receive economic benefits denied American taxpayers who had helped fund the institution. Jackson, at the same time, attacked the bank's constitutionality, even though the Supreme Court had decided its validity in
McCulloch v. Maryland (1819). Old Hickory advanced his peculiar theory that all three branches of the federal government must decide for themselves which acts and institutions were constitutional and which were not; the Supreme Court, according to Jackson, could not "be permitted to control the Congress or the Executive... but to have only such influence as the force of their reasoning may deserve." The president concluded his veto message with a ringing denunciation of the recharter bill as an evil tool or device by which the wealthier elements hoped to become even richer at the expense of the poorer classes.  

The bank veto, argues a recent Jackson scholar, "was the most important presidential veto in American history"; the real reason for the veto was purely political and that "as political propaganda it is a masterpiece." The veto message has also been described as


4Robert V. Remini, Andrew Jackson (1966; reprint ed., New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), pp. 150-52. Remini states that the bank veto represented a conscious effort by Jackson to expand presidential power; see idem, Andrew Jackson and the Bank War, pp. 81-87. For an interesting argument that Jackson's veto was intended to avoid the executive's assumption of Congress' prerogative over internal improvements and the bank, and thus that he did not strengthen the presidency nor did he intend to do so, see James C. Curtis, Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976), p. 131.
being "weak in its reasoning," devoid of intellectual substance or logic, and containing a mixture of ignorance and idealistic perception." The veto, with its direct, emotional appeal to the people, was instrumental in bringing about the coalition of Clay, Webster, and for a time, John C. Calhoun. This nucleus quickly assumed the leadership of the emerging Whig party. The birth of the proto-Whig movement was July 11, 1832, a notable day on which the counter-attack of the Great Triumvirate was launched.

Webster, Clay, and the National Republicans had long been opposed to the Democrats and especially the forceful leadership of Andrew Jackson; however, most of their earlier political speeches and comments reveal little more than the usual partisan and ideological conflicts and differences. With the issuance of the veto message, however, their opposition took on a markedly different character. Until July 11, 1832, the issue of executive usurpation lay relatively dormant; after that date, it was a burning, critical, and vigorously debated subject that dominated the remainder of the presidential

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To certain Americans, the Bank symbolized a social world view and universe which the proto-Whigs knew and respected, especially Clay, Webster, and at that particular time, also Calhoun; Jackson's veto represented a deadly threat to their philosophical and political views and to their traditional roles as regional leaders. While Jackson's veto message was aimed directly at the ever-expanding electorate, the proto-Whig response of Webster and Clay was directed to the established leaders and their constituents of an older, more traditional world of deferential politics reminiscent of the first American party system. Whereas Old Hickory and his organization looked to a new order which would feature an institutionalized executive bureaucracy and direct voter participation, the proto-Whigs were committed to preservation of the older Federalist view of politics in which the electorate would be guided by the most educated, articulate, and noble men of society, regardless of ideology. The bank veto message and the proto-Whig responses of Clay and Webster were, therefore, the focal point of the struggle between these

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competing schools of thought. Appealing to the emotions of the masses had long been Jackson's great talent; however, the proto-Whigs also attempted to appeal to the electorate, but only through great local and sectional leaders such as Webster, Clay, and Calhoun, and then the Whiggish persuasion was based on a lofty, intellectual approach. While the Jacksonians and their rivals maneuvered to win the voters' support, each party's concept of the people reveal great fundamental differences. Although the Democratic party looked directly to the masses for support and legitimacy, "Vox Populi Vox Dei" was not a Whig slogan.

In comparing the Jacksonians and Whigs, Ralph Waldo Emerson once noted that "one has the best cause, and the other contains the best men." The two "best men" of the early Whigs, Webster and Clay, launched a powerful attack on Jackson, his veto message,

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his alleged executive usurpations, and his methods of emotional mass
appeal immediately after the promulgation of the message. Daniel
Webster, whom Emerson described as "the great cannon, loaded to
the lips," was the first major speaker to rise in the Senate to assail
the veto. "Black Dan" was the foremost Supreme Court advocate
and the leading constitutional lawyer in the United States as well as
the most captivating public speaker of his time. His strong sense of
dedication to the Union and his spirit of political nationalism had been
admired for years as a result of his dramatic appearances and
closely-reasoned arguments before the Marshall court. In 1830 he
was awarded the appellation "Defender of the Constitution" as a
reward for his strong support of the Union in the crucial Webster-
Hayne debates in the Senate. 11

Webster had resolved as early as 1830 to try to avoid
lengthy, intense senatorial debates; in a letter to E. M. Dutton, he
declared that he "never did intend to trouble myself with another
debate on such questions, being as tired of them as I am of

11 For a perceptive analysis of the Websterian style of orato-
quoted in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston:
Little, Brown, and Co., Inc., 1945), p. 84; Maurice G. Baxter,
Daniel Webster and the Supreme Court (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1966), passim.
constitutional questions in the courts; but if I could see clearly what was the true verdict, I fear I might have to break my resolution."

Webster did indeed break his resolution within a week in order to debate with Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina in what became the famous forensic duel. Now, in 1832, Webster again believed that another effort was going to be required to save the Constitution, this time from a demagogic, usurping chief executive. In 1830 Webster had written that "our course must be this. Expose the selfishness and pretense of the men in power, as much as possible . . . show ourselves uniform and just, by acting according to our principles, and opposing only such measures as deserve no support." He urged that the true patriot should "cultivate a truly national spirit, go for great odds, and hold up the necessity of the Union. . . ."

In his stinging denunciation of Jackson's veto message, Webster first attacked the president for having negated an institution that had been an engine of prosperity and economic stability which had proved beneficial to all sections of the country, all classes of people, and was desired by the citizenry in general. According to Webster, a "great majority of the people are satisfied with the bank as it is,

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13 Webster to James Pleasants, 6 March 1830, ibid., pp. 492-93.
and desirous that it be continued. They wish no change." He argued that the "interests of the government, the interests of the people, the clear and undisputed voice of public opinion, all call upon Congress to act without further loss of time."  

Webster pointed out that Jackson's veto of the bank bill would adversely affect not only capitalists and financiers but would indeed be detrimental to the great majority of workingmen, regardless of occupation, profession, or section. He predicted that the effect of the veto would "depreciate the value of every man's property from the Atlantic States to the capital of Missouri." Not only would the negative impact of the veto be felt nationwide, but he believed that its inevitable results would be felt in the price of land and crops, in the products of labor, and throughout the business world in general.  

After describing the immediate economic dangers to all classes and sections which the veto's effect would have, Webster then attacked the president's reasons for denying the recharter bill.

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He denied Jackson's charges that the Bank was dangerous to individual liberties, that it was unnecessary, or that it was unconstitutional. He vigorously declared that much of what Jackson allegedly feared was "an assumption without proof; and [much] of it is an argument against that which nobody has maintained or asserted."

Furthermore, Webster stressed that Jackson's reasons for the veto were intellectually weak and illogical and were based on "no more than general statement, without fact or argument to support [them]." He perceptively noted that attacking the alleged vices was not difficult, "because it is easy to say anything; [but] neither reason nor experience proves any danger." 16

As forceful as was Webster's attack on the president's faulty logic, he directed his primary assault on Jackson's constitutional objections to the Bank, which to him were based on "very extraordinary grounds of reasoning." In his veto message, Jackson had vehemently denied the Bank's constitutionality; Webster demonstrated in a thoroughly logical manner that the Bank in fact had been originally established by the Congress in 1791 in a manner quite in keeping with the constitutional powers held by that body, and that the Supreme Court itself had decreed the second Bank to be constitutional in 1819. Old Hickory refused to accept the Bank's legitimacy.

16 Ibid., pp. 160-62.
Congress and the Supreme Court notwithstanding; however, as Webster argued,

I have always found, that those who habitually deny most vehemently the general force of precedent, and assert most strongly the supremacy of private opinion, are yet of all men, most tenacious of that very authority of precedent, whenever it happens to be in their favor. 17

Webster then described the manner in which Jackson had used the concept of precedence in his removal of political enemies from office; as he asked rhetorically, "Does the President, then, reject the authority of all precedence, except what is suitable to his own purpose to use?" 18 According to Webster, the Bank's constitutionality was firmly grounded on both congressional and judicial precedent. As president, Jackson had no power to question that which had previously established as being absolutely constitutional; only the courts had the power and authority to render such a verdict. The Supreme Court, said Webster, had decreed in 1819 in the case of McCulloch v. Maryland that the second Bank of the United States was constitutional, and that decision had become part of the organic law of the nation. The president, as any other citizen, could either obey and accept the Court's decision or not do so; however, neither

17 Ibid., pp. 162-65.
18 Ibid.
president nor private citizen could determine its legal and constitutionality validity. 19

At this point, Webster intensified his attack on Jackson's veto; he forcefully argued that if the president had the power to judge the constitutionality of laws, then the United States would no longer be a limited government founded on the doctrine of checks and balances, but it would become a "despotic" government subject to the whims and "caprices of individuals." He stressed that if constitutional questions were to be thus determined, "All would depend on conjectures; on the complexional feelings, on the passion of the individuals; . . . on the impulse of momentary interest, party objects, or personal purposes." 20

If Jackson were to acquire the personal power to pass on the constitutionality of laws, Webster argued, then such laws would be declared constitutional one day and unconstitutional the next, depending on the executive's mood or fancy; if such power were to be invested in the president, then at that time a government of laws would be terminated and a new reign of personal rule would have begun. To allow such power to exist in the president's hands would signify a regression to the absolute monarchy of the era of Louis XIV and his

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19 Ibid., p. 166.

20 Ibid., p. 169.
theory of "I am the State."\textsuperscript{21}

Webster complained that the president's veto message was couched in inflammatory and dangerous rhetoric concerning "topics of monopoly, the right of taxation, the suffering of the poor, and the arrogance of the rich... as if one, or another, or all of them, had something to do with the constitutional question."\textsuperscript{22} He further exclaimed that the effect of Jackson's message was to excite "jealousy" and create "dangerous prejudices." Daniel Webster concluded his attack on Jackson in much the same tone as that in which he had begun: with the thought that "the affairs of the Country are approaching an important and dangerous crisis, a crisis brought on and accelerated by the president's monomania, his preoccupation with party, his disregard of the Constitution, his irresponsible and demagogic appeals to the people's emotions and fears, and a general usurpation of the rights and privileges of Congress.\textsuperscript{23}

The argument of reason and intelligence as expounded by Webster was hardly stilled when on the next day, July 12, 1832, the other great proto-Whig and that year's National Republican presidential candidate, Henry Clay, rose in the Senate to add support to

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., pp. 168-72.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 175.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., pp. 150, 160, 175-79.
his Massachusetts colleague's biting attacks on the Jackson veto message. The "Kentucky Hotspur" had predicted for some time that Jackson would utilize the veto power on the crucial bank bill; consequently, his assault on Old Hickory's action followed the same sound line of logical reasoning that Webster had pursued.24

Clay attacked the president for executive usurpation of the traditional powers and prerogatives of the legislative branch. He asserted, "The veto is hardly reconcilable with the genius of representative government. It is totally irreconcilable with it, if it is to be frequently employed in respect to the expediency of measures, as well as their Constitutionality."25 Clay questioned the wisdom of allowing "the opinion of one man to overrule that of a legislative body twice deliberately expressed," when the constitutionality of the Bank had long been settled and was looked upon with great favor by the successive Congresses since the earliest days of the Republic.26

While pointing out the obvious benefits of the Bank to all sections and classes of people, Clay noted that he had not always


25 Ibid., 7:524.

26 Ibid., p. 525.
believed the institution to have been a national blessing. He described how at one time during the congressional session of 1811, he had voted against the first Bank's recharter, largely on constitutional grounds. The War of 1812, however, and many of the disasters which resulted from the lack of a strong, stable national bank had convinced him that such a system indeed was critically needed by the United States. Clay later acknowledged his mistake and subsequently voted for the recharter of the Bank in 1816: "[I] did not choose to remain silent and escape responsibility. I chose publicly to avow my conversion. The war and the fatal experience of its disastrous events had changed me." Like Webster in his Senate speech the day before, Clay warned of the terrible economic dislocations which were certain to occur as the result of the failure to recharter the Bank; he predicted that "[g]eneral distress [and] certain widespread inevitable ruin must be the consequences . . . ."

In a powerful conclusion, he focused his attack on Old Hickory's claim that the president had the power to interpret the Constitution, and if desired could declare as being unconstitutional any act, law, or institution, regardless of the prior action of the Congress and/or the Supreme Court. Clay strongly argued that if

\[27\] Ibid., pp. 528-30.
the president had such powers, a general breakdown in orderly, balanced government would occur. He noted that, "No one swears to support [the Constitution] as he understands it, but to support it simply as it is in truth." Continuing, Clay observed that "All men are bound to obey the laws, of which the Constitution is supreme; but must they obey them as they are, or as they understand them?" If such a situation does exist, then "We should have nothing settled, nothing stable, nothing fixed." Concerning Jackson's views on the Bank, his position on the veto power, and his radical concept of constitutional interpretations, Clay argued that such wrong-headed thinking would certainly result in the "absolute subversion of the government." As for himself, Clay was confident and comfortable in his political and philosophical stance regarding the bank; he exclaimed that he was "ready to abide in the judgment of the present generation and posterity."28

By August, 1932, the excitement generated by the president's veto message had spread throughout the Senate as well as the nation. Although John C. Calhoun had previously expressed his aversion to working with Clay and the National Republicans because of fundamental political differences, the powerful effect of Jackson's veto and the general theme of executive usurpation drove the "Cast

28 Ibid., pp. 528, 534-35.
Iron Man" into a working alliance with Clay and Webster. Calhoun's chief supporter, Duff Green, began publishing attacks on Andrew Jackson's alleged misuse of the veto power in his United States Telegraph, calling it no more than "Executive tyranny."

According to Green, Old Hickory had betrayed every principle on which he had campaigned in the presidential election of 1828.

The National Intelligencer also termed the president's actions tyrannical and labeled Jackson as both a "monarch" and "dictator." As Tocqueville had pointed out while observing the Jackson administration, "The veto is . . . a sort of appeal to the people. The executive . . . adopts this means of pleading its causes and


30 Washington United States Telegraph, 2, 6, and 23 August 1832.

31 Washington National Intelligencer, 22 September 1832. From the earliest beginnings of the anti-Jackson movement, the National Intelligencer consistently and strongly supported the antagonists of the president. Throughout the middle period, it was regarded as primary mouthpiece of the Whig party. For an excellent study of the newspaper, see William E. Ames, A History of the National Intelligencer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972).
stating its motives.\textsuperscript{32} The \textit{Intelligencer} was quite cognizant of this ploy also; the newspaper strongly attacked Jackson's direct emotional appeal to the "infuriate mob," which it said possessed little "virtue and intelligence."\textsuperscript{33}

While it has been charged that the early proto-Whigs such as Clay and Webster had no articulated, formalized political philosophy, it is readily apparent that they did in fact strongly believe in the concepts of a strong national Union and an economic policy, fostered and promoted by the federal government, which would benefit all people, regardless of class or section. For Clay and Webster, as well as most of the men who later became Whigs, a politically-sound and strong unionism, coupled with a paternalistic federal government and policies of a relatively high tariff, federally-funded internal improvements, a fair and workable land policy, and a responsible, respectable Bank of the United States, would inevitably produce a powerful and prosperous America which would earn the approval and esteem of foreign nations as well as providing the good life for all its citizens. Clay and Webster firmly believed in such a program and attempted throughout their careers to persuade through intelligent,


\textsuperscript{33}\textit{National Intelligencer}, 3, 16 August 1832.
closely-reasoned, and logical appeals to convince the people that what ultimately evolved as the Whig program and philosophy was indeed the right and proper course for the United States. To Webster and Clay, a president who thwarted the people's representatives in Congress by a wanton use of the veto power and thus negated their honest attempts at creating a rich and strong nation was a worrisome obstructionist and possibly a tyrant. When Jackson attempted to enlist the people's support for his dangerous if not unconstitutional positions through demagogic, emotional appeals, he became an evil power who had to be resisted and ultimately defeated. While other important issues arose on which Clay, Webster, and the Whigs battled Jackson, his party, and his successors, the struggle over the Bank was singularly crucial. Jackson's veto led directly to the emergence of a pair of dedicated men and their followers who were determined to retain their traditional privileges and roles as leaders of their constituencies and who were equally determined to resist what they considered to be a dangerous concentration of power in the executive branch. In order to build a politically sound and economically strong United States, argued Clay and Webster, the legislative prerogative had to be maintained and utilized to its fullest limits.

Just as it has been alleged that the Whigs had no distinct, definite set of political beliefs, it is interesting to note that the same
charge has been levied against Andrew Jackson. Two prominent historians have written that Old Hickory completely lacked any concrete, intellectualized concepts of political philosophy.\(^{34}\) Always a man of action, Jackson was never a theoretician by temperament. Tocqueville described the Old Hero as a "Federalist by taste and a Republican by calculation."\(^{35}\) Another writer characterized Jackson as "a man of action and an opportunist." He was skillful at bending the will of the public to his own ends, and he excelled in a democratic-oriented rhetoric to achieve his objectives. "Jackson never really championed the cause of the people," Abernethy stated, "he only invited them to champion his."\(^{36}\) A leading scholar of American banking has noted that Jackson "paid no heed to [the Bank's] merits," but instead injected divisive themes of rich versus poor, which was "good politics"; the Jacksonians "had no greater concern for human rights than the people who had what they were trying to get."\(^{37}\)

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\(^{35}\) Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 431.


Whether or not it is true that Jackson did not believe that
the world was round, as Nicholas P. Trist, later chief clerk of the
State Department, remembered hearing a relative of the General's
comment, "What counts is that Jackson was popular." In the
campaign of 1832, Clay, Webster, and the National Republicans had
presented the electorate with firm political and philosophical positions
founded on reason and intellect, particularly on the vital question of
executive usurpations and the presidential veto of the bank. However,"[t]he Democracy issued no statement of principles. Jackson was
its platform, and the Bank veto was its chief plank." As Repre-
sentative Nathaniel Niles of New Hampshire said to William C.
Rives of Virginia, Jackson's "whole course in life has been dictated
by emotion in contradistinction to reason." The General, with his
immense popularity, and his class-conscious, divisive rhetoric,
based on emotional appeals to the people, was a masterful politician.
Clay and Webster, who employed more reserved, logical, and closely-
reasoned arguments, simply could not attract the votes of the
masses.


39 Van Deusen, Jacksonian Era, p. 67.

40 Quoted in ibid., p. 99.
Andrew Jackson was overwhelmingly re-elected in the presidential contest of 1832. Clay's defeat signified the end of the "available" candidates, who were identified with the National Republican party. The old organization of Clay and John Quincy Adams was obliterated. Despite the temporary, unionist-oriented alliance of Webster and Jackson during the subsequent nullification crisis of 1832-33, the basic ideological and philosophical strains on such an alliance were too severe to bear by 1834. The National Republican party was effectively destroyed by the disaster of 1832, as was the fledgling Antimasonic party. The time was ripe for the emergence of a new party which could unite all the various forces and elements which had only one common sole objective: the defeat of Andrew Jackson. Often political adversaries, but always philosophical allies, Clay and Webster were the natural leaders and spokesmen of the new Whig party.

After the successful resolution of the nullification crisis of 1832-33, Jackson resumed his war on the Bank; his objective was to end absolutely its power and influence even before the charter was to expire in 1836. According to Old Hickory's trusted advisor, Amos Kendall, the Bank was corrupt, immoral, and a serious threat to the

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best interests of the country; another Jacksonian, Attorney General Roger B. Taney, declared the Bank to be unconstitutional. Armed with the opinions of these two close lieutenants, Jackson decided to remove the government's deposits from the Second Bank, even though Congress had previously declared the money to be safe. 42

The president directed Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane to remove the deposits; when he refused to do so, he was transferred from his post to the state department. Jackson then named William J. Duane, a Philadelphia lawyer and respected authority on economic and financial matters, to head the treasury department. When he, too, declined to comply with the president's orders to remove the deposits, he was abruptly fired. Both men were removed from office solely because they honestly believed that the government's funds were secure in the Bank and that to place the money in state banks would be both inflationary and destructive of public confidence in the economy. Nevertheless, Jackson was determined to destroy once and for all the power of the Bank. After the firing of McLane and Duane, he appointed Roger B. Taney, the attorney general, to the post of treasury secretary; he promptly

complied with Jackson's order. After withdrawing government funds from Biddle's Bank, Taney placed them in "pet" or state banks. These banks usually had one common feature: their management was strongly pro-Jackson. Because of their support of the president in the past and their assistance in bringing about his election, Jackson rewarded bank managers with the "spoils" of victory; he personally selected their banks to serve as the depositories for the government's money. 43

When the Twenty-Third Congress convened in December, 1833, Henry Clay immediately rose in the Senate to attack the president's actions; he demanded that Jackson provide senators with an exact copy of the memorandum concerning the withdrawal order, which the president had earlier read to his cabinet. Claiming executive privilege, Jackson refused to do so, even though a majority of senators supported Clay in his request. 44


44 U. S., Senate, Register of Debates, 23rd Cong., 1st sess., 1833, pp. 30-37. Clay's opening attack on Jackson signified the beginning of three months of heated discussion; it was the longest single debate in either house of Congress since 1789; Van Deusen, Life of Henry Clay, p. 280.
The Kentucky renewed his attacks on Jackson and his policies on December 26, 1833. Clay proposed two resolutions of censure, both of which strongly condemned the president's political philosophy and actions. The first resolution bitterly assailed Jackson for his dismissal of the former secretary of the treasury, Duane, because of his heartfelt and duty-inspired refusal to carry out the president's orders; Clay also decried the subsequent appointment of Taney, who felt no obligation other than executing the will of his political crony, Andrew Jackson. As Clay pointed out, "The president has assumed the exercise of a power over the treasury of the United States not granted to him by the Constitution and the laws, and [is] dangerous to the liberties of the people." The second resolution of censure was aimed at Taney, whose reasons for removing the government's deposits struck Clay as being "unsatisfactory and insufficient." 45

After presenting his resolutions, Clay launched a broad attack on Jackson and his theory of the presidency. According to the Kentuckian, Andrew Jackson's irresponsible use of the veto, his arbitrary use of the removal power, and his general disregard of both laws and traditions had the constant effect of thwarting the will of the people and their representatives in Congress. Clay pleaded for

the "Senate and the people to discard all passion and prejudice, and to look calmly, but resolutely, upon the actual state of the Constitution and the country." Jackson's firing of the highly-principled Duane and the subsequent appointment of Taney, a political lackey who had immediately acquiesced to the president's will, was utterly reprehensible. Clay forcefully argued, "[I]t is that union of the purse and the sword, in the hands of one man, which constitutes the best definition of tyranny which our language can give."

Continuing his assault on both Jackson and Taney and on the president's cabinet, Clay asserted that "there is a cabal behind the curtain, without character and without responsibility, feeding the passions, stimulating prejudices, and molding the action of [the president]..." Such actions, said Clay, indicate that "The administration must have a poor opinion of the virtue and intelligence of the people of the United States..." He warned that "We are in the midst of a revolution, hitherto bloodless, but rapidly tending toward a total change of the pure republican character of the government, and to the concentration of all power in the hands of one man." Clay predicted that if Jackson's policies were not halted, by 1837 American republicanism would be unrecognizable: "the government will have been transformed into an elective monarchy--the worst of

46 Ibid., pp. 577, 588.
all forms of government."

Concluding his lengthy attack, Clay asserted that "The eyes and hopes of the American people are anxiously turned to Congress." The people had been "deceived," "insulted," "abused," and "betrayed" by Jackson. They were aware that there has been a dangerous, possibly fatal, consolidation of power in the person of Jackson; such power, the Kentuckian stressed, subverted the liberties of the people, the Congress, and consequently, "the will of one man alone prevails and [it] governs the republic." If Congress were not to act quickly and effectively in countering the "tyranny" inherent in Jacksonism, Clay predicted that the inevitable "collapse will soon come on, and we shall die--ignobly die! Base, mean, and abject slaves--the scorn and contempt of mankind--unpityied, unwept, and unmourned."

Clay's warnings were well-received during the winter and spring of 1834; men of intelligence and reason from the South, North, and East rallied to his side. In the Senate, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina agreed that removal of the deposits was indeed contrary to the Constitution and little short of tyranny; he observed that "We have a great battle to fight for liberty and the

48 Ibid., pp. 619-20.
Constitution." In an optimistic mood, he prophesied that the anti-Jackson forces would ultimately triumph: "I entertain no doubt that the administration will be overthrown. It has already received its death blow." In a moment of satisfaction, the "Cast-Iron Man" commented that at last his anti-Jackson philosophy was being favorably recognized and understood. Among the more "virtuous and intelligent" men, Calhoun noted, "my motives and characters" were finally being accepted. Writing to his son, Calhoun observed that "a great political revolution is going on." While the North recently had exacerbated the South during the nullification crisis, Calhoun said that because of Jackson's alleged executive usurpations, now "our doctrines are daily growing in favor" and that the North now looked to the South for support.

Calhoun's colleague from North Carolina, Willie P. Mangum, also supported Clay and the Whig banner. Echoing

49 Senate, Register of Debates, 23rd Cong., 1st sess., 1834, pp. 1172-84. While Calhoun did not really approve of the Bank, he believed that it was economically much superior to Jackson's personal control and administration of the pet bank scheme; see Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1950), pp. 264-66; Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, pp. 226-28.


51 Calhoun to James Calhoun, 8 February 1834, ibid., pp. 331-32.
Calhoun, Mangum believed that "The tyrant [Jackson] that they [the north] armed to enforce their unjust exactions, has turned and fixed his grip upon them." Considering possible Whig candidates for the presidential contest of 1836, Mangum expressed his conviction that while "there are many pretenders" who would lead the struggle against Jackson and his obvious, hand-picked successor, Martin Van Buren, "the only hope of success is in Mr. Clay."\(^5\)

During this period, Clay was cooperating with Nicholas Biddle in the latter's effort to use the remaining power of the B. U. S. to contract the money supply and to reduce its obligations and responsibilities as governmental funds dwindled. Biddle firmly believed that such policies, especially the calling in of loans, would create a mild recession which would force Jackson to allow a recharter of the Bank in order to restore prosperity. While Biddle's actions were economically and fiscally acceptable in December, 1833, by the winter and spring of 1834 his restrictive banking policies had created a tight money situation and a severe recession. In spite of the economic hardships which the people had to endure, Clay supported Biddle's strategy.\(^5\)


\(^5\) Biddle's use of the bank's economic power caused only a
While the Kentuckian supported Biddle's policies because he believed that the Bank must be rechartered, he was quite moved by the difficulties caused by Biddle's actions. On March 7, 1834, Clay presented Vice President Van Buren with a petition from the distressed working men of Philadelphia, whom he termed "real, practical, working men; intelligent, well-acquainted with the general [economic] conditions, and with the suffering of their particular community." He urged Van Buren to inform Jackson, "without exaggeration, but in the language of truth and sincerity, the actual condition of his bleeding country," which "prevades every class." To Clay, Jackson must be forced to recognize the need for a restoration of the Bank and a return to economic stability. 54

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54 Clay, Works of Henry Clay, 7:622; Jackson, however, was equally determined to maintain his course of action: "All who trade on borrowed capital ought to break." Quoted in United States Telegraph, 4 October 1835.
Continuing his discussion of the economic malaise brought on by Jackson's adamant refusal to restore the government's deposits and thus end the crisis, Clay stressed that "We should deal with the people, openly, frankly, [and] sincerely." The American people, said Clay, had always possessed the highest qualities of "virtue" and "intelligence," but they had been deceived and betrayed by an unfeeling and unresponsive president, a chief executive who has "prostituted the influence of his office to partisan and electioneering purposes." Clay pointed out that "The Whigs of the present day are opposing executive encroachment, and a most alarming extension of executive power and prerogative." He added further that the Whig party was "contending for the rights of the people, for civil liberties, for free institutions, [and] for the supremacy of the Constitution and the laws." Clay noted that while a "government may in form be free, in practice [it may be] tyrannical." The true index of a government's character, he said, was its "parental and beneficent operation" in the protection of its citizens. Assuming this concept to be valid, Clay exclaimed that he and his fellow Whigs in the Senate were "ready to defend the Constitution and to relieve the stresses of the people." Concluding on a forceful note, he exclaimed, "Senators, we have a highly responsible and arduous position; but the people are with us, and the path of
duty lies clearly marked before us."\textsuperscript{55}

While Henry Clay was attacking President Jackson's alleged executive usurpations in general and the removal of the deposits in particular during the winter of 1834, he was receiving constant and powerful support from Daniel Webster. Parrying the Jacksonians' charges that the Whig senators were mindlessly continuing to support the Bank and were evading their sworn responsibilities to the people during the economic crisis, the Massachusetts senator retorted in February, 1834, that "The Senate stands by the Constitution, the laws, and the country; and [it] always will." "Black Dan" refuted allegations that he and his Whig colleagues in the Senate were involved in a frivolous, metaphysical dialogue over the Bank issue when the crucial problem to be faced was creation of a solution which would end the business depression. Webster asserted that the issues of the Bank and the economy were inseparably intertwined and related, and that he was not prepared to abandon a full consideration of either. "I go, sir, for the country," he proclaimed, "for its Constitution, and its laws, and for relief from its present distress, and will not suffer myself to be turned aside from that great and paramount objective."\textsuperscript{56}


\textsuperscript{56} Nathans, \textit{Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy}, pp. 75-77; Webster, \textit{Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster}, 14: 181-83.
Continuing his attack on Jackson's removal of the deposits, on March 20, 1834, Webster delivered a major speech in the Senate; in this address, he appealed especially to those of the working class: the farmers, mechanics, and laborers, "the industrious and [the] enterprising."

Denying that he defended the Bank solely because of vested self-interest, Webster carefully pointed out that he was acting only in the people's behalf. "It will be wise to regard [the people's] protest," said the "Defender of the Constitution," "[because they] are earnest who make it," and the government should not "be deaf to those whom it is addressed."

Webster attacked the tactics of the Jacksonians; to him, the president did little but "appeal to the prejudices of the people" and excite them needlessly in a demagogic fashion about non-existent threats to their liberties. To Webster, such methods were reprehensible. As he pointed out, he always attempted to address "the good sense and . . . the patriotism of the people, and not to their prejudices."

The Bank had been in existence for forty years, said Webster, and it had proved beneficial to all classes of people. "Do men

57 Ibid., pp. 213-14.
58 Ibid., pp. 215-16.
59 Ibid., p. 217.
of intelligence, in or out of Congress," he asked, "really believe that there is danger to public liberty [because of] the bank?"

Answering resolutely his own question, he exclaimed, "I hardly think it possible." According to Webster, the Bank war was the result of petty party politics, devised and prosecuted by the Democrats for their own selfish partisan advantages. If, however, the Jacksonians believed they had fooled the people, "They deceive only themselves." In a thunderous conclusion, he exclaimed that "This people, sir, are not a people to be satisfied merely with opinions from high places." The American people have intelligence, the capacity for reason, and a good sense of vision, he argued. Therefore,

If they believe the laws to have been violated, they will insist that they be redressed; if they feel severe distresses, arising from political mismanagement, they will demand relief, and will continue to demand it, and, until it is obtained, they will not be hushed into quiet by any lullaby whatsoever.⁶⁰

As always, Webster believed that Congress, under his able leadership, was the proper body to offer relief and remedy to the people.

Throughout the winter and spring of 1834, Clay, Calhoun, and Webster continued their battle against the alleged executive usurpations of Andrew Jackson, especially with regard to the Bank issue.

While the president had much support from his party, the Whigs were unified, and their attacks became even more intense. As a merchant in Leasburg, North Carolina, wrote Senator Willie P. Mangum, "There is no act of Gen. Jackson's publick [sic] life which has had so great a tendency to impair his popularity . . . as his unwarrantable assumption or abuse of power in the removal of the public deposits. . . ." A similar sentiment was later expressed to Mangum by Edward Dudley, a prominent North Carolina Whig. Commenting on the growing public opposition to Jackson and his policies, Dudley noted that "Our state is undergoing considerable change--General Jackson's tyranny [and] folly has alarmed [and] disgusted many of his old friends--among the intelligent part of the community, a Jacksonian is a rare bird."62

While Jackson was being assailed by his many adversaries, a growing number of people applauded the Whigs for their fierce struggle against Old Hickory and the Democrats. As an unidentified correspondent wrote to Colonel David Crockett of Tennessee, "Tell [Clay] to go on conquering and to conquer--That he has the law [and] the Constitution [and] right on his side." Continuing, the writer

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61 Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, p. 231; James Lea to Willia P. Mangum, 21 February 1834, Mangum, Mangum Papers, ed. Shanks, 2:98.

62 Edward B. Dudley to Mangum, 23 March 1834, ibid., p. 127.
predicted that within six months the West and the South would be united "on the side of liberty [and] law, and against the unjust encroachments of Executive usurpations."63 A characteristic comment on the Jacksonian-Whig battle was provided by John Branch, a North Carolina merchant and local politician, in a letter to Mangum. Branch asked the North Carolina senator to offer his congratulations and thanks to Clay, Calhoun, and Webster "for their coalition in defense of virtue, liberty, and law, assaild [sic] as all are by a banditti clothed with power [and] patronage."64 By the spring of 1834, it was becoming apparent that a growing number of people agreed with John Chavis' observation: "What noble fellows are Clay [and] Webster!"65

Not everyone shared such sentiments, of course; least of all, Andrew Jackson. Ever resolute in denying the constitutional arguments of Clay, Webster, and other Whigs, he wrote his adopted son that "It is not I, but the Senate who have usurped power and violated the Constitution." He charged that "if ever our republic is overthrown, it will be by a venal Senate usurping all power and forming

63 A. M. H. to David Crockett, 2 April 1834, ibid., pp. 134-35.
64 John Branch to Mangum, 16 March 1834, ibid., pp. 123-24.
65 John Chavis to Mangum, 26 February 1834, ibid., p. 103.
an alliance with a corrupt monied monopoly."

The contest between Jackson and the Whigs concerning executive usurpation and especially the bank issue reached a climax on March 28, 1834. While the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives refused to concur, Senate Whigs on that date were able to muster enough votes to approve Clay's resolutions of censure against the president. However victorious this triumph might have seemed to the Whigs at the moment, it was short-lived. The congressional elections of 1834 resulted in the Democrats' becoming the majority party in the Senate (twenty-seven to twenty-five).

Under the leadership of Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, the Jacksonians in 1837 were sufficiently powerful to expunge or to pencil-out Clay's resolutions of censure from the Senate journal. Senate Democrats, ever loyal to their president, had thereby committed an act which had no precedent in American history. A leading political scientist has written, "Never before and never since has the Senate so abased itself before a President."67


Thus Andrew Jackson had defeated the Whigs on the critical bank issue which had raged for several years. Biddle abandoned his policies of fiscal restriction in May, 1834, and with one of the major causes of the economic crisis removed, prosperity slowly returned. The charter of the Bank expired in 1836. Although it was immediately rechartered as a state bank in Pennsylvania, its once-formidable power and influence was gone.

Jackson's victory, while impressive, did not gain him any respite from the Whigs' attacks on his policies; although the bank issue was no longer the burning issue it once had been, Clay and Webster continued to assail Old Hickory's alleged executive usurpations. However, because of the demise of the bank issue, the Whigs had been robbed of a viable and tangible political controversy upon which they could have directed their considerable strength; however, they quickly discovered new issues and new questions over which the perennial fiery dialogue with the Jacksonians could be renewed.

Within a matter of months of their defeat on the bank struggle,

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several Whig candidates for the presidency emerged, and the contest with the Democrats for the White House in 1836 began.
CHAPTER III

THE POLITICS OF AVAILABILITY

The events of 1832-33 had a profound effect on American politics. Andrew Jackson had emerged as a great champion of the Union and of the "common man" in the struggle against the Bank. Under his leadership, the Democratic party had emerged as the organization with which the ordinary citizens identified. Small farmers, fishermen, city laborers, state bankers opposed to the national Bank, and many businessmen favored the Democratic party. At the same time, because of his threatened actions against the state of South Carolina, many southern planters and other states' rights advocates who formerly had supported Jackson could no longer give him their unquestioned loyalty. ¹

Although Jackson's policies and actions during the nullification crisis and the bank war had unified many diverse elements and factions destined to become the Whig party, there was little in the way of substantive agreement on any singular political philosophy, except

for a unanimous hatred of Andrew Jackson and his designated successor, Martin Van Buren of New York. In addition, sectional problems and controversies made selection of a Whig presidential candidate who was acceptable to the entire party as well as to the nation difficult, if not impossible. Accordingly, the Whigs did not select their presidential candidates through the mechanism of a national convention as they would probably only have "agreed to disagree"; instead, state legislatures and conventions put forth the names of local favorites. ²

John McLean of Ohio, associate justice of the Supreme Court, was the first anti-Jacksonian to announce his candidacy. The former postmaster general under John Quincy Adams was somewhat of a perennial candidate for the presidency, having campaigned strenuously but unsuccessfully for the nomination in 1832 as a fusion candidate of a coalition of National Republicans and Antimasons. When Henry Clay eagerly accepted the National Republican party's presidential nomination in 1832, McLean, who had never really affiliated with the Antimasons, dropped out of the contest because he

believed he had no chance of victory; consequently, the Antimasonic party turned to William Wirt of Maryland, former attorney general (1817-29), as their standard bearer.\(^3\)

Judge McLean's strategy for the campaign of 1836 was to appeal to the disgruntled and disaffected voters of all parties, factions, and sections of the country. By mid-1835, however, he realized that he had little support other than in his home State of Ohio; wisely, he left the presidential race. Such an act was probably difficult for him; earlier, John Quincy Adams had observed that McLean rarely thought of anything "but the Presidency by day and dreamed of nothing else at night."\(^4\)

A more formidable anti-Jackson candidate emerged when Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee was persuaded in 1835 to seek the presidency. White, like McLean, was not really a true Whig at this time; while McLean had been somewhat of a political independent much like John Quincy Adams, White was formerly a devout


Jacksonian Democrat. However, he had become angered over Jackson's advocacy of Martin Van Buren as his successor in 1836; furthermore, White was quite displeased by Old Hickory's unrestricted use of patronage in the executive department in order to guarantee the succession of the Red Fox to the presidency.

Philosophically, he was quite similar to orthodox Democrats: he was a devout states' rights advocate, opposed the protective tariff, detested a national bank, and he strongly opposed the use of federal monies for internal improvements. White's principal issue, which he shared with the consolidationist northern and western Whigs, was his opposition to Jackson's accumulation and use of power in the executive branch.

With White's strength in the South waxing and McLean's waning throughout the country, the western Whigs in early 1835 put forth the name of William Henry Harrison of Ohio as their candidate for the presidency. Harrison's chief political asset was his military reputation, earned largely through his exploits during the War of 1812, especially his great triumph at the Battle of Tippecanoe.

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Harrison had served as governor of Indiana territory before the war; in the 1820's, he was elected to Congress, serving first as a member of the House of Representatives and later in the Senate. In 1828, he was appointed minister to Colombia by Secretary of State Henry Clay. He was removed from office in 1829 by Andrew Jackson and retired from national politics; shortly after returning to Ohio, Harrison was appointed to an insignificant position as county clerk. While he had held high governmental positions, Harrison had few if any strongly-held political beliefs concerning the issues of the day. Although he lacked any clearly-defined political ideology, he was hard-working, honorable, honest, and immensely popular with people in the West. Everywhere he went while campaigning, "Old Tippecanoe" was enthusiastically greeted "by the people, not partisans, [who] came forth en masse to tender him respect." The French traveler, Michel Chevalier, described him as being poor, forgotten by the federal government in spite of his past heroic military feats, but "yet vigorous, because he has the independence to think for himself." 6

Like McLean had done and White was attempting to do, Harrison tried to avoid any close identification with the Whig party; rather, he sought to appeal to disgruntled members of both major parties as well as to independent voters. Nicholas Biddle's comments regarding Harrison's campaign strategy was both descriptive and prescriptive: Old Tip should reveal nothing of his political philosophy!

If General Harrison is taken up as a candidate, it will be on account of the past, not the future. Let him say not one single word about his principles, or his creed--let him say nothing, promise nothing. Let no committee . . . extract from him a single word, about what he thinks now, or what he will do hereafter.

While such advice ordinarily would not appear to be sound from a philosophical or ethical position, from a political perspective it ultimately proved to be sagacious. 7

Although three anti-Jacksonians had announced their candidacy for the presidential election of 1836, the Whig slate of nominees was not yet completed. While McLean, White, and Harrison were politicians with solid reputations, they were not statesmen. Daniel Webster, however, was such a man; by the winter of 1834, the

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champion of New England began his drive toward a Whig nomination and, hopefully, the presidency.

Webster delivered a powerful speech in October, 1834, at Concord, New Hampshire; his subject was executive despotism and Andrew Jackson's disregard of both the people and the Constitution. Lashing out at the president's position on the patronage, the bank issue, and excessive use of the veto, Webster exclaimed, "I believe the country is in danger. I believe the danger is real, urgent, [and] pressing." Attacking the personal tyranny which characterized Jacksonism, he thundered, "men are nothing, the country everything." 8

As in the famous debates of 1830 with Robert Y. Hayne, Webster in this speech postulated an organic theory of government which holds that the people collectively, rather than the states, created the Union and adopted the Constitution. This Constitution, argued Webster, is "the bond which binds together" all the people of the United States, regardless of class, occupation, or geographical section. The "people in their intelligence," in 1789, accepted the Constitution, said Webster, and now in 1834, "the current generation," the young men of the country, are at this moment its main

hope. With the principles of the Constitution under attack and the Union endangered, "it was time," he concluded, "for the people to rise for their own rescue."\(^9\)

Webster, of course, believed himself to be the one man who could insure the deliverance of the American people. To his credit, many influential citizens, adversaries and friends alike, felt similarly. His perennial political foe, Martin Van Buren, observed that "Mr. Webster had a right to think that his talents were, in some respects, superior, and in all, at least, equal to those of Mr. Clay." Even Andrew Jackson grudgingly admitted that Webster had great personal and moral qualities; the Old Hero, however, noted that these lofty attributes were not always desirable from a political standpoint. Webster, said Jackson quite prophetically, would never be president because he was "too far east, knows too much, and is too honest."\(^10\)

By New Year's Day, 1835, Webster had decided that the time was appropriate for his nomination by his willing sponsor, the Massachusetts legislature; moreover, he believed that it was

\(^9\)Ibid., pp. 45, 37.

increasingly apparent that Henry Clay was not planning on becoming an active Whig candidate for the presidency. As Webster wrote to an associate in early January, "[I]f Massachusetts is to act at all, the time has come." His optimism was strengthened by Clay's declaration that he was standing "in nobody's way." 

In mid-January, Whigs in the Massachusetts legislature officially put forth the name of Daniel Webster as their candidate for the presidency in the forthcoming election. Realizing that the Whigs already had several sectional candidates in the field, men who exhibited a few deeply held principles except an intense enmity toward the Jacksonians, the legislature issued a statement which outlined their reasons for nominating that highly-principled nationalist, Daniel Webster.

It is impossible to reconcile all the differences of this wide land; but there is one question in which all parts of it have the same interest. Let that be made the rallying point of the Whigs. Let us be for the Constitution, and the man who can best defend it. 

A meeting of Boston Whigs approved fifteen resolutions of support for Webster and urged the thinking people throughout the nation to consider the resolutions in a serious manner, as the

11 Webster to Jeremiah Mason, 1 January 1835, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:245-46.

12 Quoted in the Washington National Intelligencer, 26 January 1835.
Constitution and the Union were at stake. The resolutions addressed

... our friends--the friends of liberty, by whatever they are designated, throughout the union, on all who reverence the constitution, on all who wish for a government of laws and a charter of civil rights, to descend to their children, to rise as one man and go with us; to forget local preferences and individual partialities; to act on pure principle; to hasten to the rescue of the country, and to assign the highest trust ... to the man of whom it was declared by William Lowndes, that "the north had not his equal, nor the south his superior."13

Two private citizens summed up the attitudes of Webster's supporters. In his diary, Philip Hone wrote that "the very thought ... of having Daniel Webster President of the United States should make the heart of every American leap in his bosom and cause him to dream of the days of George Washington." Somewhat less enthralling but perhaps more succinctly stated was the comment of one Mr. Bates, a Massachusetts legislator, who exclaimed that he would "rather sink with Daniel Webster than swim with any other candidate."14

With the nomination of Webster, the Whig slate of candidates was complete. The overall grand strategy of the anti-Jacksonians was to run sectional candidates, disrupt or dilute the Jacksonians' strength in all quarters, and ultimately cause the House of Representatives to be forced to select the next president. If this scheme were to be successful, the chances of one Whig candidate winning all the house's Whig votes and thereby the presidency were excellent. 15

In the meantime, Martin Van Buren was chosen by the Jackson-controlled Democratic convention, filled with office-holders, which met in Baltimore, Maryland, in May, 1835. Many Democratic delegates to the convention, however, were appalled by the dictatorial, heavy-hand methods used by the Old Hero in order to bring about the nomination of his vice-president, the Little Magician from Kinderhook, New York. The Whigs were even more shocked by such a demonstration of Jackson's iron will; Philip Hone's reaction to Jackson's demonstration of his immense personal power at the Democratic convention: "God help the people."16


The real issue in the election of 1836 was the strong, authoritarian personality of Andrew Jackson and the record of his two terms in office. 17 In order to triumph, the Whigs would have to make perfectly clear to the electorate their constant, fundamental charge that the republic, its Constitution, and its traditions were in an immediate danger of extinction due to the Jacksonians' concept and execution of presidential power. However, except for Webster, the anti-Jacksonian presidential candidates did little more than simply skirt this genuine philosophical problem, and then they attacked the issue of executive usurpation only in the most vague, general terms.

McLean had virtually dropped out of the presidential race by early 1835. Hugh L. White said little of a positive nature; instead, he only reiterated traditional anti-Jackson slogans and policies. In a letter to a Kentucky congressman, Sherrod Williams, White stated that he was in favor of a national Bank, an internal improvements policy, limited executive power and patronage, and a strict, Jeffersonian-like interpretation of the Constitution. 18 Aside from these general, orthodox positions, he revealed little

17 Van Deusen, *Jacksonian Era*, p. 112.

evidence of a closely-reasoned, deeply-held ideology. William Henry Harrison likewise occupied a lukewarm, mild, but safely Whiggish position. Replying to letters from the aforementioned congressman Williams and from a former member of Jackson's first cabinet, John M. Berrien of Georgia, Harrison gave almost identical responses concerning his political beliefs as had Judge White. 19 Both White and Harrison were extremely popular men with few political enemies. Although neither man was controversial, neither were they men of great wisdom, reason, or conviction. They were not the kind of leaders who could reach the minds and penetrate the intellect of educated, articulate people. While they were carrying on inoffensive, low-key campaigns which were designed with little in mind other than a banal currying of the voters' favor, Daniel Webster launched his energetic, enthusiastic presidential campaign.

Throughout 1835 and 1936, Webster stressed his past service to the country and his desire to be allowed to continue his leadership as a president who would be non-sectional, non-partisan, favoring no one class, a harmonizer of all political, economic, and social

19 Cleaves, Old Tippecanoe, p. 303; Harrison's reply is summarized in Goebel, William Henry Harrison, pp. 316-17; Harrison to Berrien, 4 November 1836, quoted in Washington Globe, 2 July 1840.
conflicts. His greatest desire was to provide the nation with a traditional leadership reminiscent of the first American party system, a system characterized by the guidance of wise, independent public servants who were somewhat above and removed from the base, often irrational masses of the people. Webster and his supporters sought to portray him as a man of "intellect," "diligence," and "high devotion to the public good." His campaign was conducted toward the notion of returning once more to an older, more traditional style and philosophy of leadership based on reason and intelligence.  

Many sources, both public and private, heartily concurred. In an obvious allusion to Jackson and Harrison alike, whose fame was grounded on military exploits, the *Pittsburg Advocate* commented that its choice for the presidency was "simply Daniel Webster, not General or Colonel Webster." The *Advocate* stressed that military appeal was too superficial and hollow; Webster alone was "the great man of the country."  

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21 As quoted in the *National Intelligencer*, 28 October 1835.
Before launching his attack on the alleged executive usurpations of Andrew Jackson and the continuing transgressions of the legislative prerogative which he expected would continue if Van Buren were to succeed Old Hickory, Webster realized that he must disassociate himself from the national Bank issue. Although he personally believed in the Bank's worth to the country and had defended it earnestly for years, he was quite cognizant of the institution's unpopularity with much of the electorate. Because he recognized that the people's wishes must be respected and obeyed, he conceded defeat on the long and bitterly contested bank question. In February, 1835, he declared it to be a closed matter. Only the year before, Henry Clay had reluctantly but wisely come to the same conclusion; as he wrote Biddle, the bank question was detrimental to any chance of Whig success in future presidential elections, and the party should instead return to the older theme of executive usurpation. 22

Accordingly, Webster delivered a major speech in the Senate on February 16, 1835, in which he bitterly attacked Old Hickory's high-handed actions in making appointments, effecting removals from office in an arbitrary manner, and generally abusing the patronage system. Such irresponsible actions, argued Webster, circumvented

22 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 7:200; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:27; Clay to Nicholas Biddle, 2 February 1834, Biddle Correspondence, ed. McGrane, p. 220.
the fundamental principles of republican government. Traditional republican theory supposes that men who have the right of suffrage also possess "honest, intelligent judgement and manly independence." As one of those thinking men who are "looking to the present and [who are] looking also to the future," Webster forcefully declared that the spoils system as practiced by Jackson completely negated the actions of a wise electorate. Instead of acting independently and on a basis of principle, candidates for high appointive office rally around only the dispensor of the patronage. Rather than being concerned with the public good, persons desiring appointment to high office practice only "pliant subserviency and gross adulation. All throng and rush together to the altar of manworship." Therefore, "blind devotion to party, and to the head of a party, thus takes place of the sentiment of generous patriotism and a high and exalted sense of public duty."²³

At the same time, Webster exclaimed, when the president decides to remove an appointed public official from office, he should inform the Senate, which had originally concurred in the appointment, as to the reasons for the removal. Arbitrary removals from office by the president, Webster said, were just as evil and contrary to good republican government as irresponsible appointments.

²³Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 7:179-87.
Webster urged that the Senate assume the right to share in the power of removal; only then can the evils he arrested which "beset the progress of the government, and seriously threaten its future prosperity." 24

The Defender of the Constitution campaigned vigorously during the entire year of 1835; each month he offered an important speech to his constituents and supporters in New England. When taking his case before the people, Webster consistently and in a logical, articulate manner hit hard at Andrew Jackson's alleged despotic and tyrannical executive usurpations, and the inevitability of the continuing of such unwise policies if Martin Van Buren were elected. At the same time, he stressed the necessity of preserving and safeguarding such noble concepts, institutions, and traditions in America as liberty, the Union, and the Constitution. Although such words obviously were important to the other Whigs and the Democrats, they were especially significant to Webster.

While debating with John C. Calhoun on the force bill in 1833, Webster defined his concept of the Union:

The Union is not a temporary partnership of States. It is the association of the people, under a constitution of Government, uniting their power, joining together their highest interests, cementing their present

24 Ibid., pp. 186-99.
enjoyments, and blending, in one indivisible mass, all their hopes for the future.  

For Webster, the Union was not simply an organic entity; rather, it was an absolute end in itself. It was a religious, transcendental, mystical concept that spanned the generations in such a manner as to bind all men of the past, present, and future together.  

Along with the idea of the Union, Webster revered and always defended his particular notions of the concepts and meanings of liberty and the Constitution. Like the Union, liberty and the Constitution were quite metaphysical entities; nevertheless, they were at the same time absolute and concrete. During his first public post-nomination speech, in April, 1835, at Lexington, Massachusetts, Webster proposed the following sentiment: "The liberty and the union of the United States, may both be perpetual." In the following October, he urged his listeners at Hallowell, Maine, to devote themselves "to country rather than party; men must defend their blessed heritage and transmit it to posterity. Principles, not men,  

25 Senate, Register of Debates, 21st Cong., 1st sess., 1833, p. 571.  


27 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 13: 57-58.
should be the focus of worship." In conclusion, Webster proposed a toast to "The Constitution of the United States: The proudest inheritance of the American people." As Webster remarked in 1836 in a speech delivered at Harvard College, "much of past honor, of present enjoyment, and future hope was expressed in those few words, 'The Constitution of the United States.'"

Addressing the people of Bangor, Maine, in August, 1835, Webster declared that because of the blessings of liberty, a strong Union, and a wise constitutional form of parental, paternalistic government directed by intelligent men with high principles, the majority of Americans enjoyed a constantly rising economic status. He argued, however, that Andrew Jackson and his wrong-headed, self-seeking followers were threatening to undo all the progress achieved and attained over the years. Webster asserted that there can be nothing more "repugnant," more "hostile," or more "destructive," than "excessive, unlimited, unconstitutional confidence in men."

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28 Ibid., pp. 59-60.

29 Ibid., p. 61.

30 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 2: 164.
Attacking Andrew Jackson and his theory that he, as president, was the one true, immediate, and direct representative of the people, and as such possessed virtually limitless power, Webster earlier had remarked that such a notion "is not the language of the Constitution. The Constitution nowhere calls him the representative of the American people; still less, their direct representative." Continuing with this theme in his Bangor speech, he pleaded that "no one can be a true friend of that liberty . . . [who] shall assume to exercise an authority above the Constitution and the laws." As Webster pointed out, such "a government is not a government of laws," but a "despotism," regardless of what it might be called. He argued in conclusion that "There is no usurpation so dangerous as that which comes in the borrowed name of the people."32

While Webster was campaigning in 1835 and 1836, several crises, both foreign and domestic, rapidly developed. This provided him with an excellent opportunity to translate his lofty, intellectual philosophy into concrete political positions. The first significant crisis was a sudden conflict with France which offered the real


32 Ibid., 2:164-65.
possibility of war. The United States and France had concluded a
treaty in 1832 which stated that the French government would pay
the American government twenty-five million francs as an indemnity
for losses suffered by United States shipping during the wars of the
French Revolution. In return, the United States promised to lower
its tariff on French wines. While the American government had in
good faith met its treaty obligations, the French legislature refused
to appropriate the money which was due the United States. Enraged
at this perfidy, Andrew Jackson, in his annual message to Congress
in 1832, had issued a stern, warlike threat that the United States
would "take redress in their own hands"; he also requested congres-
sional authority to seize forcibly all French property if their govern-
ment did not immediately fulfill their treaty obligations. 33

The French government reacted to Jackson's harsh words by
recalling their charge d'affaires to the United States, Alphonse Pageot;
shortly thereafter, the American government responded in similar

fashion, requesting that its minister, Edward Livingston, return to Washington. Suddenly, an air of tension swept across the country. While most Democrats rallied to the side of their aggressive president, the Whigs were horrified at the prospect of a war with a major European power, a war that was unnecessary and would have disastrous results for the United States. As Philip Hone noted, the matter of the French indemnity was "hardly worth going to war about, unless there should be some point of national honor so deeply involved as to forbid a calculation of dollars and cents," which he believed was not the case. Hone correctly understood that Jackson's threat to issue letters of marque and to order reprisals would only infuriate the French unnecessarily and further inflame the crisis.

Jackson's supporters were numerous and faithful, however, and they would follow him, "right or wrong." As Hone lamented, "The Constitution and the laws may stand in the way, but those are trifles." He believed that Jackson's course of action would inevitably lead to war unless the president was checked by the Senate, "where we may yet look for patriotism and public virtue, and there we

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rest our cause."\textsuperscript{35}

Sensing that the French crisis presented a volatile question of war and peace, the Whig senators launched a bitter, powerful attack on the warlike Jacksonians, whom they considered to be acting irrationally as well as recklessly. In January, 1835, presidential candidate Daniel Webster offered his position on the dangerous confrontation: "It seems to me that our [proper] course is peace, and that determination should be expressed in the fewest words."\textsuperscript{36} Henry Clay, chairman of the foreign relations committee in the Senate, was of the same sentiment; accordingly, on January 14, 1835, the full chamber adopted unanimously his resolution that the president's request for the authorization of letters of marque and the institution of a policy of reprisals be denied.\textsuperscript{37}

Clay's proposed course of action, like Webster's, was one characterized by a spirit of intelligence, moderation, conciliation, and if necessary, compromise. The Kentuckian's strong leadership was praised by many fair-minded, reasonable citizens. Ex-president James Madison wrote to Clay two weeks after the passage

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 125.

\textsuperscript{36}Senate, \textit{Register of Debates}, 23rd Cong., 2d sess., 1835, pp. 208-19.

of his resolution: "The document is as able in its execution as it is laudable in its object of avoiding war without incurring dishonor."  

Numerous people agreed with Nicholas Biddle, who stated that had Henry Clay been president at this time, the unfortunate "mismanaged affair would have never occurred."  

While the French crisis smoldered, an internal conflict in Congress erupted. As the second session of the Twenty-Third Congress drew to a close in March, 1835, John Quincy Adams, Whiggish but independent, proposed in the House of Representatives that its members appropriate sufficient money for a possible outbreak of war. An amendment was added which would provide an additional contingency fund of three million dollars to be placed in the hands of the president for any sudden emergencies that might arise between that date and the opening of the next Congress the following December, some nine months away. 

While the Democrats in the House of Representatives were successful in persuading that chamber to approve the so-called "fortifications bill," along with the aforementioned amendment, the Whigs in the Senate, led by Webster and Clay, rebelled in shock at

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38 Madison to Clay, 31 January 1835, ibid., 5:388-89.

39 Biddle to Clay, 4 January 1835, ibid., pp. 386-87.

the prospect of handing Jackson money which could be, and they believed indeed would be, used to prosecute a war with France while the Congress was in recess. Webster was aghast at what he considered to be a carte blanche gift of money to the president, without any responsible congressional supervision over the use of the funds. Clay exclaimed that "Preparation for war may lead to war." The third member of the Whig triumverate, John C. Calhoun, asserted that the amendment "assumes a war with France before Congress meets again." 41

Because of the Whig-dominated Senate's refusal to agree to the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives' "three million dollar bill," Congress adjourned on March 4 without providing Jackson with the contingency fund. During the congressional recess, the crisis became more intense; the French government agreed to pay the first installment on its debt to the United States, but only if Andrew Jackson would provide a satisfactory explanation for his warlike, belligerent message of December, 1832. Jackson refused to do so. While the Whigs charged him with attempting to provoke a war deliberately, the Democrats accused the Whigs of cowardice and dishonor. The Boston Globe represented Whig thinking when it alleged that "something must be done to keep up an

41 Quoted in ibid., p. 317.
excitement in the public mind so as to concentrate the thoughts and
the views of the people" on General Jackson, and "divert them
from Mr. Van Buren." It added, "This has been one of the great
objects of this attempt to get up a war with France." The
Washington United States Telegraph termed any war between the
United States and France a "folly" and said this could only be pro-
duced through a "designed wrong-headedness" on the part of the
Democrats, especially Andrew Jackson.43 The Democrats were not
rational, thoughtful men anyway, charged the National Intelligencer;
rather, they "universally and on almost all occasions" express only
the "will of the 'party' whether it be their own will or not."44

The crisis reached a critical point when on January 15,
1836, Jackson issued a near-declaration of war on France; he
demanded that Congress pass an embargo act, vote appropriations to
enlarge the navy, and allocate money for strengthening coastal

42 Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the United
p. 202; Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, 1829-1839
(New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1949), pp. 242-44; United
States Telegraph, 6 July 1835, quoting the Boston Globe, n. d.

43 Washington United States Telegraph, 19 November 1835.

defenses. Waddy Thompson, senator from South Carolina, immediately answered Jackson's vitriolic message, calling it "erroneous, both in its parts and conclusions." Henry Clay demanded that Congress be sent all pertinent diplomatic documents concerning the affair in order that legislators be able to make an "intelligent" appraisal, for only Congress, not the president, had the constitutional power to declare war. If war should actually break out, charged Calhoun, "we are the authors of it." At what seemed the last possible moment, Great Britain offered to mediate the confrontation; Jackson accepted, and the crisis began to recede swiftly. To the Democrats, Andrew Jackson was not only the defender of the common man, now he was also the protector of American national honor. To the Whigs, however, he was now more than ever a power-mad tyrant, who had demonstrated that he would resort to war if necessary to attain his desired

45 Richardson, comp., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 2:1407-12; Jackson's message was "unnecessarily provocative," says Bailey, Diplomatic History, p. 203.


Defending the Whigs' opposition to Jackson's irrational and hot-tempered actions which had originated and intensified the French crisis, Henry Clay argued in a logical fashion that if war had actually occurred, it would not have been a war "in defense of our rights and liberties, not one in which our national honor was at stake." Rather, the conflict would have been the direct result of the belligerent and emotional actions, "language, and measures" of the president. He noted: "It would have been a war arising from false issues, false translations of diplomatic letters," and other trivial reasons which certainly did not warrant an armed conflict between former allies.  

As the crisis was reaching a peak in mid-February, 1836, Daniel Webster delivered an important speech, which was directed to the electorate as much as to his fellow lawmakers. Webster brilliantly defended with consummate skill and tightly-drawn logic the fundamental constitutional and legal objections that he and other Whig senators had entertained in denying the chief executive the contingency fund during the previous spring. Recounting the "three million dollar" bill's history, Webster pointed out that he had urged


49 Albany Evening Journal, 27 February 1836.
defeat of the amendment chiefly because "there was no enemy on our shores; there were no guns pointed at the capitol; we were in no war, nor was there a reasonable probability that we should have war, unless we made it ourselves." Secondly, since the president himself did not actually feel obliged to request formally the appropriation, asked Webster, why give him sufficient funds with which to make much mischief, if not war? As he asked his listeners, "If . . . it had been the purpose of both houses of Congress to create a military dictator, what formula had been better suited to their purposes than this vote of the House!" If the Senate had acquiesced, said Webster, "The whole war power would have been in the hands of the President."50

Continuing his assault on the Jacksonians, Webster lamented that this "devotion to men, in utter disregard both of principle and experience, [appears] to me to be strongly characteristic of our times." He exclaimed, "the Constitution is not yet an entire dead letter." If the Senate had voted to give the president the three millions, the constitutional precedents and practices of past years would be severely endangered; what would then happen, asked Webster rhetorically, "to those [people] who are to come after

50 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 7: 219-26.
These desecrations of the Constitution, commented Webster, were typical examples of the same "old story and the [same] old plea. It is the excuse of every one who desires more power than the Constitution or the laws give him, that if he had more power he could do more good." Bitterly assailing the Democrats, Webster argued that "Power is always claimed for the good of the people, and dictators are always made, when made at all, for the good of the people." Americans must make their decisions over great questions of war and peace on a basis of "intelligence," and if necessity forces the United States into a conflict with another nation, "we will make it constitutionally."52

In a moment of sober reflection, Webster admitted that "It is no pleasant enjoyment, no holiday business, to maintain opposition against power and against majorities, and to contend for stern and sturdy principles, against personal popularity. . . ." The "public intelligence" must be awakened, he argued; in the meantime, all Whigs must remain "true to our own principles." If Whigs ever abandoned their watch over the Constitution and their concern for public liberty, then "They are already among the living who

51Ibid., pp. 227-28.
52Ibid., p. 228.
will write the history of this government, from its commencement to its close."  

By late February, 1836, the British mediators had arranged a Franco-American reconciliation of the debt problems, and the French resumed their payments to the United States; Silas Wright, a leading spokesman for Jackson in Congress, declared the danger of war to be past. With the president's victory in foreign policy, the Whigs' great issue was prematurely destroyed. Jackson's personal triumph was particularly destructive to the campaign of Daniel Webster, who, as one historian has noted, "nearly gave up his political ghost..." Webster's partisan role in this national issue was perhaps the greatest mistake of his career. It ruined his chances for the Presidency." Webster, however, did not admit defeat; remaining true to his philosophy and principles, he continued to wage his campaign for the nation's highest office. Whenever there was an opportunity to attack the Jacksonians, he enthusiastically did so. One who bore the appellation, "Defender of the Constitution," could not and would not retreat from what he believed to be his duty.

53 Ibid., p. 229.


55 Van Deusen, Jacksonian Era, p. 103; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:37-38; Bemis, John Quincy Adams and the Union, pp. 322-24.
While the French crisis loomed large in 1835-36, another problem, potentially and ultimately much more severe, was making its appearance. Sectional disputes over the abolition of slavery and the annexation of Texas became definite factors in the election.56 Although the political aspects of slavery had been touched on in an abstract manner during the Missouri debates of 1819-21, now in 1835 the moral question inherent in the "peculiar institution" was beginning to emerge.57

During the decade of the 1830's, Congress was flooded with petitions from individuals and organizations which called for the abolition of slavery, particularly in the nation's capitol. As the voluminous requests from the abolitionists increased, so did the demands of the increasingly-defensive southerners for governmental action to keep such inflammatory literature from being sent through the mails to the slave states. While John C. Calhoun of South Carolina was strongly opposed to the sending of abolitionist literature into the South, he did not want the federal government to enact any laws specifically

56 Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:43.

prohibiting the transmission of such literature on the grounds that guarantees of freedom of speech and press would be violated.\textsuperscript{58}

In a positive response to his southern Democratic allies, Jackson urged that the Senate enact legislation which would prohibit the delivery of abolitionist material to the South. Clay and Webster were immediately placed in a difficult political and philosophical position. Fully 95 per cent of the abolitionist petitions had been presented by northern Whig congressmen; at the same time, most southern Whig congressmen were slaveholders.\textsuperscript{59}

Webster had always opposed the institution of slavery from a moral point of view; in 1833, he had declared that it was an "evil." Realizing acutely, however, that an immediate attempt by Congress to abolish slavery through the legislative process would possibly if not probably result in disaster to the nation, he urged instead that the legislatures of the southern states deal with this difficult problem. If the legislatures deemed abolition to be necessary and proper, it was their prerogative to abolish slavery. As Webster stated, "Congress has no authority to interfere in the emancipation of slaves, or


\textsuperscript{59}Richardson, comp., \textit{Messages and Papers of the Presidents}, 2:1394-95; Barnes, \textit{Antislavery Impulse}, pp. 118, 256; Van Deusen, \textit{Jacksonian Era}, p. 97.
in the treatment of them in any of the States."

He had not altered his position in 1835; as always, he argued that "The supremacy of the constitution and the laws is the foundation stone of republican institutions; if it be shaken or removed from its place, the whole system must totter to its fall." While Webster acknowledged that Congress had jurisdiction in all matters in the District of Columbia, including slavery, he also pointed out as other leading nationalistic-oriented spokesmen had, that Congress had no such power regarding the sustentation or abolition of slavery in the states. To Webster, all "reasonable" men could understand the validity and legitimacy of such an argument.

Being an advocate of conservatism, order, and stability, Webster was most afraid of allowing the slavery question to be discussed in Congress because of the grave implications for his beloved Union. Therefore, he opposed the "Incendiary Bill" of Calhoun, which would have forbidden postmasters to send or deliver abolitionist literature to any state having laws against such materials; in

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61 Webster to Harmar Denny, 20 November 1835, ibid., 18:14.

62 Ibid., 7:230-34; *National Intelligencer*, 9 July 1833.
Calhoun's bill, the federal government would enforce the law, but each state would decide for itself what the law regarding "incendiary" materials should include. According to Webster, such a law was an obvious violation of constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the press; such a disregard of both "reason" and constitutionality he was not prepared to accept. Literature sent through the mails belonged to the sender, stated Webster; true to his legalistic creed, he asserted that each postmaster could "not be a judge of property known to the Constitution and the laws." 63

Henry Clay also opposed Calhoun's bill, as well as the discussions in Congress of slavery in the District of Columbia, largely for the same reasons that Webster had noted. The Calhoun bill, said Clay, would denigrate the twin concepts of freedom of speech and press, and any open congressional debate over slavery would eventually lead to a violent racial conflict, followed closely by the disruption and destruction of the Union in a bloody civil war. 64

As events progressed, a sectional rather than partisan division in Congress resulted. Webster's and Clay's arguments

63 Ibid., 14:239-43; Albany Evening Journal, 12 March 1836.

prevailed in the Senate; the bill to exclude inflammatory abolitionist literature from the federal mails failed, although local postmasters in the South continued to refuse to deliver such material. In addition, antislavery petitions introduced into the Senate for consideration were immediately tabled and therefore virtually dead. While these volatile questions were temporarily settled in a reasonable, logical, and amicable manner, the growing conflict between abolitionists and defenders of slavery was gaining intensity. Whereas many past quarrels were essentially of a partisan nature, now they were taking on a decided sectional cast. While Webster and Clay urged friend and foe alike to employ the great faculty of reason in political conflicts, their audiences grew smaller and less receptive after 1836.65

While the battles over abolitionist petitions and the slave question raged in Congress in 1835-36, another sectional problem rather unexpectedly and suddenly emerged as a factor in the presidential campaign. Long an important province of first Spain, then Mexico, Texas declared independence in March, 1836, and after a brief but violent revolution, became an independent republic. Texas

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was indeed independent, but weak and threatened by Mexico, which hoped ultimately to reconquer it.

Andrew Jackson had desired to annex Texas into the United States for some time, since a majority of Texans were Americans of southern and western origin; also, the leader of the Texas revolution was Sam Houston, an old friend of Jackson's and a former Tennessean. Jacksonian Democrats began to urge the immediate annexation of Texas, or at least, to extend diplomatic recognition to the republic. Whigs, especially the northern element, immediately responded with a call for caution and reason in this crucial matter. Their concern was twofold. Annexation of Texas might bring on a general war with Mexico; in addition, if the Republic of Texas were annexed, it would probably come into the Union as a slave state and thus further the spread of the "peculiar institution."

The distant land of Texas was largely a mystery to most congressmen. According to the Washington National Intelligencer, Texans themselves were "very poor, and care not a fig under what Government they live." How many millions of dollars, asked the

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newspaper, shall be diverted from desperately-needed internal improvements and applied to the acquisition of Texas, with "its present heterogeneous and lawless population, and its prospective proconsulates, military governments, and boundless speculation?" 67

Alarmed, Webster wrote Edward Everett that "We are in a peck of troubles here, and I can hardly see our way through. My greatest fear at present, is of a war about Texas." Like other Whigs, Webster correctly feared this matter was "likely to bring into our politics new causes of embarrassment, and new tendencies to dismemberment." If the Texans were successful, however, in establishing a viable government, the United States would be morally and legally bound to recognize it. "The time for doing so," declared Webster, "was all a matter for a sober discretion of the government." It would have to be neither "dangerous, improper, or premature."

We must not forget, he pointed out to the Senate, that "we are on terms of amity with Mexico . . . and had thus recognized its lawful existence." 68 Henry Clay was of a like mind, but even more cautious. Concerned that the United States might offer military aid to Texas if a renewed conflict erupted with Mexico, the Great Compromiser

67 National Intelligencer, 10 March 1836.

68 Webster to Everett, 7 May 1836, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18:19; Albany Evening Journal, 12, 26 May 1836.
noted that the American army had recently fought with little success in a war against the Seminole Indians in Florida. While the army in Florida was composed of some 7,000 soldiers, the 700 marauding Indians had been "neither captured nor [even] found; and unless we could show a somewhat better capacity for war, we had better refrain from engaging in [another] one." Like Webster, Clay argued that United States relations with the Republic of Texas should be normalized as soon as a stable, legitimate government was established; at the same time, he urged that the United States maintain friendly communication with Mexico.69

The debate over the recognition or the annexation of Texas continued on into the summer and autumn of 1836; Jackson, however, not wanting to injure the presidential prospects of the Democratic nominee, Martin Van Buren, declined to make any official commitment or to take any actions on the matter until after the election. On the day before he left office in March, 1837, Old Hickory extended diplomatic recognition to Texas. During the course of the prolonged debate, however, Jackson and his Whiggish adversaries remained locked in a bitter battle concerning the president's alleged desire to annex Texas to the Union in order to expand the slave power of the

South. On this matter, John Quincy Adams charged that the president was "a bad man because he has no principles at all, and therefore worse than a man with bad principles." While Philip Hone wrote his diary that the Democrats and Andrew Jackson appeared to desire an expansionist war against Mexico "without the sanction of Congress," the *Albany Evening Journal* told its readers that the unchanging Whig ideal was "only to preserve the peace and prosperity of the Union." 70

While the Whigs were locked in their struggle with the Democrats, Daniel Webster's own candidacy for the presidency continued to be in serious trouble. Although McLean had dropped out of the fray, and White's electioneering efforts were really accepted only in the South, the "God-like Daniel" was encountering unexpectedly strong opposition from his fellow Whig, William Henry Harrison. As the election drew nearer, Webster realized that "Old Tippecanoe" would be the man to defeat if he were to keep alive his hopes for the presidency.

Although Webster campaigned vigorously and earnestly in New England and in the West, at public functions and in the Senate, it was becoming more evident that public enthusiasm for his

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candidacy was not developing as he had hoped and expected it would. Although Webster honestly and intelligently put forth brilliant arguments that attacked the Jacksonians for their transgressions on the Constitution, the laws, and American political traditions, the voters paid scant attention. They did, however, listen to William Henry Harrison.

As Webster wrote to Nicholas Biddle in May, 1835, "It appears to me that our political affairs are taking a very decided turn [for the worst]." His perceptions were quite correct; in a matter of four months, Harrison's campaign had excited a great commotion among the people, especially in the West. Frequent, enthusiastic barbecues were held in his honor; Tippecanoe clubs sprang up throughout the region. Although Harrison's supporters were quick to exploit his fame and popularity as a military man, his other formidable asset was his political silence; he had few known opinions on the issues of the day, and said little if anything to indicate otherwise.  

71Webster to Biddle, 9 May 1835, Biddle Correspondence, ed. McGrane, p. 250.

72The William Henry Harrison Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on microfilm, North Texas State University, contain virtually nothing that would indicate Harrison ever gave much thought to politics at all; Cleaves, Old Tippecanoe, pp. 293-98; Goebel, William Henry Harrison, pp. 307-10.
While the Harrison campaign was generating much hoopla but little of real substance and truth, Webster doggedly spent the summer and fall of 1835 reiterating his familiar philosophies and themes. He wrote to a Whig group in Baltimore that he hoped that the people would yet choose "principles over devotion to men"; that they would believe in a "paramount attachment to the constitution," and that they would strive to "maintain all those guards for liberty which our forefathers have established for us." To Webster, a politician must always deliver that which he believes to be truthful and necessary in a logical, intelligent manner; accordingly, his campaign was conducted with such high standards. Harrison's campaign, however, was quite devoid of any visible exhibitions of intelligent, closely-reasoned arguments.

Martin Van Buren was nominated as the Democratic party's choice for the presidency in May, 1835; by December of that year, the Whigs had become disarrayed and were in a state of political confusion. The task of finding a Whig candidate who could defeat the formidable New Yorker was proving to be difficult. As Clay perceptively noted, McLean and White "stand virtually no chance of victory, and Harrison has little more"; as for Black Dan, he explained

73 National Intelligencer, 18 November 1835.
74 Carroll, Origins of the Whig Party, p. 142.
that "While Mr. Webster has attainments greatly superior to those of any other nominated candidate, it is to be regretted that a general persuasion seems to exist that he stands no chance." Rather coyly, perhaps wishing for a possible presidential draft movement, the Great Compromiser suggested that only himself would be capable of defeating Van Buren.75

As the campaign progressed, by December, 1835, it was becoming obvious that Pennsylvania, with its bloc of thirty electoral votes, would play a decisive role in the ultimate selection of the favorite northern Whig contender. If Webster were to stave off the rising challenge of Harrison, he would have to win the support of the Antimasonic party, which was fairly strong in Pennsylvania. If he failed to do so, Harrison would be awarded its support and would thereby probably emerge as the Whigs' northern champion, thus virtually ending Webster's candidacy. The inherent structural weakness of the Whig party was thereby revealed: an element of non-Whigs, a small third party, would ultimately decide who the primary Whig nominee in the North would be.76


76 Brown, Daniel Webster and the Politics of Availability,
Meeting at Harrisburg in December, 1835, Pennsylvania Antimasons, led by Thaddeus Stevens, expressed their preference for Webster, personally as well as philosophically. Instead of choosing him, however, they turned to Harrison as their choice; neither Webster nor "Old Tip," of course, was a true Antimason. A good, honorable man with a sound, carefully defined philosophical foundation based on deeply-held principles was thus passed over in favor of an intellectually weak, less controversial, and more popular candidate; so Daniel Webster painfully encountered the first taste of what ultimately became known as "the politics of availability." Harrison was "available," and Webster was not.7 For the remainder of his long and distinguished political career, Webster, a man of logic and reason, had to contend with the politics of popularity. One prominent biographer has succinctly described Webster's problem: "Crowds gathered everywhere to listen to his sonorous voice, but they did not vote for him at the polls. Magnificent as he was, he was not a

pp. 125-48; Nathans, Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy, pp. 97-98.

popular favorite."

As the Intelligencer commented, "he was too marked by intellect and independence of soul ever to be a favorite with the people in these degenerate days." Harrison was extremely popular with the people, and in the North and West his popularity grew: "the name of Harrison goes like wildfire," noted the Albany Evening Journal. It urged Whig voters to heal the split between Harrison and Webster and campaign together for "Old Tip" because prospects for victory were excellent. Success was even more certain, said the newspaper, because "the rank and file" of the old Jacksonians were now among the ardent friends of Harrison, and "the only real Democrats left to rally around the torn and faded banner of Van Buren were office holders and collar men." Webster's "friends had yielded to popular sentiment" and thus had assured Harrison's success, said the Journal, quoting the Bath (New York) Constitutionalist.

Other newspapers began to desert Webster's faltering candidacy; the influential New York Courier and Enquirer announced that although it had originally endorsed him, it had now "yielded to the

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78 Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:42.

79 National Intelligencer, 29 December 1834.

80 Albany Evening Journal, 6, 25, 11 January 1836.
popular will" and directed its support toward Harrison.81 Several important Whig presses, however, gave their continued support to Webster; the Boston Atlas, the New York American, and the Washington National Intelligencer urged his election. Unfortunately for Webster, even with the backing of many such leading journals, he could not demonstrate that he had the flexibility required in order to be attractive politically to the masses.82 Nevertheless, many faithful men continued to give him their support. The unyielding attitude held by the loyal supporters of Webster was expressed by an Antimasonic newspaper, the Boston Daily Advocate: "We want no lesser lights--no stars of the second magnitude." Webster, argued its editor, Benjamin F. Hallett, Jr., was "the great man of the country."83

By early 1836, it was apparent that Webster's cause was doomed to failure; his defeat at the Pennsylvania Antimasonic convention, his desertion by important publications, and the flight of Whigs and Antimasons in the North and West to the more popular Harrison seemed to indicate certain electoral disaster. Webster, however, gamely and bravely continued his campaign for the presidency

81Quoted in ibid., 18 May 1836.
83Quoted in National Intelligencer, 28 October 1835.
on the same high plane of logic and reason which had always charac-
terized his approach to politics. In the Senate, he battled with the
Democrats on the French question, the Texas issue, and the rising
slavery problem. He took to the campaign trail regularly throughout
the year, repeating his charges of executive usurpation, "man-
worship," and the abandonment by the Democrats of traditional
republican principles. He presented in detail his thoughts on internal
improvements, education, and culture; always, however, the powerful
logic and reason which characterized his attacks were levied against
those who would subvert the institutions which he held to be most pre-
cious: the Constitution and the Union.84

While struggling to gain votes, Webster was aware of his
impending, inevitable defeat; accordingly, he offered to drop out of
the presidential race if that was the desire of the Massachusetts legis-
lature, which had originally nominated him. Whatever its decision
on the matter might be, he urged that it be based on "just and consis-
tent principle, sincere, [and] patriotic duty, and the great cause of
of constitutional liberty." His only request was that the legislators
make their decision for "the good of the country."85 After

84Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 7:
85National Intelligencer, 31 March 1836.
considering Webster's offer to quit the presidential contest, the legislature confirmed his nomination by unanimous vote. An anonymous writer named "Massachusetts" described the commonwealth's attitude toward Webster's role in the election:

The conflict before us . . . is a contest for the preservation of the Constitution. Animated by this feeling, [the people of Massachusetts] will support Mr. Webster. Whoever may be seduced [may] . . . fly. [The people of Massachusetts] still rally to the banner of the Constitution as borne by him, with the most entire and absolute confidence.

In a war of words which continued daily until the election, Democrats and Whigs hurled invectives at each other; Jackson lambasted all the Whig candidates; they retorted with such ditties as "You know I'm neither Whig nor Tory, and care for nothing but glory." Whig newspapers leveled scathing attacks on Van Buren; his reliance, said the National Intelligencer, "was not of the affection for the people. [Rather,] he appealed to their baser passions, promising 'spoils' as the reward of political services. His reliance was upon the protection of his machinery, and the strength of his collar."

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86 Brown, Daniel Webster and the Politics of Availability, p. 154.

87 National Intelligencer, 28 December 1835.

88 United States Telegraph, 4 October 1835; 17 June 1835.
There were no really specific issues on which the Whigs could credibly attack Van Buren by the time the election was held in November, except for the general assaults on Jacksonism. The French crisis had been settled; the Texas, abolitionist petitions, and slavery questions were for the moment, dormant. The candidates' positions had been expressed during the campaign; Daniel Webster's views were especially well-known. The leading Whig nominee, Harrison, adhered to mildly orthodox party positions: distribution of proceeds from land sales to the states, limited internal improvements at national expense, and a rather noncommittal attitude toward any future establishment of a new national Bank. Martin Van Buren declared that he was against distribution, internal improvements, and the establishment of a new Bank. 89

The voters went to the polls and gave Van Buren a clear-cut victory, but it was not of landslide proportions in any sense. Of the Whigs, whose intraparty squabbles and conflicts made the Democrats' victory possible, Harrison received the electoral votes of Ohio, Indiana, Vermont, and New York. 90 Hugh Lawson White was


awarded the votes of Georgia and Tennessee, while the South Carolina legislature cast that state's eleven electoral votes for Senator Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina. Daniel Webster received the electoral votes only of Massachusetts. Although he failed to carry his own state, Van Buren carried the electoral votes of the remaining states in the Union; his total vote was 170, while his opponents' combined total was 124 votes. In the popular voting, however, the New Yorker received a majority of only approximately 25,000 out of a total of over 1,500,000 votes cast. 91

The election of 1836 revealed clearly that a true, balanced two-party system had emerged in the United States, especially in the South and West. While Van Buren scored heavily throughout the nation, he was effectively opposed in each geographical section by regional Whig leaders with significant followings. Of equal importance, the election demonstrated the still-immense popularity of Andrew Jackson; the presidential contest was in many ways a public test of Old Hickory's policies of the preceding eight years. The

fledgling Whig editor, Horace Greeley, perceptively noted that while Van Buren was essentially a man without substantial executive or administrative talents, he excelled in "suavity." Through the skillful use of this ability, he was able to achieve first the vice-presidency and ultimately the presidency by means of "the personal favor and imperious will of Andrew Jackson." Had there been no Jackson, Greeley speculated, "Van Buren would never have attained the highest office in the gift of his countrymen." 92

For Webster, the election of 1836 had an especially painful meaning. In order to win votes, he had to attempt to sway both the public at large and party regulars; each course required his leaving his old congressional power base. He presented himself to the electorate as an intellectual steeped with great powers of logic, a man both patriotic and endowed with great qualities of statesmanship. Although his credentials were impressive to the voters, who remembered and respected the mechanisms of the first American party system, such attributes, attitudes, and talents no longer won votes. Whereas Webster had excellently played the older game of politics, by 1836, the game itself had changed profoundly; the politics of patrician leadership had become the politics of availability in the

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second American party system.  

As the Albany Evening Journal noted, "Webster was too pure a man--of too enlarged views--wedded in his modes of thinking and acting to considerations too lofty to be a successful candidate." He was a relic of times past, said the New York Star, a time that has disappeared when one could "hope for the success of great intellectual men, who rely on talent, and not on tact--who are familiar with books and not with men." Clearly, political realities were in a state of flux in 1836; an older order was giving way to a newer system.

Although Webster was slow to realize it, Thurlow Weed, editor of the Albany Evening Journal, knew as early as 1834 that the Whig party under the traditional leadership of men like Webster and Clay would never capture the presidency. Prophetically, Weed had pointed out that

Our party as at present organized, is doomed to fight merely to be beaten. . . . The longer we fight Jacksonism, the more it won't die. The truth is [that] we are in the condition of the old federal party. The people are against us, and they won't change so long as the existing party lines are drawn. . . . With Clay,

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93 Nathans, Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy, p. 102; Brown, Daniel Webster and the Politics of Availability, pp. 162-64.

94 Albany Evening Journal, 29 May 1835; quoted in Nathans, Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy, p. 94.
Webster, or Calhoun, or indeed any man identified with the war against Jackson and in favor of the Bank, . . . the game is up.95

A similar idea was expressed by William H. Seward, future Whig governor of New York, in a letter to Weed in 1835. "The people are for [Van Buren]," said Seward, "not so much for him as for the principle they suppose he represents. That principle is Democracy."96

Daniel Webster's only political weapons were a firm belief in constitutionalism, integrity of the laws, preservation of the Union, and an intellectualized vision of what the requirements were in order to insure the happiness, tranquility, and prosperity of his nation. While such entities and concepts must have appeared somewhat vague, mystical, and abstract in the age of Jackson, to Webster they were absolutely logical, reasonable, and clear. To his detractors, Webster's campaign slogan for 1836 probably sounded somewhat simplistic: "Our country, our country, and nothing but our country."97

To Webster and his few but fervent and faithful supporters, however,

95 Weedy to Francis Granger, 23 November 1834, quoted in Carroll, Origins of the Whig Party, pp. 219-20.


such a seemingly-plain statement captured perfectly the essence and substance of their difficult, if not impossible, struggle.
CHAPTER IV

DEFEAT OF THE OLD ORDER

Martin Van Buren was sworn in as the nation's eighth president March 4, 1837. Although he had shrewdly employed the assistance of his mentor, Andrew Jackson, and the powerful Democratic party machinery to full advantage in order to defeat his divided, disorganized opponents in 1836, he was to be denied a second term in 1840. After suffering a bitter loss in the election of 1836, the Whig party quickly evolved into a highly-organized, well-managed political machine which was able to win dramatically one of the most interesting and controversial elections in American history. Van Buren's solid victory of 1836 was followed by a devastating defeat in 1840 in which the Whigs achieved the first of their two presidential victories.

A newer, more effective Whig strategy was directly responsible for the defeat of Van Buren; however, he was not the only casualty produced by the election of 1840. The Whig party had changed by abandoning its traditional leaders, such as Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, and by rejecting its previous reliance on a
system of deferential politics founded on intellect and reason. A new party had emerged, built on the politics of availability and dedicated to victory at all costs, even if electoral success meant the adoption and improvement of the same tactics employed by Jackson and the Democrats. The new Whiggery, with its alleged or real democritization in both membership and spirit, proved to be quite successful politically; however, the transformation of the party necessarily precluded the possibility of the nomination and election to the presidency of Webster and Clay. Mediocrity and emotionalism rather than excellence and reason dominated the new Whiggery as it competed with the Democrats for votes. The avoidance of selecting men of conviction and the lack of discussion of critical issues is indicative of the deterioration of ethics and philosophies in politics, which had begun with the close of the first American party system.1

The response to Jackson's departure from Washington in March, 1837, was mixed. Most Whigs rejoiced; Philip Hone exclaimed that "Old Hickory's" exit from office thus had ended an

administration which was "the most disastrous in the annals of the country." A majority of citizens, however, still exalted Jackson; twenty thousand people were in attendance at Van Buren's inauguration, not so much to view the new president as to witness the final departure of his legendary predecessor. "It was the stillness and the silence of reverence and affection . . .," said Senator Thomas Hart Benton, "and there was no room for mistake as to whom this mute and impressive homage was rendered. For once, the rising was eclipsed by the setting sun."2

To many men, Jackson was, in the words of John William Ward, "the symbol for an age." His military exploits, and his championing of the common man, whether real or feigned, and his battles with the nullifiers and the bank men seemed to capture the essence of most who lived in the turbulence of early nineteenth-century America.3 At the same time, Jackson was the major dynamic source of energy in the Democratic party. Jackson's emotional appeals,


not his intellectual positions, held the party together. He con-
stently sought popular support while neglecting to build needed legisla-
tive discipline or to bring about an organized, institutionalized party
leadership. Serving as a hero, legitimate as well as symbolic, at
a time when heroism was a constant issue, he could and did avoid
growing internal party dissensions as well as emerging sectional
and economic problems. Once Jackson left office, however, the
Democratic party began to fall apart as a result of the twin forces of
long-submerged tensions and a rapidly changing world.4

Into the vacuum created by Jackson's departure stepped
Martin Van Buren. As Carl Schurz once observed, "Every one
knew that he owed the presidency solely to Jackson's powers."5
To many of his contemporaries, he was quite deserving of the sobri-
quets by which he was known: the "Red Fox" and the "Little

4James C. Curtis, The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and
the Presidency, 1837-1841 (Lexington, Ky.: The University of
Kentucky Press, 1970), p. 50; idem, Andrew Jackson and the Search
The English traveler and social critic, Harriet Martineau, com-
mented that in spite of Jackson's forceful presidency, he left great
political questions "unsettled" which ultimately had to emerge in
an explosive manner. Refer to her essay in Jacksonian America
1815-1840: New Society, Changing Politics, eds. Frank Otto Gatell

5Carl Schurz, Henry Clay, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton,
Mifflin Co., 1887), 2:130.
Magician." He had long been involved in the intrigues of New York politics and therefore knew well the advantages of maintaining flexible positions on critical issues. In his earlier career, he had exhibited both aristocratic and democratic tendencies; in addition, he constantly vacillated between pro- and anti-slavery positions. At one time an adversary of Andrew Jackson, he ultimately maneuvered himself into the role of heir apparent, eager to succeed to the presidency once Jackson retired. Unlike his predecessor, Van Buren was a self-made man of culture, refinement, good humor, and he usually enjoyed excellent relationships with his political foes. While such qualities are to be commended ordinarily, parties in the Jackson era were hardly ordinary and his gentlemanly bearing often caused him political grief.\(^6\)

Van Buren never attained Jackson's level of popularity with the masses; he perhaps seemed too aristocratic. Ironically, this quality enabled him to win the admiration of many of his political enemies. "He will be a party President, but he is too much of a

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gentleman to be governed by the rabble who surrounded his predeces-
sor and administered to his bad passions," wrote Philip Hone in
early 1837. "As a man, a gentleman, and a friend, I have great
respect for Mr. Van Buren . . .," he observed. 7

Van Buren's first major test occurred within weeks of his
inauguration. In April, 1837, a catastrophic economic depression
swept across the country, devastating financiers, industrialists,
workers, and farmers alike. A violent deflation took place which
dramatically increased the ranks of the unemployed, closed factories,
and brought the nation's economy to a standstill. Lasting fully seven
years, the depression became the primary political and economic
problem with which Whigs and Democrats wrestled. It was to divide
the Democratic party into hostile factions, consume Van Buren, and
ultimately, made inevitable the great Whig electoral victory of
1840. 8

The Panic of 1837 was the result of a complex economic
breakdown which involved Europeans and Americans alike. From

7Schurz, Henry Clay, 2:129-30; Hone, Hone Diary, ed.
Nevins, 1:244.

8Reginald C. McGrane, The Panic of 1837: Some Financial
Problems of the Jacksonian Era (1924; reprint ed., New York:
Russell and Russell, Inc., 1965), pp. 93-144; Samuel Rezneck, "The
Social History of an American Depression, 1837-1843," American
Historical Review 60 (1934):662-87.
the conclusion of the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon (1815) to the 1830's, the United States economy had expanded tremendously. The price of cotton in the South had doubled, land sales in the West had tripled, and the industrial growth of the Northeast had accelerated immensely. Much of this economic expansion had been fostered by a mania of speculation, fueled extensively by European, especially British, capital. At the height of this speculative boom, the charter of the second Bank of the United States expired in 1836; President Jackson in 1833 had begun to deposit government funds not in the stable national Bank, but rather in his "pet" or favorite local and state banks. These banks in turn made risky, unwise, and unsound loans to capitalists, planters, and industrialists, and land speculators throughout the nation. When in July, 1836, Jackson issued his "specie circular," which called for the payment in western lands to be made in gold or silver only, a severe monetary contraction ensued. Consequently, as a result of the currency contraction and ensuing deflation, coupled with their own economic recession, major European investors and bankers, led by the British,

began to withdraw capital, which they had been massively injecting into the expansionist, speculative American economy. Suddenly, banks suspended redemption of paper in specie, stocks on Wall Street dropped precipitously, unemployment rose dramatically, and a full-scale, general depression followed.  

In the spring of 1837, Philip Hone noted that the "great crisis is near at hand, if it has not already arrived." All socio-economic classes felt the effects of the depression. "Men who a year ago thought themselves rich . . . are now bankrupt," he observed. The working class particularly suffered. Even such an aristocrat as Hone expressed his concern for their plight; as he asked his diary, "What is to become of the laboring classes?" In a fit of despair, he queried, "Where will it all end? -- In ruin, revolution, perhaps civil war."  

In spite of the complex nature of the depression and its origins, Andrew Jackson believed quite simplistically that the real cause for the economic crisis rested solely on wealthy speculators and their 


Whig political allies. The Whigs, of course, denied this charge.

Possibly the most realistic assessment of the blame for the economic chaos was offered by Thomas Cooper, president of South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina), who observed, "To be sure, overtrading and gambling speculation will account for [much] of the present distress, but no one can be blind to the effects produced by the desperate ignorance of the last President."13

Regardless of the origins of the depression, Whigs and Democrats alike demanded that Van Buren act to stabilize the deteriorating economy; unfortunately for the president, his advisors had no plan for positive action. A group of Whigs met with Van Buren in April, 1837, and presented him with demands for the abandonment of Jackson's specie order of 1836; Van Buren refused to do this. The Whig demand for the removal of the specie circular was joined by a powerful group of conservative Democrats whose support was essential to Van Buren's continued political strength and the success of his administration. Senators Nathaniel P. Tallmadge of New York and


William C. Rives of Virginia, representing the heart of the Democrats' conservative north-south political alliance and coalition, demanded flatly that Van Buren abandon the specie circular. However, most of the older, original Jacksonians urged that Van Buren not rescind the specie circular. Azariah Flagg, Democratic representative from New York, wrote that "The specie order did not cause the [financial distress] and its repeal cannot cure it." A fellow New Yorker and congressman, C.C. Cambreleng, noted that "The evil is far deeper and broader than the specie order." Confused and faced with conflicting advice, Van Buren elected to let the specie circular remain in effect.

In May, 1837, the panic intensified dramatically when the banks of New York City, no longer able to maintain enough specie for business demands, failed; in quick succession, numerous other banks throughout the country collapsed. Distress mounted; the Boston Courier commented that the citizens of that city "seemed to be on the


15Flagg to Van Buren, 8 April 1837, Cambreleng to Van Buren, 10 April 1837, Van Buren Papers.
point of revolution." The New York American reported "much ferment again in Wall Street . . .," and that the rate of reported suicides stemming from the economic distress had risen. From the West, the Cincinnati Gazette described how workers' wages had dropped by 50 per cent. H.P. Gilpin, a Democratic party worker and friend of Van Buren, wrote the President that he had witnessed "the largest public meeting I ever saw assembled in Independence Square" in Philadelphia, and that it was composed "entirely of the working classes. . ." 16

Van Buren's dilemma deepened as he was again bombarded from all sides with demands that the national government take positive action to alleviate the growing crisis. A Democrat from Connecticut, Andrew Lane, wrote to the president requesting that he relieve the suffering of the people. "I cannot forbear crying out," he said, "[for] help! help!! help!!! before it is eternally too late." Nicholas Biddle and the Whigs proposed that a new, strong national bank be established to stabilize the economy. A future Democratic president suggested the same solution. In a letter to Van Buren, James Buchanan observed that the "pet" or state and local banks favored by Jackson were "utterly worthless in about every . . . particular," and

that the revival of a new, responsible national Bank was apparently the wisest course. The Whig press agreed; the *Boston Mercantile Journal* said that the local and state bank failures were the direct result of Jackson's "ill-advised and insane measures . . .," which had yielded little other than "national bankruptcy." While besieged by both conservative Democrats, Whigs, and even some old Jacksonians, Van Buren was counseled by Jackson himself to remain firm in his decision to maintain the specie order and to take no precipitous actions. Offering encouragement, the ex-president said that "All your friends are proud of you . . .; be sturdy in your course."17

As Van Buren followed the advice of Jackson and did nothing of a positive nature to relieve the economic pressures on the people, a great public outcry developed and became focused on the government's inaction. The *New York Daily Express* bitterly attacked the assertion made by the administration mouthpiece, the *Washington Globe*, that the depression existed only in the minds of the people and that if anyone was "starving," it was only because they "deserved to starve." The New York newspaper added that the

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17 Andrew Lane to Van Buren, 27 May 1837, Van Buren Papers; Buchanan to Van Buren, 6 June 1837, ibid.; Jackson to Van Buren, 20 May 1837, ibid.; Biddle to Joel Poinsett, 8 May 1837, Biddle Correspondence, p. 274; quoted in National Intelligencer, 17 May 1837; Jackson to Van Buren, 12 May 1837, Jackson Correspondence, ed. Bassett, 5:483.
"actually seemed to chuckle over the ruins of credit." The Philadelphia Commercial Herald strongly assailed the Democrats' allegation that the depression was caused solely by the wealthier classes of speculators. In a caustic editorial, it accused Van Buren and the Democrats of trying to "rally one class of the community against another, and to enlist the worst passions of the human heart, and the strongest prejudices of the uninformed." The administration, charged the Herald, "relies upon the ignorance of those whose passions they would excite." 18

Finally realizing that something had to be done by the government in order to stave off total economic collapse, Van Buren issued a call on May 10, 1837, for a special session of Congress to convene the following September. During the summer, an impasse developed between Whigs and Democrats concerning the origins of the depression as well as the wisest course of action to pursue in the crisis. As Democratic Senator John M. Niles, of Connecticut, wrote to Van Buren, "Our opponents charge the difficulties . . . to the government; we charge them to the Banks. This is the issue between us." In such an atmosphere, national attention turned to the president. Writing to Andrew Jackson, James Buchanan observed that "much

18 Quoted in the National Intelligencer, 23 May 1837; ibid., 1 June 1837.
more depends now on the conduct of Mr. Van Buren."
On Van Buren's vacillation and hesitancy to develop a positive program for economic recovery or of political leadership, Buchanan said that such inactivity had "made rather an unfavorable impression on some or our friends." These Democrats, stated Buchanan, "say the old General would not have acted thus."19

On September 4, 1837, Congress met in joint special session to hear Van Buren's recommendations and proposed solutions for the panic which continued to grip the nation. Specifically, he called for the following program: the postponement of distribution of the surplus funds still remaining in the treasury and the issuance of treasury notes to cover the immediate financial requirements of the national government. Also, since many state banks were ceasing to pay out specie and were therefore contributing to the economic depression by constricting the supply of money, he urged that if any banks did so in the future, they would be declared to be bankrupt and placed in receivership. Most important, the president proposed the establishment of an independent treasury into whose several depositories or

subtreasuries government funds would be placed; thus, Van Buren specifically called for a "divorce" between the government and the banks, a policy whereby the treasury could collect, safely keep, and disburse its funds without the need for any potentially irresponsible banks, national or state. 20

In his message to Congress, Van Buren reiterated the traditional Jefferson-Jackson concept of limited government. The notion inherent in the "necessary and proper" clause of the Constitution that the national government has the power to establish national Banks and to govern domestic fiscal affairs was interpreted in the narrowest possible manner; in fact, it was almost rejected. Van Buren warned the people not to seek aid, relief, or welfare from the national government, even if his suggestions before Congress failed to pass and the economic crisis intensified. "All communities are apt to look to government for too much . . .," he said. Continuing, he stressed that "the less government interferes with private pursuits, the better for the general prosperity." Any suggestions for government-directed economic relief or welfare must be denied, exclaimed the president, for "such measures are not within the constitutional

20 Richardson, comp., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 3:324-46.
province of the General Government. 21

Reaction to Van Buren's Message was swift and vociferous. Democratic radicals praised it while the conservatives, Democrat and Whig alike, were strongly critical. Although the radical Democrats' position can be explained fairly easily, the conservative Democrats' objections were more complicated. The Whig response was even more complex.

The radical Democrats, consisting of a coalition of intellectuals, workers, and others of a left-wing bent collectively known as the "Locofocos," favored the continuation and even an extension of a hard money policy which they believed would weaken if not destroy what they called the "moneyed aristocracy." The "Locofocos" were not bent on destroying capitalism; rather, being against "law-created privilege," they wanted only to have the opportunity to become capitalists themselves. The conservative wing of the

Democrats, as well as many Whigs, opposed Van Buren's plan largely because of the reasons that the Locofocos approved it; they were the people who possessed much of the socioeconomic and political power, which would be lost if Van Buren's plan were to be carried out. Another reason for bipartisan hostility was that conservative members of both parties believed that the Democratic radicals, allegedly aided by Van Buren, were determined to destroy established institutions, order, and quite possibly, the social fabric of the entire nation. 22

The Whig approach during the chaos of the panic of 1837 was an appeal to reason and intelligence. In an important editorial which appeared in the National Intelligencer one month before the convening of the special congressional session, the editors noted that "We have had a surfeit of demagogues, enough of flattery, and too much of folly" over the previous decade. The editors warned, "Let the

passions alone. They have been played upon too successfully."

Such passions, said the paper, "argues that we lack judgment."

If prosperity was to return, reasoned the newspaper, "We need the truth, the honest truth," and a breed of men who speak "to the sense, and [who rely] upon the judgment of his fellow men." Above all, the editors exclaimed, "We want political agents who will act for the country first, [and] for self and party last."²³

The fundamental Whig disagreement with the Van Buren independent treasury plan was infinitely more philosophical in nature. The Whigs, especially the Clay-Webster faction, were appalled at Van Buren's espousal of the doctrine of limited government during such a monumental crisis. The government, they believed, should be an engine of motion, a source of positive economic stimulation in periods of depression, and a careful guardian and regulator of the economy during more normal times. Above all else, the Webster-Clay faction believed that the government should be ultimately and actively involved in the regulation of the nation's economic, fiscal, and financial affairs in order to benefit all classes, sections, and occupations. To most Whigs, an economically strong nation would yield great benefits to all Americans, regardless of their geographical or socioeconomic status. As Webster stated in 1833, the

²³*National Intelligencer*, 2 August 1837.
national government should always take a parental interest in providing the citizens with a positive economic atmosphere in which opportunity for advancement was neither fettered nor inhibited.24

After Van Buren presented his subtreasury plan, Henry Clay was one of the first Whigs to attack it. In a biting attack on September 25, 1837, Clay strongly refuted the oft-quoted charges that overtrading, overspeculation, and national banks were to blame for the depression. He asserted quite plausibly, "I think this is a view of the case entirely too superficial." The real cause of the economic crisis was that America had been "deprived of the practical benefit of a free government." Although Americans were free in form, he said, the "essence did not exist." Instead of a government in which the "aggregate wisdom of the whole, or at least a majority" govern, the nation had been under the despotic control of a single individual, Jackson, who lacked the farsightedness to put forth a credible, realistic financial program to insure the future.

prosperity of the country.  

Bitterly assailing the independent treasury plan in particular, together with Van Buren concept of limited government and the notion that the national government should play a minor role in the regulation of economic process and affairs, Clay condemned the president's philosophy that the states, the banks, and most of all, the people, were being "left to shift for themselves, as they may or can," and ultimately, "leaving them to their fate." As he pointed out, "We are all people, states, Union, banks--bound up and interwoven together, united in fortune and destiny, and all, all entitled to the protecting care of a parental government." That government, said Clay, "would be faithless to the highest and most solemn of human trust should it neglect to perform it." 

Clay's speech of September 25 on the inadequacies of the independent treasury bill, the origins of the panic, and especially on the role of the federal government in a time of severe crisis was particularly bitter; three days later Daniel Webster rose in the Senate to deliver an even more forceful attack on Van Buren's plan and its inherent philosophical implications. Webster followed essentially


26 Ibid., pp. 63-68.
the line of argument employed earlier by Clay; however, the senator from Massachusetts went much further in asserting the idea that the powers of the national government must be employed to alleviate the widespread suffering of the people during the depression, restore financial stability, and regulate banking and currency in order to insure continuing economic prosperity.

According to Webster, every president since George Washington had recognized the need and obligation to regulate the currency, the banks, and other important economic matters. Even Andrew Jackson had realized this necessity and attempted to deal with such matters in his own fashion. The major principle inherent in Van Buren's independent treasury plan, Webster argued, was that for the first time an American president had rejected this obligation and instead had deserted the people. 27

In the face of economic collapse, the Van Buren independent treasury plan included "not one single provision [directed] to the relief of the people," exclaimed Webster. "I think government exists," he said, "not for its own ends, but for the public utility. It is an agency established to promote the common good . . . and its chief duties are to the people." Individuals can and should provide for themselves that which they need, but such vital matters as

27 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 8: 78-95.
regulation of interstate commerce and control of the currency and credit are "beyond the power of individuals." Such activities are constitutionally assigned to the national government, and especially to Congress.28

At a period when "the great burden of suffering is on the people," Webster stated, a great philosophical and constitutional question was being raised, "both for the present and all future time." This fundamental question was "whether Congress has, or ought to have, any duty to perform in relation to the currency of the country, beyond the mere regulation of the gold and silver coin." Van Buren's proposed independent treasury plan, Webster concluded, was a categorical denial of such a basic responsibility; instead, it revealed a new policy which advocated a "severance of the government from the people . . .," and it envisioned a callous "abandonment of the duty of government . . . to the people thereafter.29

In this atmosphere of intense partisan political, ideological, and philosophical conflict, the debate over the proposed subtreasury plan raged on for three years. The plan was passed by the Democratic-controlled Senate two times, only to fail in the House of

28Ibid., pp. 68-70.

29Ibid., pp. 66-79, 95-97; Carl Schurz, the politician and historian, commended this speech because of its "remarkable grasp of thought, clearness of statement, and brilliancy of reasoning." Schurz, Henry Clay, 2:142.
Representatives on each occasion. While the Whigs maintained a unified partisan stance, the Democrats were increasingly torn by the growing rift between the Jackson-Van Buren faction and the Democratic conservatives. John C. Calhoun, once the bitter enemy of Jackson and Van Buren, however, deserted the Whigs in the midst of this violent political and philosophical quarrel and joined the Van Burenites. This Whig loss was more than offset by the numerous defections of conservative Democrats to the standard of Whiggery.

After a brief and slight economic upturn in early 1839, a second series of bank failures and decreases in agricultural prices heralded a return to depression by late that year. In the midst of the lingering and deepening economic crisis, Van Buren finally succeeded in persuading Congress to pass his subtreasury plan as a final act of desperation; it was signed into law, quite symbolically, on July 4, 1840. The "Red Fox's" triumph, however, was little more than a "hollow victory," as one recent historian has noted.

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In his vacillation and inaction, Van Buren had incurred the wrath and reasoned arguments of Clay, Webster, and the Whigs. He had compounded his difficulties when he finally and forcefully demanded the bill's passage in early 1840; now they charged him with the old crime of executive usurpation. More importantly, his handling of the prolonged economic crisis and promotion of the subtreasury plan had severely weakened the old New York-Virginia axis of the Democratic party in general and Van Buren's New York political base in particular. Martin Van Buren had rendered himself politically vulnerable, and the Whigs knew it. 31

Sensing Van Buren's indirection and confusion in dealing effectively with the deepening depression and desiring to gain maximum political advantage because of his ineptitude and misfortune, certain Whigs launched their campaign for the presidential election of 1840 in mid-1837. Daniel Webster was the first man of his party to enter the contest for the White House, three years away. Before officially announcing his candidacy, he expressed a desire to take a leave of absence from the Senate in order to get a well-deserved rest from his struggles with the Jacksonians, recoup his failing financial condition, and gain time in which he could ascertain the position of

31 Curtis, Fox at Bay, pp. 137-38, 148-51; Schlesinger, Age of Jackson, pp. 263-64; Van Deusen, Jacksonian Era, pp. 128-29.
the new administration on various issues and thereby develop a
winning counterstrategy.

As early as 1835, Webster had mentioned a desire to leave
the Senate in a letter to Jeremiah Mason, a favorite correspondent
and confidant. Delayed from doing so because of his lengthy battles
with the Jacksonians, early in 1837 he once again mentioned to
several close friends and political associates that he wanted to leave
the upper chamber. He felt obligated to supervise the rebuilding of
his personal fortune, especially his western land holdings, which had
been adversely affected by the economic depression; also, his private
law practice had long been neglected, and he desired to rebuild his
once-lucrative legal career. Of greater importance, however, was
Webster's wish to leave the inherent conflicts of the Senate, travel
throughout the country, and develop a political strategy which would
carry him to victory in 1840 and into the White House, where, as one
of his biographers quite accurately observed, "all his visions
ended."

32 Webster to Mason, 6 February 1837; Webster to Edward
Everett, 31 January 1837, Webster to Robert Winthrop, 31 January
1837; Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:252-53, 18:24-26;
Webster to Winthrop, 27 January 1837, Webster to Joseph Gales, 8
March 1837, Daniel Webster, The Papers of Daniel Webster, ed.
Charles M. Wiltse, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, New
Hampshire, on microfilm, North Texas State University; Nathans,
Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy, pp. 105-06; Claude M.
Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co.,
1930), 2:57-59.
Webster's fundamental political strategy was to attempt to win the crucial support of the New England states where he was already and consistently strong, along with the middle Atlantic states, where he was not. Being a pragmatist, he was aware of his extreme weakness in the West and knew that he could not realistically count on that region's votes; therefore, he knew he had to gain as many votes in the other non-western areas. New York City was particularly important; accordingly, he determined to launch his campaign in that city. With the support of the city and the great region surrounding it, he believed that he could win; otherwise, his cause would be doomed. 33 Webster desperately wanted to win; as one of his contemporaries noted, "No girl of 25, who saw her charms fading, was ever more anxious to be courted." 34

Courted he was; when Webster arrived in New York City on March 15, 1837, to give the first major speech of his presidential campaign, the reception given him was tumultuous. According to Philip Hone, who was present, Webster was greeted by 5,000 enthusiastic supporters who had waited for hours to hear the senator.

33 Webster to Hiram Ketchum, 28 January 1837, Webster Papers; Nathans, Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy, p. 107.

Webster rewarded them with a three-hour discourse, which has been considered to be one of the most important of his career; in the notable "Niblo's Saloon" speech, he honestly and credibly put forth his own political principles as well as those to which he believed the Whig party should adhere. 35

Webster's address featured an intensely nationalistic, unionist approach to the great political questions of the era. While his arguments were carefully chosen and presented to appeal to men's higher faculties and sense of logic, Webster's words, phrases, and delivery were also calculated to win the support of the mass of ordinary men who had thronged to hear him. To Webster, the presentation of such a blend of philosophical abstraction with its more visible, tangible political and socioeconomic manifestations would hopefully prove to be the key to electoral success in 1840. He was increasingly aware that his lofty arguments must be made comprehensible to the average voter.

As in most of his speeches, Webster stressed the Whiggish ideal of the bountiful blessings which were provided by the preservation and promotion of the intertwined relationship of a living Constitution, a mystical Union, and the people, which comprised an organic

35 Hone, Hone Diary, ed. Nevins, 1:247-48; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:60.
continuity and the successive, collective hopes of present, and future
generations. 36 "You have an interest in the preservation of the
Union, of the Constitution, and of the true principles of government
. . .," he said. "You act for yourselves, and the generations that
are to come after you. . . ." Pursuing his familiar theme of gen-
erational continuity and responsibility, he argued that "those who
ages hence shall bear your name . . . will feel in their political and
social condition, the consequences of the manner in which you dis-
charge your political duties." 37

Becoming more specific on the great issues of the day, Web-
ster told his listeners that he was in favor of an internal improve-
ments policy, paid for by proceeds accruing from the sales of the
public lands, because such a program would bring great economic
benefits to all classes of men in all sections of the country. Turning

36 Major L. Wilson, "'Liberty and Union': An Analysis of
Three Concepts Involved in the Nullification Controversy," Journal
of Southern History 33 (1967):332-42; idem, "The Concept of Time
and the Political Dialogue in the United States, 1828-48," American
Quarterly 19 (1967):622-38; Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian
Persuasion: Politics and Beliefs (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford Univers-

37 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 2:
198-99, 230; as one historian has observed, "While [the Jacksoni-
ans] seemed determined to restrain the present, Webster and Clay
preferred to speak prophetically of a transcendent triumph awaiting
America"; see Paul C. Nagel, This Sacred Trust: American
Nationality, 1798-1898 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971),
p. 88.
to the great tariff issue, he stressed the need for a protection policy that would safeguard not only the domestic markets of the industrialists and the capitalists but would also serve to assure the continued high wage scale of the American worker, who, whether a highly-skilled "mechanic" or a common laborer, enjoyed a much greater standard of living than the "pauper labor" of Europe. 38 In defining his positions on these important issues, Webster clearly assumed a political stance which was completely antithetical to the Jackson-Van Buren philosophy.

Concerning the two volatile and related issues raised by the proponents of admission of Texas into the Union and the concomitant question of slavery, Webster was equally candid. Referring to the Democrats' desire to acquire the Republic of Texas, he adamantly declared, "No such necessity, no such policy, requires the annexation of Texas." Such an annexation, he reasoned, "is not necessary to the full and complete enjoyment of all which we already possess." 39

As he carefully explained, there was a particular objection to the admission of Texas into the Union: it would most likely be a slaveholding area. Webster was categorically opposed to the further

38 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 2: 197-204.

39 Ibid., pp. 205-07.
extension of slavery within the United States. He believed that slavery was "a great moral, social, and political evil..., and under no circumstances could be allowed to expand into new areas, as it probably would, should Texas become a state. Revealing the dilemma which faced all politicians of this era, he stated that even though he detested slavery and any expansion thereof, he was equally certain that since the Constitution had recognized the existence of slavery in 1787 and had given the states the power to continue, abolish, or regulate the "peculiar institution," then "Congress had no power whatsoever to interfere with it when it already existed." As he observed, "Slavery, as it exists in the States, is beyond the reach of Congress." 40

The final point Webster raised was the typical Whig charge of executive usurpation; in this speech, he attacked particularly the Jacksonian financial program, which he believed was directly responsible for the panic of 1837. Noting the theory of executive power as practiced by Jackson and his surrogate, Van Buren, Webster exclaimed that Democratic presidents "mean to govern well; but they mean to govern. They promise to be kind masters; but they mean to be masters." Real, benevolent, but effective leadership has traditionally and must always come from the people's

40 Ibid.
representatives, i.e., Congress. The direct result of the Democratic presidents' assumption of great and unconstitutional powers and the simultaneous blow to congressional leadership was the creation and execution of the Jacksonian financial program, which had quickly deteriorated into a tragic fiasco that caused the entire nation great suffering. 41

After his successful speech in New York City, Webster returned to Boston; within a short time, he decided to embark on a campaign tour through the West in the summer of 1837. In addition to his desire for the nomination, he had become tired of his senatorial duties and needed some time away from that chamber. Reflecting his concern for the depressing state of the economy and the Senate's failure to do anything positive to correct its deteriorating condition, he wrote to two friends in February, 1837, that "Our public business is in a sad condition," and noted, "There is much to disgust one . . ." in the Senate. 42

Webster left on his western travels through Kentucky, Missouri, and New York in May, meeting with local political leaders and giving speeches along the way. As in his speech at Niblo's

41 Ibid., pp. 207-09.

42 Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:62; Webster to Franklin Haven, 18 February 1837, Webster to Robert Winthrop, 15 February 1837, Webster Papers.
Saloon, he attacked Jackson, Van Buren, and the Democrats for their politics as well as their policies, especially those which he believed to be responsible for the intensifying economic depression. He was especially critical of the president's seemingly total disregard for the people's welfare. The remedy for these problems, he consistently argued, was a return to the leadership of a strong Congress that would ensure the creation of benevolent, wise, parental, and effective policies which would promote public welfare and prosperity.43

During the course of his tour through the West, Webster's electioneering tactics began to take on a markedly different character. While his basic nationalism and dedication to Whig principles remained sound and uncompromised, he began to direct his lofty, intellectual appeals not only to the better educated, more sophisticated classes as he had always done, but increasingly to the mass of ordinary people as well. Consciously or not, Webster revealed that his opinion of and respect for the common man had become more positive. As he noted in a speech at Rochester, New York, "We have reached a new era. The eyes of the whole people seemed to be opened, and they begin to look for themselves." 43

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43 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 2:233-43, 251-59, 3:79-87; Current, Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism, pp. 102-07.
people of America can be aroused to the point where they themselves will demand an honest and parental government, Webster said, then "I have no fears for the future." Concluding his Rochester speech on a note of strong optimism, he exclaimed that "my faith is in the people." 44

As his tour progressed, Webster's reliance on the masses and his appeals to them became increasingly more apparent. Writing to a New York Whig, he urged party leaders in that state to "endeavor to win over all honest men," while still being "firm and unyielding in our adherence to Whig principles." In a similar letter to a Whig committee in Boston, he wrote that in addition to a "consistency in principle . . .," his party must welcome "all who will unite with us in upholding and bearing onward, the Whig standard." In the battle against the Jacksonians and their policies, he reasoned that the Whigs as well as the country itself could rely on nothing but "the power of the people . . ." and "their good sense." Let "the popular voice prevail . . .," said Webster; "the people shall be heard." 45 By the winter of 1837, it had become obvious that Webster, with his

44 Webster to George Lay, 20 November 1837, Webster Papers; Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 13:99-100.

45 Webster to George Lay, 25 November 1837, Webster Papers; Webster to Whig committee, Boston, 16 November 1837, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:291-92.
Whiggish principles and intellectual appeals unshaken, was attempting to enlist a new, ultimately more powerful constituency.

With the pace of the presidential campaign quickening and the battles in Congress intensifying, Webster began to question the wisdom of his original determination to retire from the Senate. Other people were interested in his final decision on this matter; writing to Webster, his son, Fletcher, said that "I am constantly asked, whether or no you mean to resign, and I answer not at present." The suspense ended early in 1838 when Webster announced that he had decided to stay in the Senate and seek another term.46

Despite his enthusiastic tour through the West in which he courted all classes of voters, Webster's campaign did not elicit the anticipated response. In addition, he had failed to win the support of the vitally important Whig leadership of New York. Acutely aware of his inability to gain widespread political support, Webster turned his attention back to older, more comfortable terrain, the Senate, where great struggles were raging over the continuing depression and renewed slavery controversy. Assuming his familiar role as "Defender of the Constitution," Webster once more engaged those

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whose words and actions would, he believed, weaken if not destroy
the Union. For the next three years he fought the Van Buren
administration and especially John C. Calhoun, and even his own
ideological ally and personal rival, Henry Clay, both of whom he
charged were doing in 1838 what they had attempted to do in the nulli-
fication crisis of 1833: "to make a new Constitution." After formally
withdrawing from his presidential candidacy in June, 1839, Webster
left for an extended vacation in England in order to rest and to make
preparations to support his party and its nominee in the forthcoming
election of 1840.47

While Webster was maneuvering for the presidency, Henry
Clay also began to turn his thoughts again toward the White House.
Like the senator from Massachusetts, Clay in early 1837 had experi-
enced a feeling of disgust with the Senate because of its bowing to the
various pressures of the Jacksonians. "The Senate," he lamented,
"is no longer a place for a decent man." Because of the rapidly
developing economic crisis and unwillingness of the new Van Buren
administration to attempt to use the national government's power to
provide a remedy, the Kentuckian once more joined battle with the

47 Nathans, Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy, pp. 114-16; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:62-65; Webster to Hiram
Ketchum, 15 January 1838, Webster Papers; Webster, Writings and
Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:311; National Intelligencer, 6 July
1839.
Democrats and simultaneously began to emerge as a candidate for the presidency. 48

As the English traveler, Harriet Martineau, observed in a letter to Clay, "Your new President [Van Buren] seems to have succeeded in making himself gloriously unpopular at the very outset." Many others believed likewise, including a Whig committee in New York, which wrote a letter to Clay in which they inquired about the possibility of his once again becoming the party's standard bearer in 1840. In his response, Clay was both cautious and passive. While he agreed with the committee that governmental "abuses" should be corrected, the people's liberties protected, the executive branch "reformed," and a Whig should be placed in the White House, he was quite hesitant to commit himself publicly to the task of becoming the Whig nominee. To Clay, any announcement of his candidacy at this time was premature; at the same time, he did admit that he was giving serious consideration to running for the presidency once more. For him to announce his formal candidacy, however, a great swell of demand from the people would have to develop; otherwise, he would

simply bide his time. 49

By the winter of 1837, Clay began to believe that such a popular outcry had indeed arisen; from all that he had heard, he prophesied, "I shall be again forced into the Presidential arena." Time was to substantiate Clay's suspicions; the Kentucky legislature nominated him as their favorite son candidate in January, 1838. Of this action, Clay expressed with perhaps false humility, "I think it displays more zeal that discretion." 50

Clay's nomination surprised no one. He retained tremendous personal popularity in the North because of his American System. Many southern Whigs favored him because of his willingness not to press overbearingly in favor of internal improvements and the national Bank. In addition, while he was known to dislike slavery and had for years been a member of the American Colonization Society, being a slaveholder, he was considered to be sufficiently sound on that sensitive issue. Having been a congressman from Kentucky for three decades, Clay could claim significant support throughout the Ohio River valley. Above all else, however, men of all sections


50 Clay to Francis Brooke, 13 January 1838, ibid., pp. 423-24.
remembered his services during the great nullification crisis of 1832-33, when during a time of grave national danger, he had played a crucial role in the pacific settlement of the dispute.51

The Whigs' selection of Clay was especially no surprise to the old Jacksonians; James K. Polk of Tennessee, a leading Democrat and future president, wrote Andrew Jackson that most of his political acquaintances in Tennessee fully expected the Kentucky senator to be the major Whig nominee. Some Whigs seemed unconcerned over their future candidate. As Henry A. Wise of Virginia commented, "I would choose any decent white man in the nation to be president in preference to Martin Van Buren." The "Little Magician" himself personally welcomed Clay's candidacy; Van Buren pointed out in a letter to Andrew Jackson that Henry Clay had always been his favorite Whig opponent.52

Before his nomination in 1838 and as an active candidate in 1839, Clay engaged the Democrats at every opportunity. He wrote in 1837, "The Whigs mean to beat the [Van Buren] administration." He assailed Van Buren's independent treasury plan immediately after


52 Polk to Jackson, 7 January 1838, Jackson Papers; quoted in Cole, Whig Party in the South, p. 55; Van Buren to Jackson, 17 February 1839, Van Buren Papers.
its proposal in the fall of 1837; he continued to warn of the dangers to the country of a "union of the sword and the purse..." for three years, much in the style, rhetoric, and philosophy employed by Webster during the same period. He, too, lambasted the Democrats for their abandonment of the people in a time of severe economic crisis and despaired at the lack of a responsible national government which would assume a direct responsibility of caring for its distressed citizens. Clay's solution for the financial crisis, of course, was the reestablishment of a national Bank, a plan in which Webster heartily concurred. To Clay, such a move would represent the first step toward the development of a national governmental philosophy which recognized the responsibility of providing a parental, positive, and protective environment for its citizens.\(^{53}\)

Concerning the possibility of the reestablishment of a national Bank, Clay was pessimistic; he believed that it was "useless" to try to obtain a new Bank because the people were not then in favor of doing so. If and when public sentiment changed, or even if it did not, Clay wrote to a correspondent, "I for one cheerfully acquiesce in the

\(^{53}\)Clay to Francis Brooke, 19 December 1837, Clay, Works of Clay, ed. Colton, 5:422; the speeches of Clay against Van Buren's subtreasury plan and his Whiggish concept of the duties and powers of the national government may be followed in Senate, Congressional Globe, 25th Cong., 1st sess., 1837, pp. 251-69; also, see ibid., 2d sess., 1838, pp. 151-52, 344-419.
decision." Clay indeed possessed a "good opinion" of mankind; as he noted, sometimes their actions in the past have "shaken my faith very much," but nevertheless, he assumed them to be essentially good and honest, "although very likely to deception." Clay battled sincerely for the people in his speeches in the Senate against the subtreasury plan and for the establishment of a new Bank, which he believed would remedy the economic havoc brought on by the Jacksonians. As one biographer has pointed out, "Clay was then sixty years old--too old for experiments in farce." His utterances must therefore be taken as evidence that he "believed in" what he said.54

In addition to his contest with Van Buren over the independent treasury, Clay clashed with his former Whig ally, John C. Calhoun, now a Democrat and supporter of the president, over the rising issue of slavery. Retreating from his erstwhile nationalistic philosophy, Calhoun had presented to Congress in December, 1837, an impassioned but well-defined and logical, constitutionally-based defense of slavery. According to Calhoun, the Union had been created in 1787 by the several states; therefore, this "compact" of states rested on the assumption that the national government, acting as the agent of the states, ought to use all of its powers to insure the

safety of all the states and their institutions, including slavery where it already existed. Moreover, said Calhoun, when each state entered the Union and became a part of the compact, it retained sole and absolute power over its own institutions, including slavery. He reasoned, therefore, that the national government should not and could not interfere with slavery in the states where it currently existed, or for that matter, in the District of Columbia, or even where it might exist in any new states admitted to the Union at a later date. In addition, the national government had the constitutional duty to protect the "peculiar institution" wherever it had previously thrived or might spread in the future. Thus, Calhoun deliberately forced the Senate to decide directly whether or not it would defend or oppose slavery in the older states, and indirectly in any new states which would be admitted to the Union. The volatile Texas issue, of course, was intimately and directly connected with this great question.

Although no longer a Whig, Calhoun continued to base his political arguments on slavery and other critical issues on a foundation of sound, intellectualized reasoning. Even though he had

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abruptly in 1828 shifted from a strong nationalist to an equally-adamant sectionalist stand, his motives were logical as well as sincere. His dilemma was that he tried to preserve both the Union and southern rights, which, in an era of shifting moral, philosophical, and economic realities, was increasingly difficult if not impossible to do.  

Calhoun was depressed at the charges of self-seeking opportunism when he deserted the Whig party. "In times so degenerate, when there is so little truth and sincerity," he wrote to a former Yale schoolmate, "he, who speaks and acts as he really thinks, is almost sure to deceive everybody." He added, "Had I gone with the crowd and the current of the time..." and tried to advance "my popularity and influence," instead of trying to protect the nation and its best interests, "I could have passed for a first rate patriot; at least equal to Mr. Clay or Mr. Webster." Instead, following the only logical course, Calhoun lamented that "I have been charged with motives of popularity and ambition."  

The dilemma of Calhoun was soon to be the dilemma of the entire nation. As spokesmen of the South such as Calhoun demanded

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56 Wiltse, John C. Calhoun: Nullifier, pp. 390-91; for a dissenting view, see Capers, John C. Calhoun, pp. 78, 256.

the positive protection of the national government over slavery, a powerful abolitionist crusade to have the federal government legally abolish slavery in the states where it existed or ultimately might spread also gained momentum. To men of reason, the extremist pro- and anti-slavery forces both were equally dangerous, and if not checked, would eventually collide with such force that the Union would be destroyed. To such men, only moderation, conciliation, and compromise could save the nation.

Although he personally opposed the institution of slavery, Webster strongly denied Calhoun's constitutional interpretation, which charged the national government with the duty to protect slavery in the states where it existed. While he admitted that Congress could regulate and even abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, Webster maintained that Congress had no power whatsoever over the institution in the states where it already existed. Only the states themselves could abolish or protect slavery; the national government had no such power. To Webster, Calhoun's theory was clearly unconstitutional and to assume that it had any constitutional validity at all would be extremely dangerous to the preservation of the Union. 58

58 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 8: 109-14; Webster to Benjamin Silliman, 29 January 1838, Webster Papers.
Clay followed Webster's constitutional reasoning regarding the relationship of the states and the national government in the slavery controversy, except that he feared the abolitionists even more than the slave power, and he warned the nation of their potentially-disastrous disunionist effects. According to the Kentuckian, abolitionists in pursuance of their "mad and fatal course" had set back the progress of gradual emancipation because of the fears of the South of a suddenly-liberated, vengeful black race. Clay argued that southern demands for the protection of slavery in the states where it already existed were unconstitutional; at the same time, he stressed that the abolitionists' illogical extremism would eventually result in a deadly sectional conflict between a unified North and a monolithic South. The outcome of such a confrontation would inevitably be "a clash of arms," a civil war, and "beneath the ruins of the Union would be buried, sooner or later, the liberty of both races." True to his appellation of the "Great Compromiser," Clay urged that a spirit of moderation and reason guide both southerners and abolitionists and that the federal government not become involved in the raging slavery controversy. For the time being, Clay's and Webster's warnings were heeded, and their efforts were successful. 59

Throughout his presidential campaign of 1838-39, Clay, who owned slaves but favored a policy of colonization as the best solution to the great problem, was continually enmeshed in the pro-slavery, abolitionist struggle. His policy of trying to placate both sides seemed only to dissatisfy each group. As he noted, "The Abolitionists are denouncing me as a slaveholder, and slaveholders as Abolitionist, while they both unite on Mr. Van Buren." Clay, however, was quite optimistic regarding his chances for both the Whig nomination and the presidency in 1840. As he wrote to Francis Brooke, "I believe myself that the current in my favor . . . will again burst forward, with accumulated strength."60

Clay had good reason for such optimism. He always had considerable support in the North and as the president of South Carolina College, Dr. Thomas Cooper, told Nicholas Biddle, "If Clay can get the votes of New York or Pennsylvania, his chances for election are good." As Cooper pointed out, at the same time, "the South will not go for [Webster]."61

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60 Clay to Brooke, 3 November 1838, 28 January 1838, ibid., 5:430-31, 439.

61 Cooper to Biddle, 14 August 1838, 24 May 1837, Biddle Correspondence, pp. 323-24, 279-80.
The South, however, would go for Clay, or so he believed. His former position on the tariff, his role in the compromise of 1833, and his ownership of slaves, even though he was mildly anti-slavery, made him acceptable to many in the South. As Calhoun's senatorial colleague from South Carolina, William C. Preston, wrote to Senator Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina, "The only [Whig] who has a chance for the next Presidency is Mr. Clay—who is really a noble creature. . . ." Another southern correspondent likewise informed Mangum that "Mr. Clay is the only one . . . that the Whigs can expect to run with success." 62

By 1838 Clay's candidacy was endorsed by the Kentucky and Rhode Island legislatures and by several southern newspapers. Clay's optimism seemed to be justified; as he wrote Mangum in the summer of 1838, "Our Cause everywhere is making sure and certain progress, and . . . my particular cause could hardly be improved." 63 Within eighteen months, however, Clay's hopes for the presidency were dashed.

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63 Cole, Whig Party in the South, p. 56; Clay to Mangum, 31 May 1838, Mangum Papers, ed. Shanks, 2:525.
During the late 1830's, the Whig party was undergoing a critical introspection and self-examination. Old line Whiggery had been based on a broad, multifaceted detestation of Andrew Jackson, his domineering personality, and especially his political philosophy and policies; it was led by such distinguished patrician-politicians of the deferential style as Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, who in turn were supported by a relatively small but loyal following. Clay and Webster attempted to appeal to the electorate's higher sense of logic and reason in their efforts to win elections as well as to implement through congressional action their Whiggish policies. However noble and intellectually-defensible this leadership and political style might have been, it did not win elections. While the proto-Whigs of 1832 and the Whigs of 1836 under the leadership of Clay and Webster earned many votes, they could not attract enough of the rank and file support to defeat Jackson and Van Buren in the battle for the White House.

This traditional Whig leadership was too aristocratic and too intellectual, and the party's approach to the electorate was too esoteric and metaphysical to gain the masses' loyalty and allegiance. From a standpoint of political pragmatism, in what was rapidly being proclaimed as the "age of the common man," the old style Whiggery of Clay and Webster was fading. Clearly, unless it were to undergo
a dramatic transformation in leadership, style, and rhetoric so as
to enlarge its base of popular support, the Whig party was doomed to
repeated electoral defeat and ultimately, to political death.

Try as they might maintain their roles as the absolute
leaders of their party, Webster and Clay did not succeed. After the
Whig defeat in 1836, a new, younger, and more astute group of poli-
ticians emerged as the real political leaders of the Whig party. They
were highly successful in lessening intraparty political strife, they
were able to broaden significantly popular support for the party, and
they turned their attention to "available" candidates who, because of
their skill and promotional efforts, could win elections. These new
Whig leaders desperately sought political victory at any cost, even if
triumph meant adopting the Democrats' style of emotion-laden rhe-
toric and shallow appeals, which were designed to cater to and gain
the votes of the masses. This new style Whiggery was even pre-
pared to find its own military heroes, strong Whig credentials not
being a major criterion of selection, and through any means necessary,
elect these heroes to the nation's highest office. While the new Whig
leadership and its approach to politics was pragmatic in the best
Jacksonian tradition, the older leaders, especially Clay and Webster,
with their lofty principles and closely-reasoned, logical arguments,
were quietly set aside. Clay and Webster continued to serve in the
Senate and seek the presidency, maintaining all the while their old principles, leadership, and influence; nevertheless, they had irretrievably lost forever their former positions and power in the Whig party. They had not changed, but their party, and the United States, had. 64

Much of the inspiration and leadership for the new style Whiggery was provided by the Albany, New York, newspaperman (formerly from Rochester), Thurlow Weed, and his fellow journalist, Horace Greeley. They were ably assisted by powerful leaders of the old, democratic Antimasonic party, especially William H. Seward from Auburn, New York, and Thaddeus Stevens, of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In order to win the presidential election of 1840, these men knew well that they and the Whig party would have to "descend from the forum and take the people by the hand." 65

As the National Intelligencer noted, it was clear that the


lesson of the 1836 contest would not be forgotten: "that politicians
would have learned to consult the people, and not to control them in
the choice of candidates." The Whigs, as one Pennsylvanian wrote
to future President William Henry Harrison, "must prepare for the
next campaign, and profit by the errors of the past." Under the
new leadership, such "errors" were indeed rectified, and as
Horace Greeley later testified, "In that slouching defeat of 1836
lay the germ of the overwhelming Whig victory of 1840."

Even as Clay and Webster were launching their presidential
campaigns in 1837, the new Whig professionals were searching for a
fresh "available" candidate who could win in 1840. Thurlow Weed
particularly favored the elimination of Webster and Clay as Whig
candidates; he believed that it was necessary to remove them from
the field and concentrate instead on a single candidate who could in all
probability win the forthcoming election. He was never hostile to the
two old Whigs; rather, he personally liked and admired them. To
Weed, their problem as well as that of the Whig party, was that they
could not win in the changing political milieu of the times.

Of the senator from Kentucky, Weed remarked in retrospect

66 National Intelligencer, 20 April 1838; C. J. Todd to Harri-
son, 8 April 1837, William Henry Harrison Papers, Library of Con-
gress, Washington, D.C., on microfilm, North Texas State Univer-
sity Library; Greeley, Recollections of a Busy Life, 1:113.
that although he was "warmly attached to Mr. Clay and preferring him over all others for president, I did not believe he could be elected. . . .," and that he did not wish to see Clay once again subjected to the "mortification of defeat" or for the Whig party to lose its great "opportunity" to win in 1840. Similarly, in a face-to-face confrontation, Weed bluntly told Webster that he had no chance for the presidency; the "Wizard of the Lobby" pointed out that the Whigs were going to choose instead the candidate "who will poll the most votes."\(^{67}\)

To this new party leadership, the obvious candidate with the most popular appeal was the Whig who had made the best showing in 1836, General William Henry Harrison. Lacking any significant political experience and fewer demonstrable philosophical beliefs, and campaigning only briefly that year, Harrison had shown that he possessed limited but widespread popularity. His greatest asset, noted the *National Intelligencer*, was that unlike Clay and Webster, "his name subdues all prejudice and encounters none." Seward proposed within days after the election of 1836 that the General be the

Whig "candidate by continuation" in 1840. 68

These new professionals sensed that they had found a winning candidate in Harrison, and indeed they had. Through the skillful machinations of Weed, Seward, and Stevens, the "Hero of Tippecanoe," a man with little if any true political convictions except that he always maintained that he was a Whig with antimasonic leanings, was nominated at the party convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in December, 1839. Availability was obviously the primary consideration in Harrison's selection, and the Whigs were determined to gain the presidency.

The old guard was shocked at the apostasy of the younger Whig leadership because of their selection of Harrison as the nominee. Reportedly, former Senator John Tyler, of Virginia, who was subsequently to be named as Harrison's running mate as the vice-presidential candidate, cried when he heard that Clay's bid for the presidency had been thwarted. Clay himself was enraged. "I am the most unfortunate man in the history of parties . . .," Clay said, "always run by my friends when sure to be defeated; and now betrayed for a nomination when I, or any one, would be sure of an

According to Henry A. Wise, Clay became violently inebriated and said, "If there were two Henry Clays, one would make the other president of the United States." In a moment of understandable rage, he declared, "My friends are not worth the powder and shot it would take to kill them." Nevertheless, Harrison was the official Whig candidate and was therefore charged with the responsibility of defeating Martin Van Buren in the 1840 contest for the presidency.

The Democrats held their national convention at Baltimore on May 5, 1840, and routinely nominated Van Buren by unanimous vote. Their party platform emphasized the limited powers of the national government; it denounced federally-funded internal improvements as well as the recreation of a national bank. It firmly supported the independent treasury plan, as well as the notion that Congress had no authority to deal with slavery in the states where it already existed. After the convention adjourned, many Democrats became negative about their chances for success in 1840; in spite of their platform, they had little to offer the voters in a time of severe

economic crisis and questionable presidential leadership. At the same time, most Democrats echoed the sentiment of a correspondent of Van Buren concerning the probability of the victory of the Whig nominee: Harrison's election "would be a national calamity."70

Harrison and his party issued neither a formal statement of principles nor a party platform; they simply maintained they were Whigs and were determined to oust Van Buren and the Democrats and institute a new program of total "reform" of the government. The Whig presidential candidate and his party attacked the Democrats' use of executive power, spoilsmanship, and their foes' lack of concern for the people's fate during the continuing economic crisis which had begun in 1837. The latter charge was especially effective; hard times had jolted the voters into a receptive mood and they listened intently to Whig promises of a better future. As the old Jacksonian, Thomas Hart Benton, commented, "availability was the only ability sought by the Whigs." The Whigs' leadership wanted desperately to win, and thus they and their candidate resorted to the most elemental, fundamental, and basic emotional appeals to achieve the election of their own version of the "Old Hero."71


71 For the definitive account of the Whigs' use of wild emotionalism in the campaign of 1840, see Robert G. Gunderson, *The
To Clay and Webster, a serious dilemma was posed. Would they support their party's candidate, who was assuming a vague, anti-Democratic stance, which was not founded on an official, positive party platform, and who employed the oft-criticized Jacksonian methods of pandering to the public's whim and fancy? Their response was definitely affirmative.

Henry Clay and Daniel Webster believed sincerely that William Henry Harrison had to be elected in order for any of their long-held political and philosophical plans to be enacted. Therefore, with reservations, they began to campaign for the Whig nominee. Clay, ever true to his old Whig code, was the first of the two traditional leaders to reveal his real thoughts. "I lament the necessity . . . of appealing to the feelings and passions of our country men, rather than to their reasons and their judgments, to secure his [Harrison's] election." Webster, too, disapproved of the tactics of the new Whiggery, but like Clay, he believed that such rhetoric and strategy was necessary to guarantee the election of Harrison and

the furtherance of his traditional Whig program. As he wrote to the governor of Massachusetts, "The people have been cajoled and humbugged. All parties have played off so many poor popular contrivances against each other that I am afraid the public mind . . . " has been warped "from correct principles." Being men of reason and intellect, Clay and Webster nevertheless campaigned for the "available" candidate, the man whom the new Whig leadership adopted simply because such action was expedient; only through his election could they in their own way preserve and further implement their old, venerable philosophies and policies. 72

The major issue in the election of 1840 was the continuing economic depression and Van Buren's unwillingness or inability to do anything to correct the crisis. Clay embarked on a speaking tour of the West in which he hammered at the Democrats and their lack of concern for the economic well-being of the people; he also attacked the Jacksonian policies of spoilsmanship and political favoritism. At Buffalo, Nashville, and Baltimore, he urged a return to responsible and effective government led by a dynamic Congress, supported by a wise if weak chief executive. While Clay did not enjoy indulging

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72 Clay to John J. Crittenden, 31 July 1840, quoted in Van Deusen, Life of Henry Clay, p. 335; Webster to Edward Everett, 16 February 1840, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18:75-76.
in demagoguery in behalf of Harrison, he believed that his old poli-
cician could and would be implemented if Harrison were to be elected; throughout his tour, he excelled in promoting Whig programs. 73

Webster also campaigned vigorously for Harrison. Like Clay, he strenuously urged Harrison's election, but felt a strong dis-
taste for demagoguery and therefore pressed issues and attacked the Democrats with his familiar intellectualized weaponry, albeit tainted with an eye toward the popular mood. He defended his old theory of the nationwide benefits of a policy of tariff protection in the Senate against the formidable arguments of Calhoun; in the South, he assailed Van Buren's alleged abolitionist tendencies. On Wall Street, he attacked the Democrats' neglect of the financial community. He ended his campaign for Harrison in Boston with an ascerbic onslaught against the general Democratic philosophy, its programs, its paralysis in a time of national economic crisis, and its leaders, both past and present. In typical Websterian fashion, he proclaimed, "Princi-
ples are everything; individuals nothing." 74

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21; Van Deusen, Henry Clay, p. 335; Hugh McCulloch, Men and
Measures of Half a Century (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons,
1889), pp. 53-54.

74 Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:85; Nathans, Daniel Webster
and Jacksonian Democracy, pp. 134-38; Webster, Writings and
Speeches of Daniel Webster, 8:267-77, 3:5-35, 61-79, 81-102, 40-
43.
One historian has noted that "There has probably never been a presidential campaign of more enthusiasm and less thought than the Whig campaign of 1840." For principle, the Whigs substituted mass enthusiasm. In a campaign that was purposely designed to reach the masses, the Whigs adopted the rustic log cabin and hard cider as their symbols. There were log cabin badges, log cabin loges, a Log Cabin newspaper, and log cabin clubs. Hard cider, the common man's drink, was liberally distributed among the people as the bands played rousing political songs at massed gatherings. Huge barbecues were held throughout the country, and the electorate was treated to the flamboyant oratory of the Whigs' most exciting speakers. 75

One correspondent wrote Martin Van Buren in 1837 concerning his financial policies, "Don't let our opponents learn how to defeat you." 76 The Whigs did, however. Without any great intellectual effort but with brilliant political expertise and psychological acumen, they triumphed precisely because they successfully


76 Thomas Cooper to Van Buren, 14 April 1837, Van Buren Papers.
emulated the old Jacksonians. By running a military hero for the presidency and keeping him silent on his political convictions while stirring up the people's emotions, especially concerning the panic of 1837 and its aftermath, they emerged victorious. Rather than appealing to men's higher faculties of intellect and reason, the new Whig leadership and its candidate successfully directed their attention to the "stomachs of the people."  

As one party professional wrote Van Buren, "Never in my experience of 27 years [have I seen] the rank and file show so much spirit and zeal." Harrison gained 52.9 per cent of the popular vote, while Van Buren received 46.8 per cent. A new minor party, the Liberty party, was able to obtain only some 6,000 votes for its militantly abolitionist candidate, James G. Birney. The electoral vote reflected a landslide for Harrison: he received 234 votes to Van Buren's 60. Clearly, the voice of the people was heard, and they demanded a new style Whiggery and its popular, if bland, candidate.  

Van Buren's political acumen and perceptive party management which had served him so well as a party man utterly failed him during his presidency. His lack of a magnetic personality, strong

77 Quoted in the Washington Globe, 16 May 1840.

leadership, and the lingering economic depression cost him a second term; as one historian has noted, in the overwhelming Whig victory of 1840, Van Buren "was left standing amid the ruin, bewildered and alone." The "Little Magician," whose magic had deserted him, probably would have agreed with the National Intelligencer, which commented, "We live in a remarkable age—one that will puzzle the honest historian hereafter to describe." 79

A temporary harmony was achieved by the Whigs through their selection of Harrison and their rejection of their traditional leaders, Webster and Clay, and their old, deeply-held philosophies. While Webster and Clay had fervently clung to both their principles and to a rational, intellectual presentation thereof, the new Whig leadership copied and even improved upon the emotionalized rhetoric and methods of their old adversaries. The principled Webster and the outspoken Clay, who had said, "I had rather be right than be president," were bypassed for a lesser man whose greatest political asset was that he had no particular political philosophy. 80

Whig unity and harmony was short-lived, however. Within months, an unforeseen event occurred which rent the party to its

79 Curtis, Fox at Bay, pp. 204-06; National Intelligencer, 27 March 1840.

foundations. In the chaos of subsequent party dissent and because of important old and new issues, Webster and Clay reemerged as the party's principal leaders and spokesmen. A new style Whiggery had evolved after 1836; after 1840, with their principles and standards untarnished but their political awareness sharpened, Clay and Webster once again launched their battle standards against the Democrats and began the long road to the White House.
CHAPTER V

WHIG DIVISION AND REUNION: CLAY, WEBSTER, AND THE GREGIAN HORSE

William Henry Harrison, the "available" Whig candidate, was inaugurated president in March of 1840; within a month, he became the first president to die in office. Whether "Old Tip" would have become an effective leader quickly became a moot question. With his death, a renewed struggle for leadership erupted in the Whig party. Four years later, a combination of old problems, new issues, and the emergence of a dynamic Democratic chief executive had not only dashed the presidential hopes of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster but had called into question grave matters of war, peace, slavery, and quite possibly, the existence of the Union itself.

After receiving the nomination, William Henry Harrison was the titular head of the Whig party; nevertheless, the real leader of the congressional Whigs and of the national party at large was Henry Clay. Even before Harrison's election in November, 1840, Clay had taken the liberty of offering his own programs and policies
for the party. They featured the usual nationalistic Whig goals and objectives: an extremely limited presidential veto power, congressional control of the treasury, and the establishment of a new national Bank if the public expressed its desire for such an institution. Also, Clay's program envisioned that the protective rates for the tariff should be maintained on the basis of the compromise solution of 1833. Harrison apparently agreed with Clay's plan. 1

Immediately after Harrison's victory in November, 1848, Clay began to offer the president-elect even more unsolicited advice and to exert forcefully his style of personal party leadership. Somewhat arrogantly, he fully expected Harrison to succumb to his will. Within days, however, Harrison told Clay that perhaps it would be best for them to communicate only through mutual friends, rather than through personal meetings. Tensions began to mount between the Whig leader and the Whig president. After listening to Clay virtually demand that Harrison appoint his personal friend, John M. Clayton of Delaware to the post of secretary of the navy, Harrison exclaimed, "Mr. Clay, you forget that I am the President."

By March, 1841, the breach between the two men was complete, with

Harrison requesting that Clay henceforth communicate with him only in writing and not visit the White House.\(^2\)

In a despondent mood, Clay wrote the president immediately after receiving Harrison's directive and explained that instead of "dictating" to him or to his administration, he was only expressing his opinion, "as a citizen and as a Senator in regard to public matters, [and if this] be dictation, then I have dictated, and not otherwise." As Clay observed, the only alternative to voicing his opinion as his duty required would be to retire from the Senate. In closing, Clay noted that he still had the great obligation to render services "to a country to whose interests my life has been dedicated." Observing the president's wishes, Clay never had another private visit with Harrison.\(^3\)

While Clay and Harrison's feud was intensifying, the president had begun to select the members of his cabinet. Clay was


offered the post of secretary of state largely because of his acknowledged services to his party, but he rejected the appointment before it was formally tendered. The Kentuckian probably reasoned that his power base would be greatly enhanced if he remained in the Senate and assumed the leadership of the Whig majority in the congressional session due to meet in March, 1841. By doing so, he would thus be in an excellent position to shape legislation according to his personal and philosophical predilections; also, he would enjoy an enviable post from which he could launch his candidacy for the presidency in 1844, as Harrison had previously pledged to serve only one term in office.  

Although Clay declined Harrison's offer of a high cabinet position, he virtually gave his assent to the selection by the president of his old philosophical ally and personal rival, Daniel Webster, as secretary of state. As Clay pointed out, while the two great Whigs' relations had been strained and "shaken" in the preceding eight years, "I did not see how any President could overlook him; [if] I had been elected, I should have felt myself constrained to offer

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him some distinguished station. . . ."

Quietly, Harrison offered and Webster accepted the position as head of the state department. 5

Because of the deepening feud between Harrison and Clay, Webster's influence over the president was great; consequently, the new secretary of state had much to do with the selection of the other cabinet members. Interestingly, the major nominees for the cabinet posts were much more friendly and disposed toward Clay than to Webster. Senator William C. Rives of Virginia described the new attorney general, John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, as being Clay's "alter ego." The secretary of war, John Bell of Tennessee, and the secretary of the treasury, Thomas Ewing of Ohio, were also old friends of Clay. 6

By the spring of 1841, it had become apparent that both Clay and Webster had maneuvered themselves into powerful positions from which they could launch their presidential campaigns for 1844: Clay as the leader of both the strong Whig congressional majority as well as the national party, and Webster, as the weak president's

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chief foreign relations advisor and personal confidant. As Henry A. Wise of Virginia observed, "At once, there arose an implacable war, open and declared between [Clay] and Mr. Webster." This struggle, said Wise, "divided the Whig party into two factions, on no difference of opinion or principles at all, but purely on personal preferences and partisan predilections." Obviously, both Clay and Webster planned to use the aging Harrison in order to promote their own presidential aspirations. 7

As the Whig senator from North Carolina, Willie F. Mangum, prophetically noted in the spring of 1841, "We may look, I fear, for [a] widening of the breach between Clay and Webster." The division occurred almost immediately in the lame duck session of Congress which convened in December, 1840. Clay was unable to gain the passage of any significant Whig legislation, while Webster openly and consistently voted against Clay's proposed measures along with most of the Democrats. Simultaneously, Clay and Harrison constantly quarreled over Whig patronage policy. As Clay's

demands for a larger role in assigning the spoils of the Whig victory of 1840 increased, the angry Harrison ever more sought the advice and the loyal friendship of Webster. 8

The three-sided struggle for Whig leadership became an irrelevant issue when Harrison suddenly died of pneumonia on April 4, 1841. "Old Tip," the first president to die while in office, was succeeded by the vice-president, John Tyler, of Virginia. Perhaps it was fortunate that Harrison had died at the height of his career. As Henry Wise observed, had he served as president any longer, "he would have been devoured by the divided pack of his own dogs." Within a few short weeks, John Tyler was to feel the sting of unbridled ambition which consumed the Whig leaders, especially Henry Clay. 9

The new president was an aristocratic member of the old school republicanism in Virginia. He was a strong states' rights advocate from the earliest beginnings of his public career in 1816.


9 Wise, Seven Decades of the Union, p. 180.
until his death in 1862, at which time he was serving in the Confederate Congress. Throughout his career in government, both state and national, he had consistently voiced his opposition to the national bank, federally supported internal improvements, and the protective tariff. While he had been the only senator to oppose the Force Bill which gave President Jackson solid congressional support in the nullification crisis of 1832-33, he had always been a personal friend of Henry Clay and a staunch advocate and supporter of the compromise tariff of 1833. Although Tyler had been a devout believer in the tenets of states' rights and strict constitutional construction for years, the strong use of executive power by Jackson in the 1830's proved to be too forceful for his tastes; consequently, he aligned himself with the Whig coalition in the early days of Jackson's second term in office.  

In the campaign of 1836, Tyler had been the choice of a small group of southern Whigs as their vice-presidential candidate; although he was defeated that year in his quest for the nation's second highest office, Tyler, as well as other Virginia states' rights Whigs, remained loyal to the anti-Jacksonian coalition. At the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Whig convention in 1939, the choice of John Tyler was

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Henry Clay, whom he had always admired as a great political leader, in spite of the Kentuckian's strong nationalist philosophy. Clay, too, acknowledged that his only real differences with Tyler were over policy matters, not fundamental philosophical beliefs, and any conflicts which might arise could be resolved quickly and easily. To Clay, the singular goal of the Whigs was to wage constant and ultimately successful war on the Democrats and reconcile quickly any intraparty squabbles which might interfere with the ultimate, greater objective. 11

Exactly how Tyler became the vice-presidential candidate at the Whig convention in 1840 is still uncertain. His close friend and fellow Virginian, Henry A. Wise, later maintained that Tyler accepted the nomination only to guarantee to Clay the loyalty of William C. Rives, a dissident conservative Democrat from Virginia, whose support Clay and the Whigs desperately needed in 1840 and in subsequent struggles with the Jacksonians. Other sources indicate that Tyler was selected for the vice-presidential nomination only because other, more prominent Whigs had declined the post.

However, for whatever other motives there might have been, it seems that Tyler was chosen because of his politically-attractive states' rights southern appeal, which balanced conveniently the northern and western consolidationist philosophy of Harrison and the dominant Whig leadership. 12

While Clay's relations with the previous president had deteriorated completely, he had great hopes for a pleasant and profitable political association with John Tyler. Philip Hone observed that "Mr. Tyler is a fine, goodhearted gentleman, and I believe, a disinterested patriot. . . ." Hone also pointed out, however, that Tyler "has some Utopian notions of government which if he does not abandon, will leave him and his administration . . . high and dry. . . ." Indeed, while the change of presidents seemed to portune a close relationship between Tyler and Clay as well as a concurrent decline of Daniel Webster's influence in the White House, quite the contrary ultimately was the case, and Hone's comment on Tyler's "Utopian notions of government" proved to be prophetic. Quickly Tyler and Clay became bitterly and irreconcilably estranged, with

Tyler seeking to maintain an independent presidency, and Clay emerging as the undisputed Whig champion, in the Congress as well as among partisan supporters throughout the country. Webster, trapped in the Clay-Tyler struggle, sided with the president, thereby seriously damaging his political standing with the dominant Clay Whigs, but yet allowing him to remain a prominent national leader who commanded great respect because of his loyalty to the president.

The problem which consistently plagued the Whig party during the Tyler administration for four years can be best explained by examining the philosophies and weltanschauung of the three protagonists, Clay, Webster, and Tyler, and their relationship to their party. As has been pointed out, the Whig party at the time of its creation in the early 1830's was an amalgam of states' rights advocates, strong nationalists, nullifiers, high and low tariff men, and both pro- and anti-bank proponents. The only real thread holding together such a melange, whose membership contained inherently conflicting philosophies, was a tremendous dislike and fear of Andrew Jackson, his alleged excessive and tyrannical use of the veto

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in particular and his consistent display of strong executive power in general. With "Old Hickory" in retirement in 1841 and the battles with Jackson concluded, the one real source of party cement was removed. Consequently, Whiggery was soon buffeted by the various, diverse, and converse forces and philosophies of the leaders, each of whom attempted to assume the direction of the party, the people, and the Congress, in order to reach the White House.

Throughout his career, Henry Clay had always been a devout nationalist, strenuously and consistently promoting those policies and programs which he believed to be essential to the growth of a prosperous, strong United States; at the heart of his vision for the country stood his American System, a political and economic plan designed to promote both national unity and nationwide prosperity. Although he was a man of great principle, he also realized the need for political compromise in times of great national crisis; compromise, if such were the only alternative to domestic disaster, was to him quite appropriate. To Clay, a political compromise did not mean the abandonment of closely-held principles; on the contrary, when honest men of reason were at an impasse, it was not only desirable but necessary to seek an honorable middle path which all conflicting parties could accept. Thus, to Clay, the
Missouri Compromises, the compromise tariff of 1833, and the later compromise of 1850 were not only politically expedient, but they represented equitable, honorable solutions to grave matters which involved the preservation of the Union.

Clay firmly believed that national power should be divided among the three branches of government, with a slightly greater power being assumed by Congress. To Clay, Congress was the branch of the people, it contained their representatives and, therefore, the real source of national power; accordingly, the duty of the congressman was to provide strong, positive leadership. The president's role, Clay believed, was only that of an executor of the congressional will as expressed through its creation of proposed laws, policies, and programs.

Congress, especially the Senate, was Clay's base of political power. He had once been speaker of the house and for over thirty years, he was among the most influential senators, creating Whig programs and combatting those of his opponents. As one historian has observed, "He was regarded as the embodiment of Whig principles, but was in reality the formulator. . . ." He was above all else, "a leader. . . ." With Harrison's demise and the succession of Tyler, Clay was determined to assert more firmly than ever his congressional leadership, a style built on strict party discipline,
and thereby to create and cause to be enacted all of his long-desired but constantly thwarted economic policies at last. Harrison, the "available" candidate, was dead; now the aging but always popular Henry Clay desperately sought and fully expected to assume the mantle of "availability" for himself and thereby be propelled into the White House in 1844. 14

John Tyler, as noted above, was an old school Jeffersonian Republican whose long political career had been founded on strict constitutional construction and a fervent defense of states' rights. Only because of Andrew Jackson's harsh treatment of South Carolina during the nullification crisis of 1832-33 did he find himself in the Whig party. Pledged to oppose almost all of the nationalistic Whigs' programs, especially a protective tariff, a strong national Bank, and the distribution of land sales, he was inevitably destined to conflict with the congressional Whigs, led by Henry Clay. Ironically, although a great proponent of the legislative prerogative, after becoming president, Tyler felt himself obligated to utilize the veto power frequently in order to thwart the programs of Clay and the congressional Whigs. Of course, his reliance on the veto proved to be

anathema to the Clay group, and consequently, his use of presidential power led him into direct confrontation with Clay and the congressional Whigs. 15

Tyler and Daniel Webster shared a fundamental attitude toward public service and politics. Both men believed that politicians should place principle and honor over expediency and subservience to petty partisan politics for the good of the country. Furthermore, Tyler and Webster were both popular regional leaders with significant numbers of admiring constituents. At the same time, however, their political philosophies were totally different: Tyler was ever the arch strict constructionist, while Webster did not waver from his position as the champion of the ultranationalists. Even so, as Tyler came under intense pressure from the Clay-led congressional Whigs, he was usually supported by his secretary of state. Webster correctly believed that he had a special talent for the creation and execution of foreign policy and other aspects of diplomacy. There were several potentially dangerous, pressing problems facing the United States in the early 1840's, especially with England, and Webster felt obligated to remain in his appointed office to insure their successful resolution. Consequently, while the Tyler-Clay battle raged, Webster continued to carry on what he considered to be

15 Vide footnotes 10, 12, and 13.
his life's work: the maintenance and promotion of the Union.

Webster's action in remaining loyal to Tyler, however, was not purely altruistic; the man from Massachusetts desperately wanted to succeed Tyler in the White House in 1845. 16

The special session of Congress, which Clay had earlier persuaded Harrison to call because of the continuing economic crisis, convened on May 31, 1841. Immediately, a clash erupted between Henry Clay and John Tyler over financial matters in general and the perennial bank problem in particular. The bank question, which had for so long been a major political issue between Whigs and Democrats, now was to divide the Whig party itself and in the process of doing so, break one president and almost make another.

Henry Clay believed that the great victory of 1840 had given the Whigs a popular mandate to institute a financial program based on his "American System," even though such fiscal and economic policies had seldom been discussed during the campaign itself. After Harrison's death, Clay was filled with both hope and reservation concerning the new president. As he wrote a favorite correspondent, "If the Executive will cordially cooperate in carrying out

the Whig measures, all will be well. Otherwise, everything is at hazard." At first, it did seem that Tyler would indeed cooperate. In an address given three days after taking office in April, 1841, Tyler pointed out in a Whiggish manner that he strongly disapproved the "union of the purse and sword." While attacking the economic and fiscal policies and programs of both Jackson and Van Buren, he explained that he desired a "constitutional" method of restoring a sound currency, which would lead to prosperous times once more. 17

The critical word which led to so many heated Whig intra-party battles was "constitutional." Most nationalist Whigs understood Tyler's message to signify that he was prepared to accept a new national Bank. Major Whig newspapers, both North and South, also contained editorials and comments to the effect that Tyler was going to assume a stance of traditional Whig orthodoxy, namely, a nationalist position. 18

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18 Washington National Intelligencer, 12, 14, 17 April 1841; Richmond Whig, 13, 14 April 1841.
To blur further his real feelings on the bank question, Tyler wrote to Clay in April, 1840, and told the "Hotspur" that "I have no intention to submit anything to Congress on this subject [i.e., the bank] . . .," and that he would consider the constitutionality of any bank measure which might emanate from Congress. Tyler then clouded completely his true position on the Bank when, addressing the special session of Congress on June 1, 1841, he exclaimed that he would rely completely on "the immediate representatives of the States and the people," and that he "would take their counsel and advice" in matters of economic and fiscal policy. Tyler stated that he would refrain from making positive suggestions as to exactly what measures Congress should devise. "I shall be ready to concur with you in the adoption of such system as you may propose, reserving to myself the ultimate power of [a veto], which I will not believe any act of yours will call into requisition." 19

As one historian has stated, by such uncreative indecisiveness and seeming "helplessness," John Tyler thus threw himself "into the waiting arms of Henry Clay and the Whig majority in Congress. . . ." Clay had always been a proponent of the legislative prerogative and believed as a good Whig that Congress should be the

19 Tyler to Clay, 30 April 1841, Tyler, *Letters and Times*, 2:32; Richardson, comp., *Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 4:42-47.
dynamic, creative branch of the national government, and now Tyler had specifically charged him and his fellow congressmen with solving the nation's continuing economic crisis with whatever fiscal and financial legislation they deemed appropriate. As Woodrow Wilson later observed, "leadership and control must be lodged somewhere. . . . There can be no successful government without leadership. . . ." In what he must have considered to be a power vacuum, Clay rushed to fill the void. 20

A week after the special session had convened and in response to the president's call on Congress to provide leadership, Clay offered a resolution outlining the program which he desired to be effected. The main provisions were: repeal of the subtreasury plan; incorporation of a national Bank adapted to the wants and needs of the people and of the federal government; an increase in the rates of the tariff which would afford American manufacturers additional protection; and distribution of monies resulting from public land sales to the states. 21


21 Senate, Congressional Globe, 27th Cong., 1st sess., 1841, p. 22.
During June, 1841, Clay successfully brought about repeal of the subtreasury plan originally instituted by President Martin Van Buren. Later in the session, through a complicated logrolling agreement, he achieved a plan whereby his distribution program would be put into law. However, his major goal, establishment of a new national Bank, immediately ran into trouble.

On June 7, 1841, Clay, chairman of the Senate special banking committee, asked Secretary of the Treasury Thomas Ewing to submit a plan for a national Bank, or "fiscal agent." The Bank that Ewing proposed to Clay was one which gave the states power to veto the Bank's policies; to counteract the very power and effectiveness of the Bank itself would not alleviate the nation's continuing economic crisis, or so thought Clay. "What a bank that would be," he exclaimed in disgust. Tyler, however, would probably have signed the proposal into law, had he the choice at this time, but he did not have such an opportunity.

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Condemning the Ewing proposal, Henry Clay devised his own bank scheme, which envisioned a powerful national Bank reminiscent of the old First and Second Banks of the United States, which had enormous fiscal powers. Throughout June and July, 1841, the Congress debated the relative merits and drawbacks of Clay's proposal. All the while, Clay, Tyler, the politicians and the press wondered and speculated about Tyler's eventual action on the ultra-nationalist bill. The Kentuckian himself was quite apprehensive. In a letter to Governor Robert P. Letcher of Kentucky, he commented, "We are in a crisis as a party. There is a reason to fear that Tyler will throw himself upon Calhoun [and the Democrats], and detach himself from the great body of Whigs." Continuing, Clay observed that "If he should take that course, it will be on the bank [issue]." 24

Secretary of State Daniel Webster was also concerned about the outcome of Tyler's eventual decision. In a letter to Hiram Ketchum, he noted that "The power of approving or disapproving acts of Congress is a power belonging to the President alone . . .

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[and] the entire decision rests with him alone." In a subsequent letter, Webster possibly unconsciously took the middle ground of reason when he stated, "Let us try as we can agree upon and establish." Senator Mangum of North Carolina, however, knew in his own mind that Tyler, the states' rights advocate, would not accept such a measure. He noted prophetically, the anticipated veto "will bring such an explosion as perhaps we have not seen . . .; [Tyler] is drunken with vanity. . . ." In spite of all the haggling between Clay and Tyler, Webster nevertheless believed the Ewing bill to be sound, if for no other reason than it was the only bill which was really acceptable to most Whigs; it was to him simply a matter of either the Ewing Bank, "or none at all."25

Webster tried his best to reconcile and keep in good temper the party, the president, and Henry Clay by having a "stag party" at his lodgings in Washington. If the rival factions of the Whig party did not work out their differences amicably, Webster said, "I know not what will become of our administration." The "Defender of the Constitution" was obviously quite worried about the

final decision of Tyler.\textsuperscript{26}

The major Whig newspapers were either silent or had little to say on the bank question at this time. The \textit{Washington National Intelligencer}, the Clay organ, reported virtually nothing concerning the Whig intraparty struggle over the issue; Thurlow Weed's \textit{Albany Evening Journal} commented that "We shall not try to predict the result. . . ." Later, realizing what was ultimately going to happen, the New York newspaper speculated, "Should the President Veto this bill, what is to be the course of the Whig party?"\textsuperscript{27}

Tyler felt that "My back is to the wall. . . ." Indeed it was. On the eve of the president's great decision, the \textit{Evening Journal} noted that "The fate of the bill now rests with the President." Asking the question which concerned many men in politics, the newspaper queried, "Should the President veto this bill, what is to be the course of the Whig party?" On August 16, 1841, the suspense was broken: Tyler vetoed Clay's proposal that would create a new, strong national Bank against the advice of Webster and other members of the cabinet. Tyler's argument was that the Clay measure was too

\textsuperscript{26}Webster to Caroline Leroy Webster, 16 August 1841, Webster, \textit{Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster}, 16:353; Webster to Edward Everett, 28 July 1841, ibid., 18:106.

\textsuperscript{27}There is little or no reference to the great struggle between Clay and Tyler in the \textit{National Intelligencer} during the summer of 1841; \textit{Albany Evening Journal}, 6 July, 10 August 1941.
nationalistic in concept and thereby posed a destructive threat to the states, their liberties, and their rights. 28

After the first veto, the Clay-led Whigs in Congress passed another bank bill; Tyler, on September 9, 1841, quickly vetoed the proposal on the grounds that it was also destructive of the states' constitutional prerogatives and powers. Earlier, a friend of Clay had exclaimed that if the president vetoed this bill, "I should despair for the Republic; if our friends betray us, what can we expect from our opponents?" 29

After a summer of intraparty conflict, the Whig party was faced with both a crisis and a dilemma. Should Whigs try to continue to support a consistent, honorable, if obstinate, president, or should they shift their allegiance to the real leader of the party? For most congressional Whigs, the choice was not difficult. Clay was "the embodiment of Whig principles," the man who had carried their

28 Tyler to Beverly Tucker, 28 July 1841, John Tyler Papers; Albany Evening Journal, 9, 10 August 1841; Silas Wright to Van Buren, 21 June 1841, Van Buren Papers; Richardson, comp., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 4:63-68.

standard for many years, and would continue to do so in the future. 30

In September, 1841, the entire Whig cabinet originally appointed by Harrison and retained by Tyler resigned in disgust, except for Webster. For him, whether to remain in the cabinet and thus to support the discredited president or to follow his party associates was a difficult question. As an ultranationalist, Webster knew that working with an extreme states' rights advocate would be difficult. At the same time, he did not want Clay to solidify his leadership of the party in such a way that would completely eliminate his own chances of later seeking the presidency. In addition to philosophical and political considerations, Webster's decision was influenced by foreign policy problems. He sincerely believed that the United States was facing an immediate crisis with England because of long-simmering, unresolved diplomatic problems. Therefore, in order to keep his hopes for the presidency alive and continue to serve the president and the country, Webster decided to stay in the cabinet. 31


31 The supposedly-weak Tyler proved to be surprisingly strong in his relations with fellow Whigs. When the first executive-legislative conflict occurred with Clay, he told "Prince Hal" to
As a result of Tyler's veto and the subsequent resignation of all but one of his cabinet, the estrangement between the president and the party that had elected him seemed complete. As John Quincy Adams lamented, "[T]he hour for the requiem of the Whig Party was at hand." Such indeed appeared to be the case. While several Whig newspapers scolded Tyler for his actions, most party papers strongly condemned the president. One noted that while Tyler had acted "conscientiously," and that his "sincerity and integrity" could not be questioned, his arguments were "untenable and his general notions [on the bank bill were] unsound." Another newspaper said that Tyler had "acted the imbecile and the fool outright." A Kentucky editor commented that if Tyler thought it proper "to throw himself into the arms of... Benton and Calhoun, we say

"Go... to your end of the avenue, where stands the Capitol, and perform your duty to the country as you think proper." As for me, Tyler exclaimed, "So help me God, I shall do mine at this end of it as I shall think proper." Quoted in Tyler, Letters and Times, 2:33. When the cabinet resigned en masse after Tyler's second bank veto, the president was asked by Webster, "Where am I to go, Mr. President?" Tyler replied, "That is up to you, Mr. Webster." Answering quickly, Webster declared, "If you leave it to me... I will stay where I am." Thereupon Tyler said, "Give me your hand on that, and... I will say to you that Henry Clay is a doomed man from this hour." Quoted in ibid., pp. 121-22; Henry Cabot Lodge, Daniel Webster (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1886), pp. 250-51; Webster to Hiram Ketchum, 10 September 1841, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:356-58; National Intelligencer, 14 September 1841.
Weed's influential Whig newspaper had predicted that Tyler's vetoes "would lead to a more firm union of the Whigs in Congress." These Clay-led congressmen, said the newspapers, "will [still] be found true to their principles and their country." Such appeared to be the case; on September 13, 1841, a caucus of congressional Whigs took the unprecedented action of publicly expelling their besieged president from the party. Thus, as the special session of Congress closed, the Whigs found themselves under the strong leadership of Henry Clay, with the great nationalist Daniel Webster supporting a discredited president, who himself had become a man without a party. 33

Throughout the regular two sessions of the Twenty-Seventh Congress, which met from December, 1841, through the fall of 1842, the Whigs in Congress and the president continued to battle furiously,

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with Tyler exercising the veto power over much legislation. Henry Clay did not take an active role in the struggle, however. By the spring of 1842, the Kentuckian had completed his work in solidifying his leadership of the congressional Whigs, he had comfortably assumed his familiar position as party chief, and hearing the siren song of the White House once more, he turned his attentions toward another race for the presidency. The few resolutions that he did introduce and the fewer speeches he made in Congress indicate the issues which he believed would be important in the campaign of 1844: a severe restriction of the veto power, lowered governmental expenditures, distribution of the public land sales, and a higher tariff. 34

Always a strong leader, Clay had most clearly shown during the crucial special session of Congress in 1841 that he was truly both the substance and spirit of Whiggery. For the exercise of such leadership, he was condemned as well as praised by his contemporaries. One Massachusetts Whig, Caleb Cushing, charged him with having established little less than a full-fledged congressional "dictatorship." Clay's will had been absolute law throughout the special session, charged the Washington Globe. Clement Eaton, writing from a pro-Clay bias, has nevertheless described the

Kentuckian's imperious and somewhat arrogant actions in 1841-42 as being "the least defensible part of his career." A sympathetic biographer also assailed Clay's style of leadership as being "contemptuous and rash." Another leading historian of the era has observed that "the arrogance" of Clay's domineering personality was the most significant feature of the Twenty-Seventh Congress. Opinions and interpretations aside, most Whigs in Congress and throughout the country at the time probably agreed with the feelings of Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Joseph Story; as he wrote Clay,

> In promoting [Whig] measures, I know of no man who has labored more perseveringly, or with more zeal, ability, and honorable devotion, than yourself, at all times. I trust that my country will, for many years to come, possess the services of one whose eminent talents have so justly obtained the approval of the most enlightened minds in our public councils. 35

Writing to Francis Brooke in the winter of 1842, Clay made clear his intention of resigning from the Senate. While he was prepared to make any "personal sacrifice" by remaining in the chamber where he had spent so many years, he believed that "I can

effect nothing, and perhaps my absence may remove an obstacle to something being done by others." Accordingly, he resigned in early February, 1842. Six weeks later, Clay delivered his retirement speech before a packed Senate chamber. 36

The "Great Pacifier" offered a defense of his actions in the Senate during the stormy conflicts with the Democrats, other Whigs, and the president. He was particularly sensitive about his being called a congressional "dictator" and pleaded that he had been motivated solely by his sincere belief that his actions, however controversial, were necessary in a time of crisis which involved the nation's best interests. Asking forgiveness of his fellow senators, he requested that the battles between him and his adversaries be remembered only in that they were small

... conflicts of mind with mind, those intellectual struggles, those noble exhibitions of logic, argument, and eloquence, honorable to the Senate, and to the nation, in which each has sought and contended for what he deemed the best mode of accomplishing one common object, the interest and most happiness of our beloved country. 37

While the Democratic senator from New York, Silas Wright, thought Clay's speech to be egotistical and that it elicited

little real, heartfelt response, the contrary seems to have been the case. John C. Calhoun, an adversary who had not spoken to Clay for five years because of their personal differences on the sub-treasury plan, embraced Clay and "shed tears like a woman." Not a word passed between them, said one observer, "for their emotion was too strong for expression." The old Jacksonian, Thomas Hart Benton, also was said to have had moist eyes. "Old Bullion" Benton himself later said of the resignation speech, "It was the first occasion of the kind; and thus far, has been the last; and it might not be recommendable for any one, except another Henry Clay--if another should ever appear--to attempt its imitation."38

After delivering his valedictory speech, which one historian has termed, "one of the most dramatic moments in the history of the Senate," Clay retired to private life. The "Old Hero" rejoiced at the Hermitage; in a letter to Martin Van Buren, Andrew Jackson

38 Silas Wright to Van Buren, 2 April 1842, Van Buren Papers; Parmelee, "Recollections of an Old Stager," p. 758; shortly after Clay's speech, Calhoun was reputed to have said, "I don't like Henry Clay . . ., but by God, I love him." Quoted in Margaret L. Coit, John C. Calhoun: American Portrait (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1950), p. 349; Benton, Thirty Years' View, 2:403. Of the power of Clay's rhetoric, there is little doubt. Long before he was elected to Congress, Martin Van Buren read every speech that Clay had ever made; the "Red Fox" believed that Clay's oratory was matchless. . . ." See Denis Tilden Lynch, An Epoch and a Man: Martin Van Buren and His Times (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), p. 373.
exuberantly wrote that "The old coon is really and substantially
dead, skinned & buried--Clay's political career is closed forever.
. . ." Jackson was quite mistaken; within weeks, Henry Clay had
once again become the leading Whig candidate for the presidency. In the meantime, while Clay and his devout legion of con-
gressional followers were battling with Tyler, and the breach between
the Whig legislative leader and the ex-Whig chief executive was grow-
ing ever wider, Daniel Webster was attempting to maintain ties with
both warring factions and with some Democrats. Webster was at a

critical juncture in his career. If he remained closely associated
with Tyler and if the Virginian's presidency turned out to be success-
ful, he could probably look forward to the White House after Tyler
left. If the Clay-dominated Whig faction in Congress emerged vic-
torious, Webster would find his chances for the presidency greatly
diminished, if not utterly destroyed. Should Webster's great gamble

fail, there was every possibility that he would even lose his traditional

leadership in New England and especially in his home state of Massa-

chusetts, where there existed a strong, influential band of Clay's

supporters.

39 Eaton, Henry Clay, p. 151; Jackson to Van Buren, 22
November 1842, Van Buren Papers.

40 Richard N. Current, Daniel Webster and the Rise of
National Conservatism (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1955),
pp. 116-18; Nathans, Daniel Webster and the Trial of American
Webster was torn between loyalty to his president and to his party. Having believed for some time that his service to the nation as secretary of state consisted essentially of solving long unresolved and potentially dangerous disputes with Great Britain, he was seriously and justifiably concerned that intraparty strife would harm disrupt, or even terminate his attempts to create and execute sound, responsible, and effective foreign policy. On the eve of the great cabinet crisis, Webster wrote that "I will not throw the great foreign concerns of the country into disorder or danger, by any abrupt party proceeding."41

There were three critical problems in Anglo-American affairs which confronted Webster. One grave issue was the long-simmering boundary dispute between the State of Maine and the Canadian province of New Brunswick, a dispute in which both respective national governments seemed immutable in their positions as sponsors and guarantors of the territorial integrity of these states. Another major problem had resulted during a Canadian separatist insurrection in 1837 in which the Caroline, an American vessel, was sunk in the Niagara River, in American territory, by Canadian troops, while carrying supplies to the rebels. A Canadian national, one

41 Lodge, Daniel Webster, p. 251; Webster to Hiram Ketchum, 10 September 1841, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18:111.
Alexander McLeod, was consequently being held for the murder of an American sailor who had been killed in the incident. The "McLeod" affair had become by 1841 a point of great Anglo-American controversy. Another problem included an incident in which British authorities in the West Indies had seized an American slave trader, the Creole, and had liberated its human cargo. When Webster took office, he had been immediately confronted with these crucial problems and conflicts which he believed could well lead to a third British-American war. 42

In a series of intensive negotiations with the chief representative of the British government, Alexander Baring, Lord Ashburton, Webster did not seek to push the American claims or positions on the Anglo-American controversies, some of which were legally valid and others of which were doubtful, to the point where such a rigid stance would possibly raise the specter of insoluble impasse and a subsequent war. While many of his political enemies, Democrat and Whig alike, would have desired him to press American claims to the extreme for both political and nationalist purposes, Webster firmly maintained a line of argument that was at once flexible, equitable, and honorable. Though many Americans in a time of rising national

42 Current, Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism, p. 119; Webster to John Tyler, ? July 1841, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18:344.
chauvinism would have welcomed a war, Webster strove to work instead for a peaceful settlement which would defuse a critical situation, yet preserve the national honor. 43

While the Creole case was not at this time resolved, the explosive northeastern boundary crisis was settled by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842; in addition, the McLeod affair was brought to a successful termination in the same year. Having thus brought about an honorable and fair solution to these serious problems, the threat of war disappeared. There was considerable partisan Democratic opposition to the ratification of the Webster-Ashburton settlement, however. Future President James Buchanan described it as being "dishonorable to the whole country." Nevertheless, Webster's consistent pursuit of an intelligent, equitable, and peaceful solution based on the principle of compromise and concession eventually succeeded and was welcomed by most people as a pacific and mutually-advantageous agreement which would serve to further Anglo-American

43 Lord Ashburton to Webster, 2 January 1841, Daniel Webster, The Letters of Daniel Webster: From Documents Owned Principally by the New Hampshire Historical Society, ed. Claude H. Van Tyne (New York: McClure, Phillips and Co., 1902), pp. 252-54; Webster to Ruel Williams, 2 February 1842, ibid., pp. 256-58; Webster to Jared Sparks, 11 March 1843, ibid., pp. 286-87; Webster to F. C. Gray, 11 May 1841, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18:102-03; Webster to Edward Everett, 25 April 1842, ibid., pp. 120-24; Webster to Everett, 26 April 1842, ibid., pp. 124-25; Webster to Everett, 14 June 1842, ibid., 16:374-75.
During the two years that Webster was immersed in foreign policy problems, he consistently stood by John Tyler, despite the vicious attacks on the president from Democratic and Whig quarters alike. A man who is entrusted with the burden of creating and executing a foreign policy which will serve the nation's best interests should and must be nonpartisan. Webster proved that he was a diplomatist who was far removed from the realm of party politics. Throughout his service as secretary of state, Webster dutifully defended and supported Tyler, at great personal and political cost. As Webster himself pointed out, Tyler and his administration asked only "one thing from the American people; & that is a fair trial."\footnote{Frederick and Lois Merck, \textit{Fruits of Propaganda in the Tyler Administration} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 92; Richard N. Current, "Webster's Propaganda and the Ashburton Treaty," \textit{Mississippi Valley Historical Review} 31 (1947): 187-200; James Buchanan, \textit{The Works of James Buchanan}, ed. John Bassett Moore, 12 vols. (1908-11; reprint ed., New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1960), 5:342, 384; Lodge, \textit{Daniel Webster}, pp. 251-57; Van Deusen, \textit{Jacksonian Era}, pp. 173-76; Albert B. Corey, \textit{The Crisis of 1830-42 in Canadian-American Relations} (New Haven, Conn.: Princeton University Press, 1941), pp. 161, 181-82.}

As the Whigs and many Democrats continued their attacks on Tyler, Webster lamented, "The foreign relations of the Country are
ticklish enough, but our domestic condition is terrible." To him, 
"Endless debate and personal quarrels are the order of the day."
What he called "party madness" seemed to be destroying any possi-
bility of solving the nation's problems at home and abroad. As he
noted, "political affairs could not be worse" because of "party and
personal rancor, recklessness, and animosity which seem to be
making havoc of all just principles, all practical expediency, and all
really patriotic feeling." 46

By the summer of 1842, while Webster was concluding his
successful diplomatic negotiations with Lord Ashburton, the Clay-led
Whig attacks on Tyler had reached the point where any reconciliation
between the president and his former party was impossible. Daniel
Webster faced a crucial dilemma. He could remain with the presi-
dent and possibly have his great standing in the Whig party destroyed.
Another possible choice would be to abandon Tyler, now that his
diplomatic work was concluded, and rejoin his old party, hopefully
regaining the esteemed position of leadership he once had enjoyed.
A leading old Jacksonian commented that "Clay and his clique" now
hated Webster "more than . . . the Democrats." The secretary of
state finally reached his decision: he would, for the moment at least,

46 Webster to Edward Everett, 30 March 1842, ibid.,
p. 367; Webster to William Plumer, 7 March 1842, ibid., 18:116;
Webster to Everett, 31 May 1842, ibid., 16:132.
remain with Tyler. In spite of, or possibly because of Webster's choice, the Clay faction in Massachusetts renounced Webster as their leader and formally announced that Henry Clay would be their choice as the Whig presidential nominee in the election of 1844. 47

The actions taken by the Massachusetts Whigs in approving Clay's nomination served as an official severance of their ties with Tyler, and implicitly, with Webster, who now was all but labeled a traitor to his party. Seeking to preserve his independence as a non-partisan cabinet member, chief presidential supporter, and yet trying to retain his traditional standing in the Whig party and thus keep alive his own presidential aspirations, Webster desperately attempted to counter the charges of apostasy made by his Whig colleagues. While he rejected the notion suggested by the Whig governor of Kentucky, who noted that "If [Webster] has one grain of common sense left, he will give the Tyler concern a hell of a kick and fall into the Whig ranks . . .," he did follow the governor's other advice: to "swear that he is now and always was a true Whig." On September 30, 1842,

Webster chose the site of many of his past orations, Faneuil Hall in Boston, to present a fervent, but closely-reasoned defense of his case to the Whig party; it was to be one of the most important speeches in his career.

Webster began with a logical explanation of his having remained in Tyler's cabinet long after the other, more orthodox Whigs had resigned. "I was told by the President," Webster pleaded, "that on my shoulders rested the responsibility of the [Anglo-American] negotiations and on my discreetional judgement..." the matter was entrusted. Therefore,

There is no embarassment, because if I see the path of duty before me, I have that within me which will enable me to pursue it, and throw all embarassments to the winds. A public man has no occasion to be embarassed, if he is honest. Himself and his feelings should be to him as nobody and nothing; the interests of his country must be to him as everything; he must sink what is personal to himself, making exertions for his country; and it is his ability and readiness to do this which are to mark him as a great or as a little man in time to come.

While his fellow Whigs differed with him on several issues on which they might be wiser, Webster continued, "I am sure I am

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right in maintaining my opinions . . . when I have formed them honestly and on deliberation. " These Whigs, forcefully exclaimed Webster, "are no better Whigs than I am." Bitterly attacking those who charged him with party apostasy, Webster argued that

I am a Whig, I have always been a Whig, and I always will be one; and if there are any who would turn me out of the pale of that communion, let them see who will get out first. I am a Massachusetts Whig, a Faneuil Hall Whig, having breathed this air for five-and-twenty years, and meaning to breathe it, as long as I live. 50

Pointing out that "there are great public interests which require [the President's] attention," Webster asked, "If I choose to remain in the President's councils, [does it] mean to say that I cease to be a Massachusetts Whig?" Because of the domestic and foreign crises facing the country at that time as well as possibly in the future, Webster concluded, he was prepared to work with "sober men of any party, and of all parties . . ." who are not blinded by narrow, close-minded, and emotional partisanship. 51 Webster had in effect signaled his firm intention of remaining a Whig, a Tyler cabinet member, and an independent statesman; such a course would be a difficult task for any man, even Daniel Webster.

50 Ibid., pp. 126-28.

51 Ibid., pp. 139-40.
The Whig party was dangerously divided, and perhaps "can never be reunited," Webster wrote his son; however, "I intend . . . to do my duty to the country and the President . . ., so long as I can be useful, without departing from my principles, or acting against my sound judgement. . . ." In a conversation with Philip Hone, Webster admitted that "I am too old to change my politics or my religion." While Webster's politics may or may not have remained immutable, the political arena began to change rapidly after 1842, and by the spring of 1843, new situations, party alignments, and issues resulted in Webster's eventual resignation from office and his return to the Whig fold. While he had served Tyler loyally and faithfully, even Webster was only too painfully aware that further service precluded any chance for his presidential nomination by the resentful orthodox Whigs. 52

As the growing conflict between Clay and Tyler intensified and widened, there quickly developed a groundswell of support for the Kentuckian; Whig politicians and voters alike demanded that Clay be nominated as their candidate for the presidency in 1844. With the

lukewarm Whig, Harrison, now dead, and Tyler deviating away from traditional party principles, the Whigs clamored loudly for the election of the man whom they termed "the embodiment of Whig principles."

Henry Clay, after being coldly rejected as his party's presidential nominee in 1840, had announced in early 1841 that he would "be in the field again at the first sound of the trumpet." Indeed he was; as early as January, 1841, even before Harrison was inaugurated, "Clay clubs" were formed in Washington, D.C., in order to promote the Kentuckian's presidential candidacy for 1844. Many, if not most, of southern Whigs especially were eager to abandon their Virginian president and support the nationalist Clay. One North Carolina farmer and merchant echoed the sentiment of his neighbors when he wrote in 1841, should Clay "live four years longer, he is obliged to be president of the [U]nited States. . . ."

The Maryland Whig leader, Reverdy Johnson, exclaimed that "the Country will now, more than ever, need his services." Johnson predicted that Clay "will be proclaimed everywhere as the Whig candidate. . . ." One political observer said that "The great body of the people rally round Mr. Clay and they will not swerve from their devotion, [and] he will be run in 1844."53

53_National Intelligencer, 9 January 1841; Cole Whig Party
While Clay wrote cautiously that he did not want his name to be "forced upon the people" and that he did not desire the presidency unless he were to be persuaded "that it is wanted by a majority of my countrymen," important Whig leaders convinced him that "the people have already settled the question." By early 1844, twenty-four state Whig delegations and conventions had officially named him their party presidential candidate; in addition, his candidacy was promoted by over two hundred Whig newspapers. Henry Clay was even endorsed by the Massachusetts Whigs, although Daniel Webster argued strenuously that Clay had "no reasonable prospect of being elected," and to nominate him "would be little short of insanity." Nevertheless, the popular outcry in Clay's behalf, coupled with Webster's strong beliefs in the necessity of electing a Whig president who could carry out that party's policies and principles, convinced Webster by 1844 that he should support the Kentuckian. As he declared to a group of Tennessee Whigs, "That which was done in 1840 has become necessary to do again in 1844." The Whigs, Webster said, must "do justice to Henry Clay."


54 Clay to Nicholas Britton, 22 September 1842, Clay,
The Whig party, voters and professional politicians alike, closed ranks and exhibited a unity seldom witnessed and gave forth a seemingly unanimous support for Clay. Even Thurlow Weed, William H. Seward, and Horace Greeley, who had blocked Clay's nomination four years earlier in favor of the more "available" William Henry Harrison, were convinced that in 1844 the "Old Coon" was quite "available" himself and therefore had an excellent chance for victory. Thus for the Whigs in 1844, their candidate would be a man who possessed the rare quality of availability as well as the older tradition of an earlier political era, when a man of intelligence and true principle was almost automatically the candidate of first choice.

Meeting in Baltimore on May 1, 1844, the national Whig convention unanimously nominated Henry Clay as their standard bearer.


As his running mate, the Whigs selected Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, the chancellor of New York University and a devout Clay disciple. The party platform was brief and included the familiar Whig proposals of a "well regulated currency," a "tariff for revenue" with some protective aspects, distribution of federal land sales funds to the states, and a "reform of executive usurpation." No mention was made of the perennial Whig demand for a national Bank. While Clay had struggled many years for the reestablishment of a Bank, by 1841 the voters did not seem to demand one; even Webster commented that no one really cared about the issue any longer. Clearly, Clay intended to wage his campaign on the twin themes of executive usurpation and the desirability of the Whig economic program. Although Clay in early 1844 "was undoubtedly the most popular man in the United States . . ., popularity did not decide the issue." While Clay was preparing to launch his post-convention campaign on the aforementioned strategy, a volatile, impassioned new issue was emerging, which suddenly made much of his program irrelevant and eventually resulted in his defeat, caused the rejection of the expected Democratic nominee, and ushered in a new era in American history. The Texas question with its corollary aspects of expansionism and slavery, became the new major
The Texas issue had been simmering since that former Mexican province had gained its independence in 1836. Although many influential southern and western politicians, especially Andrew Jackson, had advocated the admission of Texas in the late 1830's, most Whigs and many northern Democrats resisted such an idea and thus the potentially great question was left unresolved. By 1841, however, the Texas issue reemerged and rose to full fury by the presidential year of 1844.

Those who advocated annexation of the Republic of Texas were of a decidedly mixed lot: some were fervent believers in the notion of "Manifest Destiny," or the concept that God had chosen the American people and the nation to occupy and populate the entire North American continent, spread American culture, the area of freedom, democratic institutions, and protestant Christianity from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans and from the Arctic zone to Mexico. Others believed that the admission of Texas would lessen, if not eliminate, the possibility of French or British influence in the

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Caribbean. Still others, mainly southerners and westerners, desired the admission of Texas so that the southern political bloc in Congress would be larger and stronger. Many southerners advocated Texas admission in order that the slavery system could be expanded, drawing what they perceived to be a dangerous excess of blacks from the older southeastern states; with these slaves growing cotton in Texas, that state and the entire South would prosper as never before. 57

With Henry Clay and the Whigs repudiating and rejecting John Tyler's leadership of their party, and with Martin Van Buren the preliminary choice as the Democratic nominee in 1844, the president decided to bring the volatile Texas question to the front of the political arena. Disowned by both major parties, Tyler believed that the Texas issue would give him a new, viable chance for reelection in 1844 as either the Democratic nominee or as the head of a third-party movement, and at the same time, he apparently thought that if he were instrumental in the acquisition of Texas, his harried

administration would be redeemed in the eyes of future historians. Little did he realize the veritable Pandora's box which he caused to be opened. 58

As early as October, 1841, Tyler advocated the annexation of Texas and had discussed the matter with Secretary of State Daniel Webster. Webster, however, strongly opposed the plan; he told John Quincy Adams in 1843 that Texas "could never be effected by him or [with] his consent . . ." while he headed the state department. Knowing Webster's sincere and determined opposition to the controversial matter, Tyler did not press the issue further while Webster served in his cabinet. 59

After Webster resigned, Tyler resurrected the dormant but volatile issue when he appointed Abel P. Upshur to head the state department. The adamantly pro-slavery Virginian was one of the


59 Tyler to Webster, 11 October 1841, Webster, Letters of Daniel Webster, ed. Van Tyne, pp. 239-40; J.Q. Adams, Memoirs, ed. C.F. Adams, 11:345-47; Webster to Charles Allen, 3 December 1843, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:417.
few dedicated supporters of the president, and as Tyler himself noted, was one of the leading proponents of Texas annexation in the nation. Under Upshur's leadership, annexation negotiations were undertaken in late 1843 with the Republic of Texas. Upshur, however, was killed in an accident aboard a naval vessel, the *Princeton*, in March, 1844; he was immediately replaced by an even more staunch annexationist, John C. Calhoun. Under Calhoun's direction, a treaty of annexation between the Republic of Texas and the United States was signed in April, 1844, and was thereupon sent to the Senate for ratification. Crusty old John Quincy Adams noted in his diary that the day on which the treaty was sent to the Senate was a "memorable" one, because with the treaty, there "went the freedom of the human race."60

Adams was not alone in his opposition to the annexation scheme. As the proposal was increasingly becoming a reality, Webster broke his silence and began to assail the treaty, which he considered to be a most dangerous proposal. In early 1844,

Webster delivered a closely-reasoned, scathing attack on the annexation plan; in a careful, logical manner, he pointed out the fundamental theoretical and practical objections to such unsound, unwise thinking. As he explained, Texas was an independent, sovereign nation, and the Constitution made no provision whatever for the admission of such territory to the Union. Even more important to Webster than constitutional objections were philosophical considerations. "Extension often produces weakness, rather than strength," he said, and acquisition of additional, unneeded territory would only draw from the national spirit and its dynamism. "We have a Republic . . . of vast extent & unequalled natural advantages in . . . its present conditions & its prospects for the future . . .," Webster pointed out. True to his traditional concern for posterity and the necessary inseparable relationship of continuity between past, present, and future, he urged that

Instead of aiming to enlarge its boundaries, let us seek, rather, to strengthen its Union, to draw out its resources, to maintain and improve its institutions of Religion and Liberty, & then to push it forward in its career of prosperity & glory.

Concluding, Webster exclaimed, "We have a Sparta . . ., let us embellish it." 61

The "Defender of the Constitution" and many other Whigs were indeed worried about the adverse ramifications of Texas annexation. As he wrote from New York, "There is a good deal of panic here about Texas." It was "high time to warn the country . . .," he said, signifying his readiness to circumvent the success of Tyler's pet plan.

Just as Webster attempted to reason with the people, so did Henry Clay. As Clay's campaign for the presidency developed, he consistently appealed to the electorate's facilities of reason and intelligence as he promoted his Whig economic and political principles. Indeed, Clay, like most Whigs, "had discarded the clap-trap, not to say 'coon-traps' of the 'Tippecanoe and Tyler too' theme and now addressed themselves more to the intellect of the people." Realizing, however, the explosive nature of the Texas question, he avoided taking a definitive position on the issue, as doing so would not only damage his precarious alliance of North-South Whig supporters, but might also create a dangerous, possibly disastrous division in the country among the moderate as well as extremist pro- and anti-slavery people. Skirting the issue, Clay reasoned, would thus assure Whig unity and support of his candidacy.

while keeping the entire matter from emerging in a more virulent form which would threaten the survival of the Union itself. 63

Clay and his friendly rival who was expected to be the Democratic nominee, Martin Van Buren, met at Clay's home, Ashland, in March, 1842; it has long been speculated that they agreed not to introduce the dangerous Texas problem into the campaign, but rather, wage their battles for the presidency solely on traditional political and economic issues. As Van Buren's friends and advisors pointed out, the "Little Magician" could not long remain quiet on the great question; he would ultimately be forced to take a definite stand. As the campaign progressed, Clay too was faced with mounting pressure for a declaration of his exact position on the question. 64

While Van Buren vacillated, Clay began finally to address himself to the rapidly emerging Texas issue. In a letter to John J. Crittenden, his friend and a senator from Kentucky, Clay expressed

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his reasons, both moral and practical, for opposing annexation.

The primary objection, he stated, was that since Mexico continued to claim that Texas was still part of her national territory, to annex Texas would guarantee a war "neither right or proper" between the United States and Mexico. In addition to this fundamental danger, Clay clearly explained that annexation would have grave domestic effects concerning the safety of the Union. If the pro-slavery, expansionist southerners achieved their goal of acquiring Texas, then the northern expansionists would demand the acquisition of Canada in order to regain equivalent power and influence. Aside from the dangers of war, reckless expansionism, and the constitutional objections inherent in the annexation plan, Clay, echoing Webster's arguments, said

I have no desire to see a new element of discord introduced into the Union; it is far more important to the happiness of our people that they should enjoy in peace, contentment, and harmony what they have than to attempt further acquisitions at the hazard of destroying all those great blessings. 65

Believing incorrectly that the annexationist sentiment in the South was not really a burning political issue, Clay nevertheless wrote a letter in March, 1844, to Crittenden in which he expressed his position on the Texas question; he believed his statements would

clarify his feelings on the issue once and for all. This so-called "Raleigh" letter was published in the National Intelligencer with Clay's permission the following month. Clay argued rationally that it was simply untrue that the United States had any legal claim to Texas; we had clearly given up any such claim in the Adams-Onis treaty of 1819. Appealing to the people's sense of morality and honor, he exclaimed that it "was perfectly idle and ridiculous, if not dishonorable, to talk of resuming our title to Texas, as if we had never parted with it." We are bound, he said, by the twin concepts of "good faith and national honor."66

Besides the esoteric aspects of honor and morality, Clay argued that there were other, genuine constitutional and political objections to the acquisition of Texas. If Texas were annexed, the South would not actually gain any particular political advantage, as Texas would probably be quickly divided into five smaller states in which climate and geography would permit the existence of slavery in only two; the other three of necessity would be free states. In addition, the southern desire for Texas would probably serve to whet an expansionist thirst in the North for Canada. Such expansionism would inevitably lead to increased sectional rivalry and, ultimately,

to "fatal consequences" which would "menace the existence, if it did not sow the seeds of dissolution, of the Union."67

The most immediate result of the annexation of Texas, Clay warned, would be a general war with Mexico. That nation had repeatedly stated that any American annexation would be met with a declaration of war. Clay therefore pointed out that "annexation and war with Mexico are identical." Such a war would be veritably thrust upon the American people without the Congress, their representatives, being allowed to express their constitutional duties, that of declaring war after serious deliberation about such sober matters. A war with Mexico, Clay stressed, could conceivably be widened, with England and France joining Mexico to stop what they might consider to be "an inordinate [American] spirit of territorial aggrandizement."68

Invoking the traditional Whig call for harmony, Clay appealed for preservation of national unity and a reawakened appreciation of the country's pacific and prosperous condition rather than introduction of new "prejudice" and other elements of "discord and distraction." An annexation of Texas "at this time," Clay concluded, would have little if any positive results, and would instead be "pregnant" with

67 National Intelligencer, 27 April 1844.
68 Ibid.
disaster. Since there was no "general expression of public opinion" for the annexation, the matter should be closed.  

On the same day that Clay's statement on Texas was published, his expected Democratic presidential opponent, Martin Van Buren, published a similar letter in the Washington Globe. Van Buren's position on the great annexation issue was substantially the same as Clay's; both men obviously were committed to wage their presidential campaigns on traditional party policies, economics, and politics, and were not going to bring Texas into the campaign. A week after Clay's letter was published, he was officially nominated as his party's standard bearer. A month elapsed after Van Buren's statement appeared, and by that time, the Texas issue had intensified to the point where the ex-president's intelligent, moralistic, and honorable stance resulted in his rejection by the Democrats when they held their party convention.  

There seemed little doubt in 1841 that Van Buren would not be the Democratic nominee in 1844. By 1843, there was a degree of

69 Ibid.

70 Washington Globe, 26, 28 April 1844; see also Van Buren's "Hammett" letter in Schlesinger and Israel, eds., History of American Presidential Elections, 1:823-88, for a thorough discussion of the views which cost the ex-president his party's nomination; Philo Wayne Waters, Jr., "Martin Van Buren and Slavery" (M. A. thesis, North Texas State University, 1972), pp. 54-58.
uncertainty concerning Van Buren's strength. A number of potential candidates, especially James Buchanan, John C. Calhoun, and even ex-Whig John Tyler, indicated their desire for the Democratic nomination. Buchanan's candidacy eventually collapsed, however, and Tyler and Calhoun could not generate any great enthusiasm among party professionals. Until the late spring of 1844, the patriarch of the party, Andrew Jackson, had maintained an unqualified support for Van Buren. While Jackson's affection for Van Buren was seemingly constant, his fervent desire for the annexation of Texas was even greater, and, when forced to make a choice, he chose Texas, thus abandoning his old friend. 71

As early as 1843, Jackson had argued that "the annexation is of vast importance to us . . ." and that "our dearest interests as a nation . . . and our whole union require the annexation of Texas. . . ." After Van Buren's rejection of the idea of annexation, Jackson looked for another candidate, one who would be more enthusiastic about his great dream. He found such a man in his fellow Tennessean, James K. Polk. Polk had on many occasions

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expressed his belief in the necessity for the "immediate reannexation" of Texas at any cost, and in this attitude, he and the "Old Hero" were of one mind. 72

As the Democratic professional, Cave Johnson of Tennessee said on the eve of that party's convention, "we must have an entirely new man. . . ." In the melee which ensued at the convention, that exactly was the case. Van Buren was rejected, and the annexationist, James K. Polk, was selected as the Democratic nominee. Van Buren suddenly had appeared to be unelectable; the man who was quickly to be known as "Young Hickory" was quite the "available" candidate. Expansionism and the extention of slavery had clearly replaced economics and traditional politics as the Democrats' means and ends in their search for victory in 1844. 73

The protege of "Old Hickory" had triumphed; he won the Democratic party's nomination on the ninth ballot. Whether or not


he was truly the first "dark horse" in American political history is irrelevant; he was the party's nominee, and he was determined to win the presidency on an avowedly-expansionist, pro-slavery platform. At the conclusion of the convention, the Democrats adopted the phrase and philosophy, "the reoccupation of Oregon and the reannexation of Texas at the earliest practicable period. . . ."  

While the Whig and Democrats were selecting their presidential candidates, two other parties were doing likewise. A Tyler splinter group selected the president for renomination on an openly expansionist platform. Within two months, however, Tyler announced his support for Polk.  

The Liberty party, an abolitionist group, named James G. Birney, now of Michigan, as its nominee. A small, rather ineffectual organization which a major newspaper in

74 Eugene I. McCormac, James K. Polk: A Political Biography (Berkeley, Cal.: The University of California Press, 1922), pp. 236-40; most historians label Polk as the first "dark horse" in American political history, but not all. For a view that argues Polk was simply the "available" democratic candidate, favored by Jackson and promoted by his own efforts, see Charles G. Sellers, Jr., James K. Polk, Continentalist: 1843-1846 (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 67-107; the National Intelligencer, 27 June 1844, perceptively noted that it was "hardly probable that the convention could have stumbled upon the name of Mr. Polk . . . unless there had been some previous consultation and understanding on the subject"; Stanwood, History of the Presidency, p. 215.

75 Seager, And Tyler Too, p. 236; Chitwood, John Tyler, pp. 382-83.
1840 had termed a "complete farce," the Liberty men were not much more significant politically in 1844, but yet it ultimately proved to be strong enough to play a "spoiler" role in the election of 1844. Its party platform basically was simply a statement of traditional antislavery philosophy.  

Although the Texas issue was becoming volatile, Henry Clay and the Whigs attempted to campaign on the older economic and political issues from a basis of reason, logic, and intelligence. To "resuscitate the Democracy of the country" and to uphold "the dearer interests of the Union" were the familiar old rallying cries of Clay and his party. Clay himself did not campaign actively because he believed that such emotion-laden tactics might "adversely affect the people's wisdom. . . ." As Thurlow Weed observed, "intelligent men" knew well the old principles of Henry Clay.  

Daniel Webster, after his brief conflict with the Clay Whigs, launched himself wholeheartedly into the fray. Throughout the summer of 1844, Webster defended the Whig program and promoted Clay's candidacy in speaking engagements across the

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77 Quoted in Barnes, Memoir of Thurlow Weed, p. 119.
northeastern area of the country. As always, he concentrated his efforts toward the promotion of Whig political and economic philosophies in such a manner as to gain the support and votes of the more thoughtful citizens. Like Clay, Webster consistently attempted to avoid the Texas issue as much as possible. 78

Although the first treaty of annexation which Tyler had submitted to the Senate was eventually rejected, with twenty-seven of twenty-eight of the Whigs voting solidly against it and sixteen of twenty-three Democrats just as uniformly in favor, the issue was clearly still alive. As Polk pushed the annexation of Texas, Webster and the Whigs argued against it. After lambasting the Democrats for their wrong-headed economic thinking all summer, Webster turned directly to the Texas question itself; speaking at Philadelphia in October of 1844, Webster tried desperately to parry the frenzied thrusts of the pro-annexationists. He argued that the admission of Texas to the Union would extend the area of slavery, and to this he was opposed, "at this time, at all times, now and forever." Appealing to his fellow Whigs to maintain party solidarity, he exclaimed, "When great principles of government are at stake, when high and lasting interests are at hazard . . ., brethren of the

78 Hone, Hone Diary, ed. Nevins, 2:698; Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 13:203-18; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:143-48; National Intelligencer, 4 May 1844.
same principles must be not allowed to differ. . . ." The scheme of the annexationists was sheer folly to Webster; it was no more than a "shallow device" and a case of the "madness of the many for the gain of the few."79

Speaking the same month in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Webster exclaimed that slavery where it existed was indeed an evil institution, but to allow its extention through the annexation of Texas would simply multiply its evilness. In addition, he asked his audience, "[W]e have territory enough, we are happy enough, [and] . . . is it not best to leave [things] alone?" On the eve of the election, Webster cautioned that "the duties before us must be regarded as serious and sober; the times are serious and sober." Asking that the voters of Pennsylvania give intelligent consideration of the problems inherent in the Texas annexation matter, Webster prophesied that "the results of the next election will give a tone to the government and to the whole country for many years to come."80


80 Ibid., pp. 290-93.
At a time when even a staunch Democrat such as Silas Wright could claim, "Our Union was never in so much danger . . .," and when that old Jacksonian, Thomas Hart Benton, was fulminating against Polk's position on annexation, Henry Clay was calmly but earnestly trying to convince the electorate that his position on Texas would best preserve the Union and its traditions. Harking back to his old love of a unified, happy nation, Clay wrote that "I consider the Union to be a great partnership; and that new members ought not to be admitted into the concern at the imminent hazard of its dissolution." While he personally had no objection to the admission of Texas per se, he would be "unwilling to see the existing Union dissolved or seriously jeopardized [simply] for the sake of acquiring Texas." In a statement so characteristic of Clay and one which could serve as his epitaph, he explained that "If any one desires to know the leading and paramount object of my public life, the preservation of the Union will furnish him the key." 81

While the majority of southern Whigs were satisfied with Clay's position on Texas, by midsummer, 1844, a substantial erosion of his southern support had occurred, nevertheless. Some southern Whigs evidently were being effectively wooed by Polk's firm

dedication to the annexation of Texas and were steadily moving toward active support of the Democratic candidate. To combat the loss of support, Clay wrote two more letters in which he attempted to clarify and modify slightly his position on the Texas question. In these "Alabama" letters, he reiterated his opposition to the immediate annexation of Texas, explaining, however, that he would not object to its later acquisition, provided that it could be done without dishonor, without provoking a war with Mexico, and with the approval of all the present states of the Union. Undoubtedly, Clay sincerely shared the fear of one southern newspaper editor, who exclaimed that the explosive Texas issue could breed a conflict between pro- and anti-slavery proponents which in turn would result in "the most bloody [war] ever known to the annals of warfare."\(^8\)

Even before Clay had written his "Raleigh" and "Alabama" letters, Whig leaders had expressed their fears that the Kentuckian might publish or otherwise make comments which would fatally

injure his prospects for the presidency. In order to win, Clay had to maintain the North-South Whig coalition; as long as he said little on the divisive Texas matter, party solidarity could be preserved. Once he began to explain his position and modify it ever so slightly, the North-South axis of his party began to crack. When Clay attempted to adopt a slight antislavery stance, southern support waned; when he assumed a stronger position more acceptable to the South, northern Whig votes were lost. Throughout the summer and fall of 1844, as Clay desperately attempted to explain his position on the great question, he only succeeded in losing votes in the North as well as in the South. As Andrew Jackson correctly pointed out, "What a perfect devil Clay has made of himself in his different letters."83

While Clay appeared to cloud and confuse the issue and to vacillate on his position, his real desire was only to neutralize the Texas question, which he and other Whigs had always believed to be a political ploy designed to excite the people unnecessarily and thereby distract the voters from the real issues: economics and politics. After September, 1844, Clay treated the Texas issue

as closed. As John Tyler had dropped out of the presidential race in August, the remainder of the 1844 campaign was waged between Polk and Clay, not so much purely on the traditional issues of economics, politics, and philosophy as Clay had desired; rather, there ensued a mudslinging, caustic battle between Whigs and Democrats in which each party, in a frenzy of misrepresentations, half-truths, and lies, attempted to discredit and destroy the reputations and personal character of the two presidential candidates. 84

Throughout the campaign of 1844, Henry Clay and the Whigs portrayed themselves as champions of the Union. As one politician described the voters' choice, it was "Clay, Union, and Liberty" versus "Polk, slavery, and Texas." Were the voters given such a clear cut choice, Henry Clay might have won the presidency. That he did not, however, is due significantly to the influence of two unforeseen factors in the early days of the campaign: nativism and the surprising strength of the Liberty party. 85

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84 Chitwood, John Tyler, pp. 382-83; Poage, Henry Clay and the Whig Party, pp. 147-50.

Most immigrants, upon gaining the franchise, traditionally voted Democratic. Many, however, identified with and cast their ballots for Whig candidates. Unfortunately for Clay, the Democrats were successful in convincing many of the foreign-born, erstwhile Whig voters that the election of the Kentuckian would ensure their disenfranchisement and the loss of other social and political privileges. At the same time, many native-born Whig supporters were persuaded that Clay and the Whigs were in favor of granting newly-arrived aliens jobs, favors, and other benefits not routinely promised to ordinary Americans; therefore, many former Whigs abandoned Clay and turned to Polk. This was the case in Philadelphia and in New York City; as a result, Clay was narrowly defeated in Pennsylvania and in New York State. The loss of these two key states was instrumental in his defeat for the presidency.  

The Liberty party was a small organization, and its presidential candidate, James G. Birney, was not particularly well known. This party probably would not have fared well at all had it not been for Clay's seeming adoption of what many northern antislavery men

considered to be a mildly pro-slavery stance. When he pointed out in his first "Alabama" letter that he would accept the eventual annexation of Texas if the people of the United States demanded it, he immediately caused many antislavery men who otherwise were loyal Whigs to join Birney's crusade. As one politician observed, "We had the abolitionists in a fair way until Clay seemed to be determined not to let them vote for him." Clay wanted all the people to vote for him, but his honest attempts to maintain a position that would be acceptable to most of the electorate cost him many votes in the North, especially in New York where Birney received 15,812 votes.

In an extremely close contest, Henry Clay was defeated for the presidency by James K. Polk. While Polk received 170 votes to Clay's 105 in the electoral college, an examination of the popular vote reveals the narrowness of Polk's victory. Of the 2,660,000 votes cast, Clay received only 30,000 less than his Democratic opponent. A change of only 7,918 total votes in New York probably would have favored Clay. The Whigs probably would have won the presidency if they had not been divided by the Birney movement. Clay's own views on the subject of slavery may have been influenced by the activities of Birney and the other antislavery men who were loyal Whigs.

York, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Indiana would have given Clay a majority of 103 electoral votes; consequently, Polk's slim margin of 1.4 percentage points in the popular vote actually exaggerates the extent of his victory and does not really indicate the closeness of the election. 88

The reasons for Clay's defeat are varied; although it is apparent that the Texas issue, characterized by Polk's unwavering annexationist position and Clay's alleged vacillation, was a great factor in the South as well as in the North, there were other causes. Clay's loss of traditional orthodox Whig support because of the abolitionist revolt and the complex nativist question cost him many votes, especially in New York and Pennsylvania. In addition, Polk's adoption of a favorable, if insincere, position on the tariff issue satisfied the protectionist Democrats in the key state of Pennsylvania. Perhaps, as one historian has noted succinctly, "The abolitionists defeated Clay." 89

Whigs were distraught over their loss. One correspondent wrote Clay that "You had ninetenths of the virtue, intelligence, and

88 Stanwood, History of the Presidency, pp. 222-25.

89 Ibid.; Cole, Whig Party in the South, p. 113; Sellers, James K. Polk: Continentalist, pp. 160-61; Smith, Annexation of Texas, pp. 316-20; Stanwood, History of the Presidency, p. 224
respectability of the nation on your side . . . ; the defeat is nothing to you; it is the people who are to be the sufferers. . . ." In spite of the defeat, the Whig party must not give up its "enlightened policy," said Thurlow Weed, for "the people must be made to act and think for themselves." In a depressed mood, New Yorker Millard Fillmore lamented, "A cloud of gloom hangs over the future. May God save the country; for it is evident that the people will not."90

Clay had been both the most popular man and the leading political personality of his party, a man who was both "available" and honorable. Because of the Texas question and the attendant problem of slavery, he was defeated; Martin Van Buren was the first political victim of the growing slavery controversy, and Henry Clay was the second. Clay's strength had been proved to exist mainly in the North, and it was diluted even there because of the increasingly militancy of the abolitionists. His once-formidable support among southern Whiggery was beginning to wane, as southerners began to shift gradually into the Democracy, where some perceived their sectional interests to lie. Clay explained his position on the dangerous Texas issue as best he could, in a logical, reasonable manner,

which was perfectly clear to men of intelligence. To the ordinary
man in the 1840's, however, his explanations seemed only to be
proof of an immoral flexibility or even hypocrisy. As one historian
of the Texas issue has noted, "The mass of men will not, and many
of them cannot, discriminate. . . ." between that which is truth and
that which is false. 91

Clay saw the Texas question for what it really was: a dan-
gerous matter which would ultimately crystallize sectional sentiment
in both North and South and eventually destroy his beloved Union.
Therefore, in order to retain maximum support in both sections, he
attempted to straddle the issue. To him, however, such a stance
was necessary, for "Truth and justice, sound policy and wisdom,
always abide in the middle ground." 92

The Whigs' worst fears were shortly confirmed: Texas
was annexed to the Union in 1845, and war with Mexico quickly
followed the next year. With sectional sentiment inflamed and
 expansionism rampant, the words of the Democrat, Silas Wright,
seem both ironic and prophetic: "It is only the beginning of the end
. . . ; [civil war] must come, and the present generation will see

91 Shepard, Martin Van Buren, pp. 414-16; Cole, Whig
     Party in the South, pp. 115-16; Smith, Annexation of Texas, p. 318.

92 Poage, Henry Clay and the Whig Party, pp. 143-44;
quoted in Van Deusen, Life of Henry Clay, p. 375.
Four years later, future President James Buchanan wrote that of all the reasons that caused both the Democratic and the Whig parties to decline, the primary cause was the great Texas issue of 1844: "The Texas question was the Grecian horse that entered our camp." The Democrats had learned their lesson of 1840 well; the way to electoral victory was "to dramatize on a national scale some matter which could appeal to popular emotions rather than the public intellect." 93

Henry Clay and Daniel Webster had undergone great trials during the preceding four years: Clay, the unshakable leader of his party, and Webster, the Whig who was always prepared to serve the nation, even if doing so meant rising above the shrine of party at great personal and political cost. Although they were no longer young, and time was running out on their presidential aspirations, they were ready once more to give the Democrats battle in 1848. Shortly after the election of 1844, Webster hopefully and optimistically exclaimed, "All is not lost." Henry Clay urged that in spite of his bitter defeat, "We . . . should adhere to our principles; for believing in their wisdom and rectitude, it is impossible that we can abandon them." The duty of the strong Whig minority, Clay said,

93 Silas Wright, quoted in Hone, Hone Diary, ed. Nevins 2:705; Buchanan to F. P. Blair, 27 November 1849, quoted in Paul, Rift in the Democracy, p. 183; ibid., p. 10.
was to "open the eyes of the people." Within two years, the two
great Whig leaders were again struggling for the ever-elusive
White House. 94

94 Webster, *Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 13:
301-05; Clay to J. J. Crittendon, 28 November 1844, Coleman, ed.,
CHAPTER VI

MEN OF PRINCIPLE AND AVAILABLE GENERALS

The Democratic victory in 1844 had brought to the White House James K. Polk of Tennessee, a man who would serve only one term, but whose influence, presence, and power shaped politics, the presidency, geography, and the history of the American nation and its people in a way that few chief executives have done. For four years, Polk tirelessly directed the nation through the sheer power of personal leadership. He achieved the realization of long-sought Jacksonian economic policies, particularly significant being the passage of a low, revenue-only tariff and the reestablishment of the independent treasury system. At the same time, he almost brought on what could have been a disastrous war with the leading naval power in the world and was instrumental in creating a conflict with a weak neighbor, which resulted in the United States adding a third more territory to its national domain. Whatever James K. Polk was, he was definitely not a weak man nor a weak president.

Polk and his chief Democratic supporters represented a new style of Jacksonians; the "Old Hero" died at the Hermitage in
March, 1845, and with him passed an era. Polk and the new Democrats, while faithful adherents to the basic philosophies and policies of Jackson, faced unresolved old questions and serious new problems that required imaginative, difficult solutions. "Young Hickory's" attempt to master these critical issues, old and new, consumed his four years in the presidency, and ultimately, cost him his life shortly after leaving the White House.

While Polk wrestled with the great issues of his day, he was consistently opposed by the Whig party, itself undergoing an evolutionary metamorphosis. The traditional leaders, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, were approaching the end of their long careers, while younger men, such as William H. Seward, Alexander H. Stephens, and Thaddeus Stevens were gradually assuming positions of power and leadership in their venerable old party. The year 1848 was transitional; it marked the final appearance of Clay as a presidential candidate of his party, and it witnessed Webster's next to last campaign for the nation's highest office.

As had happened in earlier years, Clay and Webster's lofty eloquence, their sound logic, and their forceful appeals to reason were rejected by their party; in 1848, once again the Whig party professionals abandoned them and adopted a popular military hero who was "Whig" in name only and whose sole qualification for the
presidency was his availability. Men of principle had built the Whig party and made it an honorable, respected organization, but not always are principles salable commodities in the market of mass politics; a resort to emotion-laden popular appeals and a philosophy based on mere expediency often bring more immediate, tangible results. By 1852, Clay was dead and Webster passed away before the presidential election of that year; because of a dearth of principled leadership, a situation compounded by the emergence of complex problems, the Whig party itself was dead as a national organization by 1854.

Before James K. Polk took the presidential oath of office, ex-president Martin Van Buren prophetically advised him that from the outset of his administration his great concern would or should be with foreign affairs. Polk himself was aware of this and of other great tasks which confronted him. Shortly after his inauguration, he told Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft that the four great measures of his administration would include settlement of the long-disputed Oregon boundary question with England, acquisition of California from Mexico, reestablishment of the independent treasury,

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1 Van Buren to Polk, 10 February 1845, James K. Polk Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on microfilm, North Texas State University.
and reduction of the tariff. 2

Despite the strenuous opposition of Daniel Webster, most of his Whig colleagues, and numerous Democrats, the strong-willed Polk was successful in achieving both a lowered tariff in 1846 and the reestablishment of the subtreasury system in 1848. Thus Polk, in only two years, had achieved twin victories on two key issues that had long been matters of bitter contention between the Democrats and the Whigs throughout the Jacksonian era. On the triumph of his pet tariff-for-revenue only project, the president wrote, "I considered the passage of [this] bill . . . the most important measure of my administration. . . ." With two great victories, Polk faced additional obstacles, the attainment of which proved to be infinitely more challenging: settlement of the Oregon question and acquisition of California. 3

Under the terms of the convention of 1818, the United States and Great Britain had agreed to occupy jointly the vast Oregon country; in 1827, both countries accepted a proviso whereby joint occupation could be terminated by either signatory, provided that one


year's notice to the other power were given. By the early 1840's hundreds of American settlers had migrated to the Willamette Valley. Spurred by the growing clamor of Manifest Destiny, both pioneers and politicians, especially the Democrats, began to voice loudly their desire to end joint occupation and to claim unilaterally America's right to the whole of Oregon, from the California border to the southern boundary of Russian America (Alaska). The Democrats, both reflecting and articulating the demands of aggressive Manifest Destiny, incorporated into their 1844 party platform a call for the "reoccupation" of all of Oregon; in his inaugural address, Polk maintained that the United States' claim to Oregon was "clear and unquestionable." While he did not specifically declare that America's claim to Oregon extended to the $54^\circ40'$ boundary line, he clearly implied that was the case. With American expansionists loudly and pugnaciously shouting "Fifty-four forty or fight," Great Britain obviously felt the intense pressure which suddenly began to develop. British reaction was predictably angry. While Polk strongly supported the American claim to $54^\circ40'$, he offered to settle the growing controversy along the 49th parallel; the British ambassador, Lord Pakenham, totally rejected Polk's offer.  

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British tempers were hot; the London *Times* stated that "the ill-regulated, overbearing, and aggressive spirit of American democracy" was determined to take all of Oregon and that the British claim would be relinquished only by "war." Parrying the strong British reaction, Polk stated that "the only way to treat John Bull was to look him straight in the eye . . ." and that "[W]e are resolved to maintain our rights at any hazard." Thus, with both countries assuming firm positions throughout 1845 and early 1846, war appeared to be a real possibility.

Polk was a master of confrontation; he and the western expansionists of his party kept alive the old enmity with England which had existed since the days of the American Revolution. His ploy was only too effective; phrases like "all or none" and "54°40' or fight" were loudly proclaimed in speeches, newspapers, and appeared regularly on posts and fences throughout the nation. As a British journal noted, "sensible politicians such as Adams, Clay, and Webster [have seemed] to disappear like other lost species

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5 London *Times*, 15 January 1846; Polk to General Gideon J. Pillow, 4 February 1846, Polk Papers; Polk to Andrew Jackson, 12 May 1845, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., on microfilm, North Texas State University.
of American life. "

Daniel Webster, however, was not at all silent on the ominous Oregon crisis, nor had he been as the dangerous question developed over the years. As one historian has pointed out, while Webster was secretary of state, "He had met critical situations with acute intellectual powers" and "by the light of practical idealism, he had sought the goal of national advancement." As the Oregon controversy intensified, Webster and the majority of the Whigs, along with John C. Calhoun and a small group of Democrats, attempted to counter the emotionalism and bravado of the expansionists with cool reason, logic, and a willingness for compromise. That the efforts of the Webster-Calhoun peace coalition were effective was quite apparent; as the British foreign minister, Lord Aberdeen, told his representative in Washington, "Polk and his Government are more afraid of the Senate than they are of us. . . ."


7 Clyde A. Duniway, "Daniel Webster," in The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy, 10 vols., ed. Samuel
In a major speech at Faneuil Hall in Boston in November, 1845, Senator Webster delivered a scathing attack on the belligerent expansionists, who seemed bent on the acquisition of all of Oregon, even at the expense of a calamitous war with England. Assailing the Democrats' "popular appeals," their "loud representations of patriotism," and their "stormy defiance of the power of a great nation," Webster observed that it was a mistake to think that they could "play the small patriot in a small style." To assume that "they can talk of a war with England . . . and get credit for their patriotism and lofty love of country, but keep the game in their own hands" was a markedly mistaken notion, he added. Instead, those who threaten war are usually rewarded with war itself. 8

"The constant speculation, this supposition, that war may come, is half as bad as war itself," Webster said. Such an irresponsible attitude is "not the way or course which just and lofty and respectable men feel on the great question of peace and war."

The wise and proper duty for Americans, Webster argued, was to

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"keep ourselves cool and calm . . ." and to demand that our government assess the situation "fairly and calmly," then enter into "negotiations," "discussions," and finally, to bring about a pacific, "amicable settlement" of the crisis, hopefully with a boundary line being established along the 49th parallel.¹⁹

Following his Faneuil Hall speech, which had a great impact in Europe and which was translated into most of the continental languages, Webster sent a letter to a correspondent in Scotland, urging the British government to accept the 49th parallel as an Anglo-American boundary in the Oregon country. Quickly this letter found itself in the hands of Lord Aberdeen, who gave serious consideration to Webster's suggestion. In the meantime, however, Democratic Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan introduced resolutions in the Senate which proposed an investigation of the nation's defenses and a notice to be sent to England terminating joint occupation. Such a termination would have been, as Henry Cabot Lodge once stated, "nearly equivalent to a declaration of war."¹⁰

Attacking the Cass resolutions, Webster pointed out in his first Senate speech in several years that "every man of intelligence

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 312-17.

knows that unnecessary alarm and apprehension about the public peace is a great evil." Believing that such "alarm and apprehension" was neither necessary nor warranted, Webster argued that the wisest course would be simply to make a "quiet, thorough, just, politic, [and] statesmanlike provision for the future." If after sober consideration it appeared that the army and navy should need augmentation and reinforcement, he said, "I am ready to cooperate"; in the meantime, "unnecessary alarm" must be prevented. 11

Webster thought that Polk did not want war but that his extremist supporters in Congress did; James Madison did not want war in 1812, but nevertheless had it thrust upon him by his own party. Still, Webster wrote, "The question of war or peace . . . essentially depends upon the Executives of the two [governments]." Even when Lord Aberdeen wrote Webster that England "cannot afford to be kicked" on the Oregon question, the Massachusetts senator continued to believe that if good sense and reason were to prevail, there would still be peace and that an amicable settlement could still be reached, the 54°40' men notwithstanding. 12


Throughout January and February of 1846, Webster and John C. Calhoun urged the Senate to adopt a compromise settlement which would establish the 49th parallel as the boundary between Canada and the United States and thus bring the long-simmering crisis to a close. The news that England was preparing to send thirty ships of the line to positions off the coasts of Canada, coupled with a congressional resolution to give England the required notice of the termination of joint occupation, made a solution to the Oregon crisis even more imperative. The influential *American Review*, a journal for which Webster often wrote, urged its readers to support the "moral power of the Whig party" and not to be swayed by those "demagogues of little knowledge and less principle [who] pervert great national questions to party purposes." The Whig party, said the *Review*, is the party of "order and reason" in the country; therefore, if the United States considered the Oregon matter from a perspective of "reason and right," there would be little difficulty in settling the dangerous crisis. Webster and his Whig colleagues consequently made public in April, 1846, their willingness to accept formally the

49th parallel for an Anglo-American boundary; in May, the British government responded by indicating that it would take the diplomatic initiative and officially propose that such a boundary line be established and honored by both parties. 13

In spite of emotional outbursts by ultraexpansionists such as Senator Sam Houston of Texas, who exclaimed, "Honorable senators have spoken of 'compromise': I abhor that term," Polk submitted the British proposal to the Senate. On June 13, 1846, senators gave their advice and consent to the Oregon treaty by a vote of 38 to 12, two votes over the necessary two-thirds majority. The Baltimore Patriot gave special notice to Webster's role in the matter, especially his role in persuading the British not to insist on a boundary line south of the 49th parallel, which for some time they seemed determined to do. Webster's opposition to the "sound and fury" of the expansionists was largely responsible in preventing their bravado and jingoism from being translated into war. America's foreign policy problems were far from being ended, however, for one month before the ratification of the Oregon treaty, the United States was at war with

The origins of the Mexican War can best be viewed as an arabesque, filled with complexity and intrigue, which were the results of calculations and miscalculations. It ostensibly began as a war of self-defense on the part of the United States but quickly evolved into a war of conquest and territorial aggrandizement. The fundamental question of the morality of the war was raised at the beginning, lasted throughout the war, and continues today. Intimately involved at the center of the moralistic and historiographical controversy was James K. Polk, expansionist Democrat and president. Under his leadership, the highly-successful war was prosecuted and ultimately terminated with an increase of 30 per cent in the territorial possessions of the United States. The victory was costly, however; in his success, Polk inadvertently planted the seeds of a much greater conflagration, the Civil War.

The Republic of Texas was extended an invitation to join the Union in March, 1845, by action of a joint resolution of Congress passed immediately before the expiration of the administration of John Tyler. Accepting the annexation offer in the summer of 1845,

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the Texas legislature then drew up a constitution, which was in turn accepted by the United States government on December 29, 1845. In February, 1846, Texas formally entered the Union. 15

Mexico had never officially recognized the independence of Texas, even after the successful revolt and ensuing war for independence in 1836; still claiming title to Texas, Mexico had for some time stated that it would regard any annexation by the United States as an act of war. When the joint resolution of annexation was announced in March, 1845, Mexico broke off diplomatic relations with the United States; in July, the Mexican government, weak but bristling with martial rhetoric, suggested that war be declared as soon as annexation was effected, or at that time when American soldiers entered and occupied Texas. 16

In June, 1845, troops under General Zachary Taylor were dispatched to Corpus Christi, Texas, at the mouth of the Nueces River, in an area claimed by both Texas and Mexico. Echoing Mexican sentiments that the movement of American troops into Texas would be considered a casus belli, Polk told his vice-president that


if Mexican troops crossed the Rio Grande, it would be considered
an act of "war." As "Young Hickory's" most recent biographer
has stated, "Polk's tone at this point suggests that he would have
welcomed a war [even] if Mexico had relieved him from the
responsibility of starting it. . . ."17

Polk apparently considered war as an acceptable alternative
to the fruitless impasse which had characterized his diplomatic
efforts to settle long-outstanding Mexican debts to the United States
and purchase California from Mexico. The acquisition of California
was of utmost importance to Polk as well as to many others. Hundreds of American settlers had migrated to California in the 1840's.
Because of their desire to live once again under the American flag,
because of the white hot jingoistic strains of Manifest Destiny, and
because of his desire to make the United States a Pacific power
through the acquisition of ports on that ocean, Polk was determined to
take California. When John Slidell, Polk's minister to Mexico, was
rudely and completely rebuffed in his attempts in 1845 and 1846 to
settle the debt question and to persuade Mexico to sell California and
parts of the Mexican Southwest, the president was furious. By
April, 1846, Polk began to think of achieving by military force that

17 Polk to A. J. Dallas, 28 August 1845, Polk Papers; Sellers, James K. Polk: Continentalist, p. 262.
which he could not gain by diplomacy. 18

Even while Slidell was attempting to negotiate with Mexico in March, 1846, Polk ordered Taylor's troops to Matamoros, on the left bank of the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo del Norte). The land between the Neues and the Rio Grande rivers had traditionally been claimed by Mexico; after the Texas revolt of 1836, the Texans claimed that the Rio Grande was the boundary between the two nations. Mexico, however, continued to maintain that the true boundary between Texas and Mexico was the Neues River. When the Lone Star Republic joined the Union, the United States supported the Texas claim. Thus, when Taylor's army moved into what Mexico irrevocably considered to be her sovereign territory, her army attacked the alleged invaders. Taylor then immediately sent word of the incident of April 25 to the president. 19

Before receiving word of the attack on Taylor's troops and after being informed of the failure of the Slidell mission, Polk wrote in his diary that "it was only a matter of time," probably less than

18 Reeves, American Diplomacy under Tyler and Polk, p. 295; Polk, Polk Diary, ed. Quaife, 1:319; Pletcher, Diplomacy of Annexation, pp. 276-90, 353-68, 371-72; Charles A. McCoy, Polk and the Presidency (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1960), p. 96

a week, before he would send a message to Congress asking for a declaration of war against Mexico. Upon receiving news of the Mexican attack, Polk, on May 11, 1846, requested that Congress declare that war existed "by the act of the Republic of Mexico," which caused "American blood to be shed on American soil." Congress acted accordingly, and Polk finally had his war. As one career army officer serving with Taylor on the Rio Grande had earlier and perceptively observed,

"We have not one particle of right to be here. Our force is . . . too small for the accomplishment of its errand. It looks as if the government sent a small force on purpose to bring on a war, so as to have a pretext for taking California and as much of [Mexico] as it chooses."

Historians have long disputed the great question of which men, which countries, or what forces were most responsible for the outbreak of the Mexican War, or the War of the American Intervention, as it is known in Mexico. In 1846, however, not having the

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21 For a view that Polk was justified in his actions and that Mexico was the true aggressor, see Justin H. Smith's *The War with Mexico* (cited previously); for opposing arguments that maintain Polk intentionally brought on the war and thus was either a conspirator, recklessly irresponsible, or both, see Hubert H. Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, 6 vols. (San Francisco, Cal.: The History Company, 1886-1888), vol. 5; for support of the Bancroft thesis, see Richard R. Stenberg, "The Failure of Polk's Mexican War Intrigue of
advantage of historical insight, inquiry, and retrospective consideration, most Americans either praised or bitterly condemned Polk and his administration. While numerous Democrats loyally supported Polk and the war, the Whig party from the outset of hostilities vociferously assailed what they believed to be an unnecessary, unconstitutional, and immoral conflict. Indeed, for years, the Whigs in Congress had usually opposed expansion, while Democrats ordinarily supported such policies; with the outbreak of the controversial war, Whig opposition and criticism reach monumental proportions. 22

1845," Pacific Historical Review 4 (1935): 39-68; for an interpretation which holds that there was a southern land hunger conspiracy which promoted both the annexation of Texas and the war with Mexico, see James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850, 7 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1892-1922), vol. 1. Although he is sympathetic to Polk, Eugene I. McCormac theorizes that western land hunger was so intense that Polk would accept war with Mexico to gain California for domestic political reasons. See his James K. Polk: A Political Biography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1922). For an excellent argument which maintains that commercial interests, regardless of section or party, drove Polk into war in order to gain Pacific ports, consult Norman A. Graebner, Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1955); for the classic view that the war was brought by the white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant desire to extend the area of freedom and liberty, see Albert K. Weinberg, Manifest Destiny: A Study of American Nationalist Expansion (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935).

22 Voting in the Twenty-Eighth Congress (1943-45) on those critical expansion issues (the annexation of Texas, the Oregon question, and the admission of new states) was consistently partisan; in the House of Representatives, 75.6 per cent of Democrats were pro-expansionists and in the senate 95.7 per cent were so inclined. In
While "Mr. Polk's War" accomplished much at relatively little cost, the president personally had no talent for popularity and never really succeeded in consolidating any semblance of widespread support for the war, except for the expansion extremists in congress and among the public at large. As Charles G. Sellers has noted, "The passage of the war bill was a striking demonstration of a determined President's ability to compel a reluctant Congress to support a jingoistic foreign policy." While Polk and his Democratic senatorial supporters declared the war was to be fought in order to achieve "an honorable and permanent peace," the Whigs, especially in the Senate, not only voted against the war bill, but as Sellers says, "sought the first opportunity of expressing publicly their sense of moral outrage. . . ."23

Whig Representative Joshua Giddings of Ohio exclaimed that Polk had violated "every principle of international law and moral justice." An unidentified Whig legislator assailed Polk's "alleged unrighteousness, and [his] damnable war." Representative John C. Culver of New York stated that the war had one simple and basic objective: "to get [Mexico's] territory." Not believing Polk's story that American blood had been shed on "American" soil, but rather than the war was unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the president, Representative Abraham Lincoln of Illinois asked Polk to show personally the exact "spot" where the opening battle of the Mexican War actually took place. From the battlefront in northern Mexico, the commanding general of American forces, Zachary Taylor, wrote that he totally disapproved of Polk's actions, and he bitterly condemned "our ambitious view of conquest and aggrandisement at the expense of a weak power."²⁴

The Whig press quickly joined that party's congressmen in attacking both Polk and his motivation and aims for the war. Particularly vitriolic were the comments of the National Intelligencer; it labeled the war an unparalleled desire for territorial aggrandizement and a shameful example of presidential immorality; it cautioned that the Mexican lands which the United States was seeking were a "Trojan Horse" and "a bone of contention fraught with all the evils of Pandora's box." The sentiment of the Whig press and many politicians were shared by many American churches. War opposition was rampant among the Quakers, the Congregationalists, and the Unitarians; from the pulpits and from the church presses came thunderous attacks on Polk and his immoral war.  

James K. Polk found strong opposition from several of the strongest, most influential members from within his own party. Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri said that while he would support a policy of American self-defense, he was irrevocably opposed to an "aggressive war" on Mexico. John C. Calhoun argued that Taylor's army should be rescued but that any offensive military action should absolutely be avoided. Aware of the potential disaster and tragedy which ultimately would come out of the war, Calhoun said that "Never

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was so momentous a measure adopted with so little thought."

While he was loyally supported by a few true friends, especially by the editors of the influential Charleston Mercury and the Richmond Enquirer, which "numbered the days of this glorious Union," Calhoun, by his courageous stand, lost considerable support in the South for his presidential aspirations. The old Jacksonian, C. C. Cambreleng, long a power in New York politics, expressing the sentiments of many Democrats of reputable standing, wrote ex-president Martin Van Buren, "Heaven help me for having any hand in laying the foundations of this administration. Tyler was bad enough, but [at least] he was an honest knave."26

Whatever the motives for the war, either real or imagined, many Democrats truly believed that the United States possessed a

divine obligation to extend the area of freedom throughout the
American continent, to spread the virtues of republican government,
Anglo-Saxon liberties, and democratic privileges to all unenlightened,
less sophisticated races and cultures. These Americans believed
that the United States was divinely charged with the moral and
spiritual regeneration of such primitive, backward peoples, and
must give them an opportunity to share the blessings of the American
way of life. If these people could not or would not see the goodness
and correctness of our ways, the United States would nevertheless
proceed undaunted in the noble mission with which she considered
herself to be entrusted. 27

The Whig argument against the war, against the acquisition
of conquered territory, and the inheritance of consequent grave prob-
lems was presented from a much more esoteric, philosophical per-
spective. "The true vocation of this great Republic is--not aggran-
dizement, but national growth--not the aggregation of foreign states,
but the development of those now composing the Union," said the
American Review. "[N]ot the dangerous fascination of arms and

27 Weinberg, Manifest Destiny, pp. 100-12, 160-89; Freder-
121-22; Major L. Wilson, Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest
conquests, but the cultivation of the arts of peace . . ." should be the nation's goal, argued the Whig magazine. "All wars . . . are dangerous to liberty, and necessarily tend to the subversion of those institutions upon which our political and social fabrics rest. . . ."

To Whig philosophers, the sudden acquisition of vast new lands would strain to the breaking point the institutions of the Union; to add new territory inhabited with alien peoples would perhaps fatally destroy the American attempt to build consensus and homogeneity in its older, more traditionally-oriented society. To build and improve the nation, not to expand its boundaries recklessly, was a fundamental aspect of the Whig creed.²⁸

Long before the Mexican War had erupted, Daniel Webster was expressing his objections to the annexation of Texas and to the expansion of the nation's boundaries. Writing to his son the week following the joint resolution of annexation in March, 1845, Webster stated that there existed no constitutional power which would admit a sovereign nation to the Union, that there was great danger in recklessly extending the boundaries of the country, and that both the institution of slavery as well as congressional slave representation would increase if Texas were admitted to the Union. In December,

when the question of Texas admission came before the Senate, Webster expanded on his reasons for opposing the Democratic-sponsored resolution. In addition to his long opposition to expansion of the slave power, Webster argued that "it is of very dangerous tendency and doubtful consequences to enlarge the boundaries of this country . . ." and that "there must be some limit to the extent of our own territory, if we would make our institutions permanent."

To expand the nation's boundaries, he stated, would be to endanger the government itself. This nation, Webster concluded, "should exhibit to the [countries] of the earth the example of a great, rich, and powerful republic which is not possessed by a spirit of aggrandizement."

In spite of Webster's admonitions, Texas, "the Lone Star, [came] in with a quick step," President Polk ordered General Taylor to the Nueces, and events began to run their fateful course. Webster was quite aware of the danger of war; writing to a fellow Massachusetts congressman, he apprehensively observed that "There is a great deal of panic here about Texas" and the concomitant possibility of war. In May, 1846, the clash between the Mexican and American armies had occurred, and the nation was at war. In

29 Webster to Fletcher Webster, 11 March 1845, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 18:203-04; ibid., 9:55-59.
Massachusetts on a vacation, Webster was not present in the Senate to vote on Polk's war message; had he been, it is highly probable that he would have cast a negative vote. 30

At the outset of the war, Webster was concerned but cautiously optimistic that American objectives were narrow and limited and that peace would be quickly restored. Although he was "alarmed for the state of the country," things perhaps "in the meantime [would] come to an armistice." While being in opposition to a war of expansion, at the same time, he tried desperately at first to maintain a purely patriotic stance. As war aims, Webster suggested that the United States declare that "The country being in actual war, [it] must be defended, and its rights and interests maintained, whatever opinion be sustained, of the necessity of its origin." As long as the war was waged only for "national defense" and not connected with "ambition" or "desire for aggrandizement," the government should be supported by "all truly patriotic men, without distinction of party." 31

30 Webster to John H. Parker, 16 December 1845, Daniel Webster, The Papers of Daniel Webster, ed. Charles M. Wiltse, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, New Hampshire, on microfilm, North Texas State University; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:161-62.

31 Webster to Peter Harvey, [n. d.] May 1846, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:453; Webster to Fletcher Webster, 1 June 1846, Webster Papers; Webster to Fletcher Webster, 25 May 1846, ibid.
Although Webster had optimistically tried to believe that both Mexico and the United States wanted an early armistice, by the autumn and winter of 1846, he had become disillusioned with the inflexible positions of both governments. As for Mexico, he said that she was "an ugly enemy" and would not even consider the negotiation of an armistice. Webster reserved his major efforts, however, for a vitriolic attack on Polk and his supporters. "There has been a great violation of duty on the part of the President," Webster urged. "He has plunged the country into war, whereas, unless in case of invasion of our actual limits, he has no right to do so." "[T]he war," Webster asserted, "in its origins, was a presidential war." By his dispatch of American soldiers into a "foreign Territory," which led to a strong military response by Mexico, Polk effectively had brought about a fait accompli which Congress had been forced to accept. This war, Webster stated, was absolutely against "the spirit of the Constitution," which clearly denoted that only the people's representatives, the Congress, could declare a condition of war. Not only was Polk's action a "great misjudgement," it was "an impeachable offence." There were great matters about which the citizens of the United States must consider with "sobriety and seriousness," Webster forcefully concluded, and the fundamental question was, "[W]hat are the objects and designs of our
By early winter of 1846, the troops of General Taylor had scored sensational victories over the Mexican army throughout the northern part of that nation. Because of the successful exploits of "Old Rough and Ready," coupled with impressive triumphs of other American armies in California and the Southwest, the United States could effectively claim one-third of the territory of Mexico. As military successes mounted and more Mexican territory came under the control of the American armies, Webster's sense of outrage at what he considered to be an unjust, immoral, and unconstitutional attempt at territorial aggrandisement reached monumental proportions.

At a public dinner given in his honor in December, 1846, Webster delivered a lengthy, hardhitting speech in which he scathingly assaulted Polk, his war policies in particular, and most of his actions as chief executive. Assailing Polk not only from a practical political perspective, he gave a thunderous presentation of his long-held Whig philosophy regarding the Constitution, nature of the Union, notion of

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32 Webster to Fletcher Webster, 6 August 1846, Webster, *Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 16:465; ibid., 13:334-35.

continuity in American history, corporate body theory, and the twin concepts of hope and memory as they applied to the nation's spiritual being. It had been some time since Webster had spoken at length on so many topics in a single speech. Employing his legendary crisp logic and cool reason, the "Godlike Daniel" was reminiscent of a younger Webster of an earlier generation when he had parried with Jackson, Hayne, and Calhoun over such fundamental matters as the nature of the Constitution and the meaning of the Union. 34

Appealing to his listeners' sense of historical continuity and perpetuity, Webster exclaimed that "through a succession of ages and ages" and for "so many millions of people," the Constitution, "fairly expounded and justly interpreted, [has been] the bond of our Union." This bond, he said, has been severely weakened by the policies of Polk and his advisors and supporters. "I think it is certain that the soberminded and intelligent portion of [even] the [older Democrats] . . . have recoiled at the adoption of new, unheard programs which have been carried to such extremes" that "honest and just" men find impossible to support. 35

34 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 4:7-45.

Of great concern to Webster was Polk's use of the veto. Echoing the familiar Whig belief that Congress directly represents the people's will, he assailed the president for vetoing a major internal improvements bill. Rivers have to be made navigable, harbors must be improved and roads should be built; such improvements must be made so as to "do some good to us and our posterity forever." Internal improvements, while expensive to individual states, were not prohibitively costly to the federal government. These improvements must be paid for by the national government; it was a "service" for the people which "the people cannot do for themselves." The national government had an obligation, a paternalistic, benevolent responsibility for the betterment of its citizens' lives, Webster stated. Internal improvements and other great undertakings "must come from the government of the United States, or in the nature of things, they cannot come at all."37

While Polk's veto of the internal improvements bill was to Webster both irresponsible and unfortunate, he reserved most of his

36 One historian has written that the Whigs' "inability to learn from experience [during the Jackson-Van Buren era] that the people looked to the president rather than to Congress for leadership [was a substantial factor] in their demise as a political party." See McCoy, *Polk and the Presidency*, p. 145.

37 Webster, *Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, 4:34-37.
speech to the president's actions which culminated in the Mexican War. After giving a lengthy historical summary of the relations between Mexico and the United States, Webster argued that "there was no danger of invasion, or hostilities of any kind, from Mexico" until Polk ordered Taylor's army to the Rio Grande. That order, Webster explained, "was a step that would naturally, if not necessarily . . . provoke hostilities and to bring on war." Such executive actions, he pointed out, were absolutely "against the spirit of the Constitution" because "no power but the Congress can declare war." By issuing marching orders to Taylor, Polk committed a transgression infinitely more serious than a simple "mistake or blunder"; it was, Webster argued, "an extension of executive authority of a very dangerous character." Posing a great and ominous question which has never been satisfactorily resolved, Webster asked, of what value was the congressional privilege and responsibility of declaring war "if the President of his own authority may make such military movements as must bring on war [itself]?" 38

Nevertheless, American troops in the field had to be supported. As quickly as possible, however, the war must be brought to a negotiated, satisfactory conclusion. The great goal and hope of Webster, as he noted in his conclusion, was that "whether we have

38 Ibid., pp. 24-33.
conquests, or no conquests, war or no war, peace or no peace, we yet shall preserve, in its integrity and strength, the Constitution of the United States." 39

In March, 1847, General Winfield Scott and a large army landed at Vera Cruz, Mexico, and began the long march that would ultimately take them to Mexico City. A strong demand for acquisition of all of Mexico as the spoils of war was increasingly heard. The Whig press, which had been lambasting Polk's war and his policies, intensified its attacks on the president. In the manner of Webster, Whig papers emphasized the moralistic, higher aims of their party and severely attacked Polk and the Democrats for their apparent immoral greed for territory. "What is needed more than anything," said the American Review, "is for the good and great men--high-minded, honest, sensible, and experienced men--to take hold of the politics of the country. . . ." The great Whig strength, it exclaimed, is a "moral power [and] Whigs must hold the high ground as moral arbiters," especially in grave matters involving the Constitution.

While triumph at the polls was desirable, "far beyond success, and far above popularity, are to be ranked consistency, honor, and justice. . . ." The Whig code, argued the Review, was based on the premise that "we want, and will have, no Mexican provinces as the

39 Ibid.
fruits of our conquests [to] form hereafter States in the Union."

Rather than greedily attempt to dismember or even to acquire all of Mexico, we should "leave Mexican territory alone." If the United States should gain part or all of Mexico as the spoils of war, "What then follows?" National debt, taxation, "moral fanaticism roused and initiated to action--civil war--and that last and greatest of evils, the disunion of the States." 40

While Webster and the Whigs were vocal opponents of Polk, his motives and methods, and the war, it was a member of the president's own party who introduced into the House of Representatives a concept that had great significance for the fate of the Union. David Wilmot, Democratic representative from Pennsylvania, attached a rider to an appropriations bill which would have expressly prohibited the existence of slavery in any territory which the United States might acquire from Mexico. The Wilmot proviso, Carl Russell Fish once wrote, "may be said to mark the point where the happy progress of this generation ... turns to tragedy." "To the North, the [proviso] became the sole objective of the Mexican War," says Calhoun's biographer, Margaret L. Coit, while "to the South, it was the reddest

flag that could have been waved in the face of the southern
bull."\textsuperscript{41}

The sponsor of the proviso, who had humanitarian reasons as
well as political motives for introducing the fateful rider, was known
for his "slovenly dress," his "unkempt hair," an everpresent "quid
of tobacco," and his "constant use of profanity." The proviso passed
the House of Representatives in June, 1846. When the measure was
brought up for discussion in the Senate in August, however, adjourn-
ment cut short debate before a vote could be taken. During each
session of Congress from June, 1846, until the end of the war, the
Wilmot Proviso was regularly introduced; it consistently passed in the
House, but failed each time in the Senate. Webster regularly voted
for the measure in the Senate, and Abraham Lincoln supposedly voted
for it forty-seven times in the House.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} House of Representatives, \textit{Congressional Globe}, 29th
Cong., 1st sess., p. 1217; Carl Russell Fish, \textit{The Age of the
Common Man, 1830-1850} (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927),
p. 315; Margaret L. Coit, \textit{John C. Calhoun: American Portrait

\textsuperscript{42} Charles Buxton Going, \textit{David Wilmot, Free Soiler
(New
York: D. Appleton and Company, 1924), intro., chaps. 7-9, 11;
Richard R. Stanberg, "The Motivation of the Wilmot Proviso,"
\textit{Mississippi Valley Historical Review} 18 (1934):535-41; Avery
Craven, \textit{The Coming of the Civil War} (1942; reprint ed., Chicago:
The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 221; Fuess, \textit{Daniel
Webster}, 2:170; Fish, \textit{Age of the Common Man}, p. 317.
While he supported the Wilmot Proviso in essence, Webster knew that to try to handle the twin questions of slavery and expansion as one matter would create even greater problems than treating them separately. The Whig party, both North and South, had always opposed expansionism with regular consistency; on the slavery issue, its position was obviously quite divided. The Democrats, however, were split even further on both matters. The most intelligent way to approach the great question of slavery in any new territories was simply not to acquire such areas, according to Webster. Therefore, the slavery question would not divide either political party and thus further agitate the country. This solution would especially benefit the Whigs. In February and March, 1847, Webster and Whig Senator John M. Berrien of Georgia introduced resolutions in the Senate which stated that no territory should be taken from Mexico and that peace negotiations should begin immediately. 43

The Webster-Berrien resolutions failed. A bitter Webster assailed in particular the northern Democrats, who were largely to blame for the defeat of his resolutions. "They are for acquiring territory [and are willing] to meet all the convulsions which the discussion of that momentous question [i.e., slavery] may hereafter

43 Senate, Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 308-09, 453-55, 555-56; Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:170.
produce," he charged. "We appear to me to be rushing upon perils headlong," he lamented, "and with our eyes wide open." With his resolutions defeated, Webster too was forced again to cast his vote for the Wilmot Proviso. 44

Webster was in a great dilemma. While adamantly opposed to the Mexican War on both political and moral grounds, he was also acutely aware that a fundamental tenet of American republicanism was the notion that constitutionally legitimate authorities, representing the will of the majority of the people, must by definition govern the country. The minority, however, assured of its righteousness or of its cause, must acquiesce to the wishes of the majority. As he wrote in April, 1847,

Men should consider that we live in a popular government, in which the will of the majority must prevail. We may think a war unnecessarily unjust; but if a majority think otherwise, we must submit. [T]he minority must yield to the majority, unless it means to break up the government. 45

While obviously not wishing to break the laws of the land or to disrupt the government, both of which he had spent his life upholding and defending, Webster proposed instead that the people's

44 Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 9:253-61; Senate, Congressional Globe, 29th Cong., 2d sess., p. 556.

45 Webster to Fletcher Webster, 24 April 1847, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:473-74.
representatives, the Congress, through perfectly acceptable constitutional practice and tradition, provide the leadership necessary to correct the excesses of the executive branch, restore peace, and in the process, reestablish a harmonious equilibrium of power among the three branches of the government.

Speaking at the Massachusetts state Whig convention in September, 1847, Webster attacked Polk for creating questionable "pretexts" on which the United States had gone to war. Assailing the expansionists who would greedily and thoughtlessly acquire lands from Mexico, he pointed out that the inhabitants of those lands were of a quite different ethnic, cultural, and political origin and background than were the vast majority of Americans. This factor, he said, would pose severe problems if these people were to be brought into the Union. As he noted, "You cannot make freemen out of persons unaccustomed to self-government and ignorant of what true freedom is."46

Another great danger to American political stability, Webster argued, was that annexation of western territories would create an intolerable, dangerous intersectional confrontation. Southerners would want to extend their institutions, including slavery, to the Southwest. Northerners would be just as strong in their opposition

to such an occurrence.

The task of Congress, Webster forcefully exclaimed, was to make the president clearly demonstrate that the war was absolutely necessary for "the safety of the Union, and [for] the rights of the American people..." If he could not do so, then Congress "ought to pass resolutions against the prosecution of the war, and grant no further supplies." Congress should not act hastily or lightly in taking such action. When, however, the war became "odious" to the people and they obviously disapproved of the president's policies, then "it will be the bounden duty of their representatives in Congress to demand of the President a full statement of his objects and purposes." If these purposes are found not to be consistent with "the honor and character" of the nation, Webster stressed, then it will be the duty of Congress to "exercise their constitutional authority.""48

"Let us stand, then, by our Whig principles," Webster thundered in conclusion. "[T]here is a chart and a compass for us to study, to consult, and to obey. That chart is the Constitution of the country."49 Despite his powerful arguments, Congress did not act to cut off appropriation requests made by the president, and the

48 Ibid., pp. 363-64.
49 Ibid., p. 365.
war continued.

Webster took his Senate seat at the opening of the Thirtieth Congress in December, 1847; gloomy and feeling thwarted in his attempts to stop the war, he said little during the early part of the congressional session. In February, 1848, he wrote that while he wished to say something about "the condition of the country," the other Whig senators "generally desire me to hold back." In March, Webster's melancholy was deepened by the news that his youngest son Edward had died of typhoid fever while serving with the army in Mexico.

The same month brought word that Mexico had finally conceded defeat and had agreed to the terms of the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Under the terms of the treaty, Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as the boundary with Texas; in addition, the United States received the vast New Mexico territory as well as California. In return, the American government agreed to pay Mexico fifteen million dollars. In spite of the great opposition of Webster and a small group of likeminded Whigs, James K. Polk, who had always known what he wanted and how to go about doing so, had finally accomplished

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his goal.  

The presidential campaign of 1848 had commenced almost immediately following Polk's election in 1844. With his announcement of a one-term pledge, both major parties began to search for strong candidates who could win the presidency in 1848. During the first year and a half of Polk's administration, Whigs and Democrats debated the old, traditional issues of the Jacksonian era: the tariff, subtreasury, and internal improvements. The leading figures of both parties coolly discussed the familiar questions much as they had done for almost twenty years. With the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846, however, longstanding political issues faded in importance. From 1846 to 1848, the burning new question was whether or not slavery would be permitted in those territories which almost inevitably would be acquired from Mexico. The caustic new issue became the focal point of both major parties as well as a significant new party. The "free soil" question forced the parties to accept, evade, or compromise on the issue; it was a decisive factor in the selection of the parties' candidates, and it ultimately shaped the destiny of the United States.  

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52 Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*
Daniel Webster desperately wanted to become president in 1848; now in his mid-sixties, he realized that he probably would not be able to pursue the elusive scepter for many more years. The Massachusetts senator was becoming, as many of the older generation of Whigs were, anachronistic, philosophically reminiscent of earlier times and of another political milieu. As his definitive biographer, Claude M. Fuess has commented, "Without being conscious of it, he was out of touch with the age."53

If Webster's chances for a Whig nomination were to be realized, he would have to have the solid, unified support of the party in Massachusetts. While his popularity in both state politics and throughout the nation had been immense during the days of his battles with Andrew Jackson and during even the generation before, by the late 1840's, his influence had greatly diminished to the point that his once-formidable power base was largely confined to the Bay State. Webster's fall from grace with the party hierarchy during his years in the Tyler cabinet, combined with the newly-emerging slavery issue, on which he and his constituents revealed increasing disharmony,

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severely limited his former influence, even in Massachusetts.  

For years, Webster had staunchly defended his beloved economic programs, which proposed a paternalistic, benevolent governmental support and assistance to business interests, especially the industrial sector. Such a policy, he believed, would bring about great benefits for all people, all classes in society, and for all the sections of the nation, while still preserving the older, agrarian traditions and virtues. Webster always spoke in the language of the Constitution and the Union because, as his friend and contemporary, Rufus Choate, observed, "[I]t was America-our-America he sought to preserve," rather than any mystical notions of humanity. As times and issues changed, however, Webster's eloquent appeals to the people's sense of logic and reason fell on increasing numbers of deaf ears. When the fundamental question of the morality of slavery, its expansion, and a wide array of concomitant problems reached crisis levels in the late 1840's, Webster's old, long-cherished values and ideals as symbolized by the Constitution and the Union could not compete with liberty and equality. When such a realization finally began to spread throughout the North and especially in Massachusetts, it was to signify the "beginning of the end" for any chance that

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Daniel Webster could ever reach the White House. 55

The divisive questions surrounding the annexation of Texas created a particularly serious schism in the Whig party of Massachusetts. Outraged at what they believed was involved in the expansion of slavery, radical young Massachusetts Whigs resolved to work for the election of a senator who would act positively, not only to stop the extension of slavery, but to seek abolition of the institution itself. In addition, these Whigs stated their determination never to support another slaveholder for the presidency, regardless of his party. While Webster had always argued forcefully against the institution of slavery, he had never been an abolitionist because of his long-held belief that as members of the Union and being thus protected by the Constitution, and in the absence of national law prohibiting slavery, the southern states had a legal right to allow slavery to exist within their borders. When Webster refused to lead the Whig radicals in Massachusetts, young Charles Sumner assumed leadership of the rising abolitionist faction; while Sumner's group was

not large in number, their opposition to Webster had a decidedly negative effect on his future political career. 56

The national Whig party had been organized around a set of commonly-held values, which the strongest initially had been a hatred of Andrew Jackson and his policies. In Massachusetts, most Whigs had always believed that national harmony was of the utmost importance; leaders of the old Boston aristocracy had long assumed that there was no problem, either sectional or national, which could not be resolved to the satisfaction of all interests concerned. For many years, a major industry in New England and especially in Massachusetts was textile manufacturing in which raw cotton and wool were spun into finished goods. To maintain a close relationship with the South in all matters, therefore, was not only good politics, it was also good business. Such was the position of the Whig party for two decades; the emergence of the Texas question, however, had a

profound effect on future Bay State politics. 57

The Mexican War had an even more devastating impact on the Whig party in Massachusetts. The older men of the party, including Webster, tried desperately to maintain the traditional relationship with the South for political and economic reasons, to be sure, but also because the old Whig party, both North and South, was the party of the Union. Because these Whigs would tolerate the existence of slavery in the South, whether to maintain a stable cotton supply or for more altruistic reasons, they became known as "Cotton Whigs." The radicals, led by Sumner, viewed such a relationship with moral disgust and were prepared, if not anxious, to cut their ties with what they considered to be an evil, expansionist slavocracy; consequently, they became known as "Conscience Whigs." 58

Webster gamely attempted to walk a political tightrope between the two factions. If he were ever to become president, he


would have to have the united support of the Whig party in his state. More important to Webster than his own presidential ambitions, however, was the fate of the nation itself. In an appeal for party harmony, he told the Massachusetts Whig convention in September, 1846, that

Others may look to other sources, or rely upon other foundations for their hopes of the country, but I confess . . . that at this period of my political life . . . I am full of the feeling that there is but one ground upon which the good men of this country can rest their trust. I see in the dark and troubled night which is upon us, no star above the horizon, but the intelligent, patriotic, united Whig party.  

The Conscience Whigs did not support Webster’s argument. Declaring that “Loyalty to principle is higher than loyalty to party,” Charles Sumner and his faction declined to give their approval to Webster’s bid for a unified party. Knowing that slavery must be contained, but not at the terrible cost of secession, disunion, and civil war, dangers which the Whig radicals seemed willing to accept, Webster launched his drive for the presidency without their support.

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Trying to elicit and consolidate southern support for his candidacy, Webster toured throughout that region during the spring and early summer of 1847. He spoke freely to the southerners, was warmly received everywhere, even in South Carolina, where the memory of his legendary debate with Robert Y. Hayne in 1830 was still vivid. Wherever he went, he expounded the basic principles of his creed. As he told his listeners in Savannah, "Our duty is to be content with the Constitution as it is," "to resist changes," and to "preserve its original spirit and original purpose" for the future blessings of "those who come after us."\(^6^1\)

In spite of the courteous receptions and his honest if lukewarm speeches, Webster's candidacy simply did not generate any significant southern enthusiasm. Returning to Massachusetts in the summer, he tried to mend his political fences with both the extreme "cotton" and "conscience" factions of his party. The schism was too deep, however, for even Webster to heal. While at home, he maintained a correspondence with groups that nevertheless desired to hear his sentiments on various political issues. For his waning candidacy to remain viable, Webster knew that he had to seek political

support from any and all quarters. 62

To a delegation of Whigs who wanted Webster to attend a trade fair in Chicago, he wrote a powerful summary of his political philosophy. A policy of internal improvements, he reiterated, sponsored and supported by benevolent, paternalistic national government, was the key to the nation's prosperity and happiness. The people wanted and needed these improvements, he said, and it was "the bounden duty of the [national] government" to provide them.

To another Whig group in Chicago, Webster urged that the people reject such dangerous practices and habits as "prejudice," "party prepossessions," and "party opposition." Instead, the people must insist that they and their elected leaders rely solely on "fair reasoning," on "precedent," and to be guided by "the judgment of the great men who have gone before us." 63

Webster's attempt to woo the western vote never really succeeded. With only token support in the South, and facing a divided party in Massachusetts, his chances for the Whig nomination had virtually disappeared. For years, Webster had forcefully and

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62 Fuess, Daniel Webster, 2:179-81.

63 Webster to N. B. Judd, E. W. Tracy, and others, 26 June 1847, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:476-85; Webster to S. L. Smith, J. Butterfield, and others, 26 June 1847, ibid., pp. 485-86.
logically advocated his philosophies, political beliefs, and concepts of what constituted a good and great people and nation. "My wish is to do good and save the nation," he wrote in the summer of 1846. "I care nothing for consequences to my own popularity." In a time of rapidly changing issues, with the emergence of new leaders, and nearing the end of an era when great political figures sought to appeal to their listeners' higher sense of reason and to their intellect, Daniel Webster found that he could no longer rely on his venerable philosophies and eloquent style. As the times changed, his political base shrank, and the White House seemed more inaccessible than ever. The people wanted popular heroes, regardless of their fundamental philosophy, and the politicians wanted "available" candidates who could win votes. A man who was unavailable, largely because of his principled constancy in a dynamic age of transformation, was to be denied his party's presidential nomination in 1848. 64

While Webster battled with the Democrats, tried to prevent one war, and vociferously opposed another, Henry Clay was living in quiet retirement at Ashland. Since his bitter defeat in 1844, he had determined to abandon once and for all the arena of presidential

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politics. Like Webster, Clay was in his late sixties; after an illustrious career of great accomplishments, which always seemed to be followed by dashed hopes for the presidency, Clay did not look forward to another political contest. As a young Whig lawyer wrote in his diary, "Everybody could talk about Clay's long career as a prominent politician and find something to use against him, fairly or falsely." No matter whom Clay might run against, "his opponent was impregnable [because] he'd never done or said anything . . . to anybody."

With the successive Democratic victories in lowering the tariff, reestablishing the subtreasury system, Polk's veto of the internal improvements bill, and finally, the outbreak of the Mexican War, Clay began to retreat from his once-firm decision never to seek the presidency again. When asked by a correspondent in November, 1846, whether or not he would actively strive for the 1848 Whig nomination, Clay replied that he would remain for the moment "silent" on the matter, answering "neither yea nor nay." After a visit to Clay in April, 1846, William H. Seward wrote Thurlow Weed, "You may depend on it that the battle is to be fought over

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again. Obviously, the lure of politics was causing the Kentuck-
ian to reconsider his planned retirement.

The great Whig principles which the party must press in the
election of 1848, wrote Clay in 1847, were the traditional programs.
Except for the bank proposal, Whigs should call for a return to a
higher protective tariff and adoption of a federally-funded internal
improvements policy. Once again, Whigs should concentrate their
attacks on growing executive power, especially Polk's numerous
vetoes of legislation; in addition, there should be an investigation
into the causes and conduct of the war. While Webster was arguing
these issues, which Clay both proposed and predicted would be the
great questions of 1848, an unexpected, new factor suddenly
emerged which quickly altered, then destroyed the presidential
aspirations of both Webster and Clay. As had happened several
times, a military hero was discovered, one who could and would
defeat the traditional political establishment. Once again, Clay or
Webster would be cast aside for an "available" candidate. 67

66 Clay to John S. Littell, 17 November 1846, Henry Clay,
The Works of Henry Clay, ed. Calvin Colton, 10 vols. (New York:
G. P. Putnam's Sons, Inc., 1904), 5:537-37; Seward to Weed, 24
April 1846, quoted in Van Deusen, Life of Henry Clay, p. 383.

67 Clay to Daniel Ullman, 4 August 1847, Clay, Works of
Clay, ed. Colton, 5:543-44.
Born in Virginia, raised in Kentucky, and for many years a legal but absentee resident of Louisiana, General Zachary Taylor had spent forty years in the army. While he owned over 100 slaves and had considerable land holdings, he was not considered to be among the truly wealthy. A man of little formal education, he was known as a good soldier who took orders calmly and obediently, and he had the reputation of being both well-liked by his men and effective in his professional duties. Taylor possessed qualities of integrity and bravery, but was a simple man who was prone to grand displays of naivete. While he was not widely known by the general public before 1846, Taylor enjoyed a highly-regarded status within the army. 68

Taylor's obscurity dissolved and vanished immediately after his brilliant victories at Monterrey and Buena Vista in the first year of the Mexican War. Relatively unknown heretofore, "Old Rough and Ready" became suddenly a great national hero. With each succeeding triumph in Mexico, his fame and popularity increased proportionately. While his commander-in-chief, Polk, had little real faith in his abilities, the general nevertheless continued to win

battles and gain widespread acclaim in the hearts of the people.

While little was known of his political views, politicians of both parties began to see in him the winning quality for which they all sought in a presidential candidate: availability.69

Thurlow Weed, who had played the role of kingmaker in the Whig party in 1839 editorialized in June, 1846, that "One or two more successful conflicts would bring [Taylor] in triumph to the White House in 1848." John J. Crittenden of Kentucky, an old friend of Clay who had decided that "Prince Hal's" political career was ended and who was searching for an available candidate to groom, believed that he had finally found his man. Writing to Taylor in July, 1846, Crittenden said that "the people everywhere begin to talk of converting you into a political leader when the war is done."

Thus, like Andrew Jackson and William Henry Harrison before him, Taylor, the simple but popular soldier, was to be thrust into presidential politics. As Dixon Wecter has noted, after Jackson, "the military ideal became a tool for political manipulation."70

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At first, the popular swell for Taylor was nonpartisan; leaders of both major parties courted his favor, and for a few months, it appeared that he could emerge as either a Whig or a Democratic candidate. A man who had never voted and said little of his political convictions, Taylor accepted petitions and endorsements by the established party presses because of his apparent currying of favor from Whigs and Democrats alike. Taylor exclaimed, "I do not care a fig about the office [of the presidency], so they, the editors and others, may publish my letters and make as many comments on them as they may."  

Nevertheless, Taylor's fame continued to soar, and by 1847 it was apparent that the Whig party was going to win the favor of the general. Webster wrote that Taylor's "popularity seems to spread like wildfire." He was especially well-liked in the South; in

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Maryland, sixteen of twenty-eight Whig newspapers had declared for him, as had seventeen of twenty-eight Whig papers in Virginia. One Baltimore newspaper exclaimed, "Convention be damned... General Taylor is going to be elected by spontaneous combustion."

At a time when southerners viewed the Wilmot Proviso as a deadly threat to their section, Taylor seemed especially attractive. As the Charleston Mercury pointed out, "What his opinions on the great questions of constitutional controversy—the Tariff, Bank, and Internal Improvements—we know not, [but] he is true and sound on the Wilmot Proviso." The Florida Sentinel stated, "Just as long as the Wilmot Proviso is an open question, we are for a southern man and a slaveholder."72

After Taylor's great victory at Buena Vista in June, 1847, enthusiasm for his candidacy spread throughout the nation. A group of congressional Whigs known as the "Young Indians," led by Crittenden of Kentucky, Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia, and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois launched a major drive to sweep Taylor into the presidency. As Taylor's availability became obvious and apparent, Henry Clay finally spoke out.73

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72 Rayback, Free Soil, pp. 40-43; Baltimore Niles' Register, 72 (24 April 1847):128; Charleston Mercury, 13 May 1847; Florida Sentinel, n. d., as quoted in Rayback, Free Soil, p. 42.

Without reservation or qualification, Clay asserted that he was absolutely opposed to any consideration of Taylor as the Whig nominee. "[G]reat military attainments do not qualify of themselves nor disqualify for the Presidency." The great danger, however, was that a reliance on military men to serve as presidents would eventually end with both parties seeking such popular figures. "Military chieftain will [then] succeed military chieftain," Clay warned, "until at last one will reach the Presidency who, more unscrupulous than his predecessors, will put an end to our liberties, and establish a throne 74 of military despotism."

With the country facing such dangers, Clay hinted that if there arose once more a great swell of popular demand that he renounce his self-imposed retirement and actively seek the presidency again, he would do so. During 1847, there did indeed seem to be a demand for Clay to reenter the presidential arena. Especially this was the case in the North, where his mild antislavery attitude made Clay more popular than Taylor, whose campaign was taking on an increasingly southern sectionalist flavor. Consequently, Clay embarked on a tour of southern as well as northern states in order to test the political waters and build national support, if he decided to seek the Whig

74 Clay, Works of Clay, 5:541-42.
Clay received a warm, enthusiastic welcome wherever he went. Believing that such a wide, favorable reception constituted the great demand for which he had patiently been waiting, he decided to commit himself once again to lead his party as the Whig candidate in the election of 1848. At a major speech given in Lexington, Kentucky, in November, 1847, Clay presented his opinions on the burning new issues brought about by the Mexican war. The promulgation of his views had the effect of officially defining the Whig platform on the war, as well as unofficially launching his presidential campaign.

Clay bitterly assailed both President Polk and ex-President John Tyler's actions in producing the annexation of Texas and the subsequent dispatch of General Taylor's army to the Rio Grande. "If we had not Texas, we should have had no war," he charged. As the direct result of such ill-advised, thoughtless actions, "What else could have transpired but a conflict of arms?" Once the war was commenced by "palpable falsehood" and the aim of the Democrats to acquire territory from Mexico had become apparent, new and

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75 Ibid., Poage, *Henry Clay and the Whig Party*, pp. 159-64.
grave problems resulted. Noting the alien customs, traditions, and institutions of the Mexicans and Indians living in Mexico, Clay pointed out that such incongruities would immediately cause "insurrection" and "rebellion" if those territories were to be acquired by the United States. If such an annexation did take place, shortly and inevitably, "our present glorious Union itself would be dissoevered or dissolved." 77

Another great danger brought on by the Mexican War was the ominous threat of imperialism. "Of all the dangers and misfortunes which could befall this nation," Clay exclaimed, "I should regard that of its becoming a warlike and conquering power the most direful and fatal." The most cherished trait of men and nations alike, he said, is that of an "unsullied character." 78

After his remarks on the causes and the consequent dangers of the Mexican War, Clay presented two especially significant resolutions. The first included a demand that the United States renounce any desire whatsoever to dismember Mexico or to acquire otherwise any territory belonging to that nation. The second stated that particularly and "emphatically," we must disclaim any temptation to gain any territory whatsoever "for the purpose of propagating slavery,


78 Ibid., pp. 64-67.
of introducing slaves from the United States, into such territory." The slavery question, Clay said, was so critical that "moderation, prudence, and discretion, among ourselves, and the blessings of Providence, may all be necessary to accomplish our ultimate deliverance from it." 79

In coming out for "no territory," Clay therefore was advocating precisely the position Webster was taking. Evading, in a sense, the Wilmot Proviso, but nevertheless trying to stop reckless expansionism and a disastrous eruption of the slavery issue, Clay believed that the only solution to the great question posed by the war was to declare resolutely and absolutely that Mexico would not be dismembered and her territories assumed by the United States. By 1847, therefore, Webster and Clay stood on identical ground:

79 Ibid., pp. 65, 67-69; being a slaveholder who was opposed to the "peculiar" institution put Clay, as it had Jefferson and so many others, in an untenable position. Acutely aware of the grave problem, he wrote, "I regret as much as any one does the existence of slavery in our country, and wish to God there was not a single slave in the United States, or in the whole world. But here the unfortunate situation is, and a most delicate and difficult affair it is to deal with." Clay to Joshua Giddings, [n. d.], quoted in William Ernest Smith, The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics, 3 vols. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933), 1:220; during the great debates over whether slavery should be allowed in any new territories acquired from Mexico which dominated congressional debate during 1847 and 1848, even the old Jacksonian, Francis P. Blair, said that he wished his traditional enemy, Clay, were in the Senate to parry the proslavery arguments of Calhoun. "I think he would do it," mused Blair, "because he always leaned toward emancipation and against Calhoun." Quoted in ibid.
the promotion of national harmony and consensus, which ultimately came to be synonymous with preservation of the Union itself.

Clay's speech was only moderately successful. Like Webster, he was caught in the vise-like grip of rising sectionalism. By his advocacy of "no territory," he lost southern backing. Because he personally owned slaves, his northern support waned. Nevertheless, by the close of 1847, Henry Clay still had significant political strength throughout the country, and he remained a formidable candidate for the presidency. 80

Despite the doubts and warnings of some of his political friends in the spring of 1848, Clay still believed he could gain his party's nomination; on April 10, he formally announced his candidacy. Making an unprecedented, direct appeal to the people, Clay proclaimed that "I am more available than any candidate that could be presented to the American people." While possibly a majority of Whig voters agreed with Clay, the party professionals, especially in the South, did not. While he campaigned, they consolidated their support for the one candidate who possessed unchallengeable availability, Zachary Taylor. 81


81 Clay to H. F. Duncan, 15 February 1848, Clay, Works
By the spring of 1848, "Old Rough and Ready," the humble soldier who did not "give a fig" about the presidency, suddenly developed a political hunger for that office. Writing to Clay, Taylor claimed that while he had formerly supported the Kentuckian because he thought him to be both the best qualified as well as the most available Whig candidate, now he felt that he was equally available and therefore would not step aside for Clay. Also, Taylor, the man who had never cast a ballot, revealed that he had always been partial to the Whig party and would have voted, had he exercised that prerogative, for Clay in 1844. In April, 1848, now apparently a self-confirmed, but belated, Whig, Taylor published the so-called Allison Letter, in which he hesitantly stated his political views for the first time.

The first Allison letter was the result of political intrigue on the part of Taylor's advisors; the letter was a desperate attempt to head off any groundswell of Clay's preconvention support and sway

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82 Taylor to Clay, 30 April 1848, Clay, Works of Clay, ed. Colton, 5:557-60; National Intelligencer, 5 October 1847; Taylor to R. C. Wood, 5 August, 14 September 1847, Taylor, Letters from the Battlefields, pp. 120, 130.
uncommitted Whig voters toward the general's candidacy. The letter itself, which contained a mild avowal of Whig doctrine, was not written by Taylor personally. Rather, Taylor simply copied a previously-prepared document written by other men, affixed his signature, and had it published. 83

In the letter, Taylor formally announced his candidacy and stated that he was "a Whig, but not an ultra Whig." As far as the great Whig programs regarding protective tariffs, internal improvements, and the Bank, Taylor said that he would follow in the leadership of the Congress, and its will should prevail. In addition, he advocated that the veto power of the president be severely restricted. Stating that American honor had been vindicated by military triumphs, Taylor urged the termination of the Mexican War, with no territorial acquisitions by the United States. By thus having given a demonstration of his alleged Whig orthodoxy, however lukewarm and weak it was, Taylor could claim that he therefore deserved the "support of all good Whigs."84

83 Hamilton, in Zachary Taylor: Soldier in the White House, maintains that the letter was the work of three mysterious, obscure men named "Hunton," "Love," and "Peyton"; see pp. 76-79.

84 The Allison letter is reproduced in its entirety in ibid., pp. 79-81.
By June, 1848, and the opening of the Whig convention in Philadelphia, the availability of Taylor and Clay's corresponding lack of that magical political quality definitely was on the minds of party members. Abraham Lincoln, while noting that Clay was infinitely more qualified, observed that "Our only chance is with Taylor."

John J. Crittenden, heretofore one of Clay's most trusted personal and political friends, wrote that "I prefer Mr. Clay to all men for the Presidency . . . but my conviction is, that he cannot be elected."

Realizing the extent of Taylor's availability, Thurlow Weed decided to support his candidacy, although he "would have cheerfully supported either [Webster or Clay]. . ." if they had any real chance of winning the nomination and, later, the presidency. As Henry Hilliard, one of the "Young Indians," noted, "I have stood by Mr. Clay with unshaken fidelity . . . [but] we are practical men" and "Clay must give way [in order] that the cause may triumph."

While he preferred Clay to any other man, Mississippi Senator Seargent S. Prentiss exclaimed that "We all must yield mere personal preferences [for] the greater good of the country." The influential Mississippian deemed it to be so important that the Whig cause triumph that he "was willing to go for almost any man who will bring around that result."85

85Lincoln to Jesse Lynch, 10 April 1848, Abraham Lincoln, Collected Works of Lincoln, ed Basley, 1:643; Crittenden to Burnley,
Because of the concern about Clay's availability, coupled with Taylor's obvious support among party leaders, his nomination became increasingly assured. When the Whig convention assembled on June 7, 1848, the general was easily nominated on the fourth ballot. Of the required 140 votes needed to win, Taylor received 171 to Clay's 32; the remaining few votes were scattered between Webster and Winfield Scott. As a sop to the disgruntled northern antislavery Clay men, former Antimason Millard Fillmore, of New York, was nominated as the vice-presidential candidate. Significantly, no platform of principles was adopted. 86

Once again, as in 1840, the Whig party bypassed men of principles, moderation, and intelligence. Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, both a combined total of eighty years of national service, were again rejected by their party in favor of a military hero who had absolutely no public experience whatsoever and who qualified for the


appellation of "Whig" only in the most limited sense, if indeed at all. As even the Democrats admitted, the professional Whig politicians

... [played] a skillful game in seizing upon General Taylor. ... Full well do they know that such is the military enthusiasm of the American people that they can be led to the support of a successful general without inquiring into his political principles, or his qualifications. ... But what are we to expect from the masses? 87

While the Whig party was being strained and shaken by increasing sectional tensions, personal rivalries, and philosophical differences, the Democrats were faring little better. Meeting in Baltimore on May 27, 1848, the scars of the years of internecine party warfare were plainly visible. Ex-president Martin Van Buren wrote that "I am only sorry for my country to see personal feelings so rampant. ..." Representing the old radical Jacksonians in New York, now known as the Barnburners, Van Buren hoped that Thomas Hart Benton, senator from Missouri, would succeed Polk, who was pledged not to seek reelection. The Polk men and the Calhoun faction, however, representing the pro-slavery element, would not consider Benton, preferring instead a candidate more acceptable to the party's southern wing; they especially preferred James

87William R. King to James Buchanan, 11 June 1847, as quoted in Rayback, Free Soil, p. 42.
Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, an avowed anti-Wilmot Proviso man. Buchanan, however, was plagued by his ample abundance of party enemies. While the New York delegation was seriously split, most of the other state organizations were similar divided between conservative and radical, as well as sectional, factions.88

There was one man whom all but the extreme anti-slavery Democrats could support: Lewis Cass. From Michigan, Cass had an enviable past public record. He had fought as a general in the War of 1812, served as governor of Michigan territory for eighteen years, was minister to France, and spent six years as secretary of war in Andrew Jackson's cabinet. A moderate in politics, he was a strong nationalist; most important to the majority of the Democrats, he was staunchly opposed to the Wilmot Proviso. Cass had received considerable attention throughout the nation and within his party for his advocacy of "popular sovereignty." This concept, an alternative to both the Wilmot Proviso of the anti-slavery Democrats and the "no territory" stance of most northern and many southern Whigs, would allow the actual settlers of territories acquired from Mexico to determine for themselves whether or not slavery would be allowed. Under his plan, the federal government would make no law regarding

88 Van Buren to Francis P. Blair, 3 March 1847, Van Buren Papers; Van Buren to Blair, 6 November 1847, ibid.; Van Deusen, *Jacksonian Era*, pp. 246-49.
the status of slavery in the new territories. Cass was opposed to the Wilmot Proviso because he correctly saw it as an emotionally divisive concept which would only produce violent sectional discord. Actually, he privately believed that the settlers of the new territories would use the popular sovereignty doctrine to prohibit slavery.

While Cass was an avowed expansionist, like Clay, Webster, and Lincoln, he considered the necessity of preserving the Union to be his paramount objective; the limiting or the extention of slavery was secondary. As one historian has noted, "It would have been difficult for the Democrats to find a stronger man for the first place on their ticket." Although the angry New York Barnburners departed the convention in protest, a majority of Democrats apparently agreed; Cass was nominated on the fourth ballot, as was another general, William D. Butler, of Kentucky, who was selected to be the vice-presidential candidate. Chiding the Democrats for their selection of not one but two military men, Abraham Lincoln exclaimed, "Like a hungry horde of ticks, you have stuck to the tail of the Hermitage lion to the end of his life, and you are still sticking to it." Of course,

Lincoln himself was a staunch supporter of his party's own military candidate. 90

While parading the usual Democratic beliefs in the sub-treasury, low tariffs, no federally-financed internal improvements, and congratulating themselves on the American victory in the war against Mexico, the party platform completely evaded the burning issue of the day: slavery in the territories. Thus, the Democrats faced the same dilemma as did the Whigs. To take a firm stand on the extension of slavery would lose either party vitally-needed support in the North; to take an opposite stand would mean the loss of equally-critical support in the South. Consequently, for both parties, evasion was the only practical solution. 91

A third party evolved late in the summer of 1848, after the two major parties had so adroitly avoided the great issue. The Free Soil party, while containing many diverse elements, was composed largely of ex-Liberty men, "free soil" or pro-Wilmot Proviso Democrats, and New York Barnburners. They assumed the position


taken by such men as Benjamin F. Butler, a former Barnburner, who exclaimed, "I consider the prohibition of slavery in the territories now free, the greatest question of the day." 92

Meeting in Buffalo, New York, on August 9, the Free Soilers named ex-president Martin Van Buren, the choice of the dominant Barnburner and Conscience Whig factions, as their presidential candidate. Their platform specifically called for an absolute halt to the expansion of slavery: no future slave states or slave territories. No further compromises on the slavery question were to be tolerated. In addition, there were other planks; most importantly, the party advocated that free land should be given to settlers in the new territories. With an eye directed toward the wooing of as many votes as possible, the party adopted a persuasive slogan: "Free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men." With the nomination of Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts as its vice-presidential candidate, the party adjourned and prepared to wage its great battle. 93


93 Smith, Liberty and Free Soil Parties, pp. 139-42.
The summer and fall following the Whig convention were difficult months for Daniel Webster. Although he thoroughly disapproved of Taylor, Webster gamely attempted to maintain a sense of loyalty to the party that had again refused him their nomination, turning again to a lesser man. While he could not actively campaign for a man like Taylor, he stated his determination "to say nothing, except in favor of the general Whig cause" because he believed himself obligated to support the old, traditional "Whig principles." Saying that he was completely disgusted with northern politicians, Whigs and all, Webster campaigned only for token purposes after the Whig convention.94

Henry Clay was more bitter. To him, the Whig party had humiliated and completely degraded itself at the convention. "I feel the Whig party is dissolved; and that there are no longer Whig principles to excite zeal and to stimulate exertion." Consequently, Clay refused to participate or campaign at all in Taylor's behalf.95

94 Webster to Fletcher Webster, 16, 19 June 1848, Webster, Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster, 16:495-97; Webster to Hiram Ketchum, 21 July 1848, ibid., 18:283.

Zachary Taylor won the election of 1848 without the assistance of either Clay or Webster. He received over 1,360,000 popular votes to 1,200,000 for Cass. Van Buren received less than 300,000 votes. The Whigs' total popular percentage was 47 per cent, while the Democrats received only 42 per cent of the votes cast. Taylor received 163 electoral votes to 122 for Cass; Van Buren received none. According to Joseph Rayback, the two major reasons for Taylor's victory were party loyalty and the ability to successfully woo "undetermined" voters; the general proved to be adept in retaining traditional Whig voters, while attracting many otherwise nonpartisan supporters. 96

The great Whig victory, at the same time, was not really a party triumph whereby the voters gave a mandate for the old Whig principles; rather, as Horace Greeley pointed out, it was "the triumph of General Taylor." If the Whigs nominate Taylor, the New York editor prophesied, "we elect him, but we destroy the Whig party." Hermann E. von Holst later wrote that "it would be difficult to push further, or to carry out more systematically, the abandonment of all principles . . . than did the Whigs in this

campaign." 97

The election of 1848 left both the two major parties and the nation increasingly divided by sectional stress. Older issues, such as the tariff and the bank, had paled as the burning new question of slavery in the territories waxed dangerously. Whether or not the new administration of Zachary Taylor could deal successfully with such a critical problem became a paramount consideration. While common citizens probably believed it could, the great leaders, Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, were not convinced. Even before he was inaugurated, Taylor faced a great crisis over the territorial slavery question. With the Whig party and the nation itself seriously weakened by sectional animosities, once again Clay and Webster came forth and stood up for the Union in the Compromise of 1850, their nationalism never stronger and their love of country never more apparent. With their eloquent appeals to men's intellect and sense of reason, the crisis was finally weathered safely. For a period of less than three years, the nation was again under the watchful guidance of Clay and Webster, together again in the senate. By the fall

of 1852, however, Henry Clay was dead, and Daniel Webster lay
dying. Once again, they had been passed over by their party for the
presidential nomination; once again, political expediency demanded
an "available" military hero. With the demise of these life-long
protectors of the Union, death too came quickly for the Whig party
and shortly thereafter for the peace and harmony of the nation they
had served so long and well.
Henry Clay and Daniel Webster grew up and spent the formative years of their political careers in a world of deferential politics. The political arena in which they matured had been traditionally dominated and led by the great leaders of the various regions and sections of the country. Whether they were southern planters, northern manufacturers, or Yankee businessmen, they had one common feature: they were the natural leaders who served the public and, in turn, fully expected the people to defer to their guidance. Being drawn largely from the ranks of the more articulate, these men believed themselves to be the most qualified to direct the affairs of the nation. While their policies ordinarily benefited their own political and economic interests, they were committed to the provision of effective, wise leadership, which would bring the good life to the masses of ordinary men.

To Webster and Clay but also to other leading men of their era, the Union was the bulwark of both American civilization and republican government. More than just a term that denoted a
collection of people or states, the Union was a mystical concept. The people of the United States had formed the Union even before the evolution of the Constitution in 1789. After the founding fathers had passed away, their ideals of liberty and republicanism were transmitted to the following generations by a process of cultural and historical continuity. The Union, to Webster and Clay, was the cement by which all the people, from the revolutionary era to the infinite future, were bound. This bond should not be broken, argued Webster and Clay; if it were, the essence of American nationality would be irrevocably destroyed.

The Constitution was also shrouded with an aura of mysticism. More than a mere document of political structure and organization, it was the bedrock of the Union. Written by wise, enlightened men, it was to be always revered and protected from any person or force that would harm or otherwise besmudge its original purity and pristine nature.

Webster and Clay firmly believed that the Union could be preserved only if the balance of governmental power as originally written into the Constitution were faithfully observed; any attempt to upset this balance would necessarily have grave consequences for the organic body of people of whom the Union was composed. Executive power and tyranny were virtually synonymous to Webster, Clay, and
the Whig party. While executive leadership per se was not evil, the lessons of the past were clear: an unrestrained use of executive power meant the destruction of individual liberties and republican government. The legislative prerogative must be maintained, and the people's representatives must always be allowed to express and enact the will of the nation. Congress should provide that leadership necessary both to the daily functions of government as well as to insure the best interests of the people.

Webster and Clay consistently argued that the best of those values, institutions, and ideals which had proved to be both wise and successful in the past must be preserved. Social stability, political harmony, and economic prosperity could best be insured by an unflinching devotion to the heritage provided by the founding fathers. Having endured the test of time, this inheritance must always be preserved, maintained, and protected.

Nationalism to Webster and Clay was the essence of the ideals inherent in the Constitution and the Union. Happiness for the people could be best insured and guaranteed only through a constant and diligent promotion of both the spirit and substance of nationalism. As economic determinists, they believed that political liberty and economic prosperity could best be obtained through the actions of a wise, parental government, which would actively promote economic
stability and expansion of opportunity. Through such governmental policies, the people, regardless of class or geographical section of the country, would enjoy political harmony and economic prosperity.

By the late 1820's, Webster and Clay had matured politically. With clearly-defined political, social, economic, and philosophical principles, they constantly and consistently argued their case before the people on a basis of reason and intellect. Using logic and rationality, they tried to convince their listeners that their Whiggish policies and philosophies represented that which was desirable, if not essential, for the country's best interests. To Webster and Clay, men of thought and reason had established the Union and written the Constitution. Just as they had dealt with the people, the times, and the problems on a basis of logic and reason, they believed that the politicians of the Jacksonian era should do likewise. Crises and difficult times were inevitable; the best way to meet these challenges was through intelligent, thoughtful consideration. Only by doing so could the proper courses be taken and the correct decisions be made.

Opportunities and problems alike developed during Clay's and Webster's careers in politics, and they usually tried to deal with them on a basis of reason and logic. Beginning in 1824, Clay constantly promoted his American System, which he believed would insure political and economic harmony and prosperity for the entire
nation; for thirty years, he consistently, forcefully, and intelligently argued its merits before Congress and the people. As crises developed, he attempted to deal with them on the same basis. In 1820, 1833, and again in 1850, he came forth with stirring appeals for compromise and moderation at times when opposing forces seemed bent on collision and destruction of the Union. Throughout the Jacksonian era, he battled with the proponents of executive power; appealing to the people's sense of history, he clearly pointed out the inherent dangers of executive supremacy to the integrity of the Constitution and the people's best interests. As the forces of expansionism and the extension of slavery grew stronger in the 1840's, Clay provided sound, logical reasons why such expansionism would be fatal to the Constitution and to the Union.

Webster, too, tried to appeal to his listeners' faculties of reason and intellect. In his great debate with Hayne and later during the nullification crisis, he clearly described the blessings of the Constitution and the Union and the dangers involved if their integrity and strength were to be compromised. During his battles with the Jacksonians and other supporters of executive power, he forcefully demonstrated the inherent dangers of such philosophies to the peoples' liberties. Throughout his career during the Jacksonian era, Webster tried to reason with the people. A social compact was at stake, he
argued; just as the people supported the Constitution and the Union, the national government was entrusted with the responsibility of providing wise leadership and good laws that would insure political harmony and the economic prosperity of its citizens. When the possibility of war arose in the 1830's and again in the 1840's, and as the acquisition of foreign territory and the expansion of slavery became burning issues, Webster urged that the people improve the moral and philosophical foundations of the nation. Instead of wars for national glory and the acquisition of new territories, which would carry the seeds of destruction of both the Constitution and the Union, he pleaded with the people to improve the nation which they had inherited from their fathers and were going to transmit to succeeding generations.

Webster and Clay served the nation for over forty years; each man desperately wanted to be president, yet neither was ever chosen. They were great men, but they were never elected to the nation's highest office. They consistently appealed to the people's higher faculties of reason and intellect; perhaps that is why they failed to achieve the presidency.

The United States underwent a profound transformation during their lifetimes. When they first came to Washington, the politics of deference, while waning, was still an important aspect of the American political milieu. By the time Webster and Clay reached
political maturity, the politics of deference had begun to give way to the politics of availability. Where leaders were once chosen on the basis of talent, ability, and appealed to the people's intellect and sense of reason, the new style politicians, especially the Democrats at first and later the professional Whig party leaders too, employed an emotional, divisive, and class-conscious rhetoric, which was designed only to gain the votes of the masses. In the age of the common man, Webster and Clay received his respect, but not his vote.

Perhaps it is ironic that after having served the nation for so many years, seeking the presidency constantly and being denied that office just as regularly, Webster and Clay were instrumental in the creation of the Compromise of 1850. After the nation had rejected their desire for the White House for decades, Webster and Clay seemed to be among the few statesmen who could cool violent tempers and persuade men from both the North and South to follow a wise course based on conciliation and compromise. Such, however, was not to be unexpected. They were as consistent in 1850 as they had been in 1830. The Constitution and the Union could be preserved only by thinking, intelligent men of good will. Just as for years Webster and Clay had appealed to men's reason, so did they in 1850. Their triumph was the brief preservation and continuation of the Constitution and the Union; after their deaths, the voice of reason diminished, and the forces of emotionalism emerged triumphant.
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