

The Rest of the Story:

John Quincy Adams' Doomed Presidency and the Election of 1828

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The chronicle of American history that we pass on to future generations marks the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 before moving on to the triumphs of Jacksonian democracy. Though the 'Era of Good Feelings' and the elections of 1824 and 1828 are often mentioned in passing, the period between the War of 1812 and Andrew Jackson's presidency is a critical time in the nation's history that sets the stage for much of what is to come; John Quincy Adams' presidency provides a useful lens by which to consider this time period. In the aftermath of the war, a sense of national unity helped legitimize the passage of internal improvements legislation (viz. canals, roads, and other infrastructure) through Congress, yet the Panic of 1819 among other events brought about partisan infighting in Congress on sectional and ideological lines while putting an end to hopes that the aforementioned national unity might be sustained. The crisis, which hit hardest in the South and West, helped cement in many people a lack of faith in the national government and more specifically the Second Bank of the United States. Amidst this crisis, Missouri's application for statehood further cultivated sectional tensions, and the debate, which led to the Missouri Compromise, foreshadowed later controversies over slavery in Congress.

As these and other clashes among National Republicans persisted at the Capitol, members of President James Monroe's Cabinet jockeyed for position in view of the upcoming 1824 presidential election. Divided electoral and popular votes in this election among the four candidates thrust the race into the House of Representatives, where Speaker of the House Henry Clay threw his support to John Quincy Adams. When Quincy Adams in turn named Clay his choice for Secretary of State, a seemingly powerful alliance had been formed, but immediately thereafter, Andrew Jackson, who had won a plurality of the electoral and popular votes, cried foul, prompting his supporters to begin building a coalition that would be able to stand in

opposition to the new President. A host of administrative and political miscalculations leading up to Inauguration Day alongside an ambitious policy agenda proposed by a minority President made Quincy Adams' presidency doomed as it began. Jackson's supporters, who had control of the Senate, successfully stymied Quincy Adams' programs and brought their case to the people, essentially jumpstarting the General's presidential bid for the 1828 election. In the face of a repeated inability by Quincy Adams' administration to get a cohesive agenda through Congress, the general public, which had made itself heard for one of the first times in American history ten years earlier in response to the infamous Compensation Act of 1816, reasserted itself in the midterm elections by giving Jacksonian Democrats (as they came to be called) control of both houses in Congress. Such a repudiation of the administration's efforts was a prelude to John Quincy Adams' resounding defeat by Andrew Jackson in 1828 and a nail in the coffin of a failed presidency.

Section 1: The Historical Context

In his chapter "Banking and Politics in Jackson's Tennessee," Charles Grier Sellers, Jr. points to a transition that occurs in the 1820's in the United States from politics of personality to politics of parties and issues.¹ Though he discusses the topic within the context of Tennessee politics, the themes he draws upon apply to the national context as well. The leaders of the Revolution who facilitated the transition from the wartime government (i.e. the Second Continental Congress) to the government under the Articles of Confederation and finally the government under the Constitution of 1789 were a colorful group of individuals with distinct

¹ Charles Grier Sellers, Jr. "Banking and Politics in Jackson's Tennessee, 1817-1827," Edited by Joel H. Silbey. National Development and Sectional Crisis. 1815-1860. New York: Random House, 1970.

visions for the new nation. Early on, they took sides to advance their principles via the Federalist and Anti-Federalist factions; the Anti-Federalists eventually became known as Republicans. At any rate, early controversies between the two groups became debates on precedent and protocol that would shape the workings of the American government for all posterity. Even so, John Adams' defeat in 1800 marked the beginning of the end of the Federalists, as Thomas Jefferson was able to expand the Republican Party in a number of ways. The end result of this development was twenty-four years of Virginia Republicans in the White House and the death knell of the Federalists. Yet as the country grew and expanded westward, the coalition that Jefferson created had become a cumbersome coalition of men divided by ideology, sectional issues, and vision for the future of the country.

The years following the War of 1812 represented a period of transition in American history. As a new generation of political leaders came to the forefront in the stead of their revolutionary predecessors, the political landscape was being transformed. On one hand, the continued migration westward into the Northwest Territory and beyond prompted a shift in power from the original thirteen colonies to the newly created states, which brought distinct sets of priorities to Congress. In another capacity, Congress' passage of the Compensation Act of 1816, bipartisan legislation seeking to raise members' salaries from a *per diem* salary of six dollars to an annual salary of \$1,500,² touched off a massive outcry over what the public viewed as unnecessary pay raises. With the bill's passage, Federalist and Republican newspapers immediately went on the offensive, each blaming the other for the bill's approval and inciting the

² C. Edward Skeen, "*Vox Populi, Vox Dei: The Compensation Act of 1816 and the Rise of Popular Politics*," *Journal of the Early Republic* 6 (Autumn, 1986): 256, 258.

general public along the way.”³ The fact that the outrage occurred during a brief period of national unity in the aftermath of the war is paramount, since as C. Edward Skeen notes,

Other ostensibly controversial and more important measures passed by the same Congress, such as the Second Bank of the United States and the protective tariff, he [i.e. Joseph Gales, editor of the National Intelligencer from 1807 to 1833]⁴ observed, “pass almost without remark of approval or disapproval---the presidential election itself,” he continued, “even calls forth few pens.”⁵

Indeed, the fracas surrounding the Compensation Act of 1816 was an anomaly and an historic one at that. The average turnover for members of Congress in this era hovered around fifty percent, yet seventy percent of Congressmen in the congressional election of 1816 either retired or were refused reelection.⁶ Even the indomitable Henry Clay was affected by the trend, as it was the only time in the Congressman’s illustrious career in the House of Representatives that his constituents were divided over whether or not he should be re-elected. Skirting the national trend, Clay defeated his challenger, John Pope, by about six hundred votes.⁷ Skeen and other colleagues of his point to this event as the first step towards greater accountability by members of Congress to their constituents.⁸

While the controversy surrounding the Compensation Act of 1816 brought changes in the relationship between congressmen and their constituents, the Panic of 1819 came with a different sort of change to the national political landscape of the time. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, a period of national unity enveloped the country after the War of 1812 due to the

³ Skeen, 259.

⁴ North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, “Gales Family,” <http://www.ncmarkers.com/Markers.aspx?sp=search&k=Markers&sv=H-99> (accessed October 30, 2007).

⁵ Skeen, 263.

⁶ Skeen, 266.

⁷ Remini, (1991), 147.

⁸ Skeen, 273.

widespread perception of a booming postwar American economy, but this sentiment was brought to an end because of an economic crisis.⁹ In his book *The Era of Good Feelings*, George Dangerfield utilizes a chapter to spell out the shift in the national mood from sentiments of nationalism to much stronger feelings of sectionalism. The specific logistics of the Panic are explained by Dangerfield:

For the whole postwar American economy had been based upon a land boom....Aided by a government policy that encouraged the purchase of the public domain on credit, and by the swelling vigor of the westward movement an immense land speculation began. It was financed by one of the most extraordinary emissions of dubious paper money in the history of the modern world. From 1815 to 1818 the bubble grew and grew; beautiful, iridescent, fraudulent, opaque. For nearly three years it resisted the pressure of a general decline in world prices,....But in the middle of 1818 it began to visibly tremble; and with the collapse of cotton it broke.¹⁰

Such was the impact on a macroeconomic level. On a microeconomic level, the Panic of 1819 devastated local economies across the South and West, creating fierce animosities toward banking interests and most notably, the Second Bank of the United States. Yet these tensions would only become fully manifest a decade later when Andrew Jackson was sworn in as President and commenced his famous battle with the National Bank.

In the meantime, mistrust among the sections simmered on the national stage because of the controversy over Missouri's admission to the Union via the Missouri Enabling Bill, which granted Missouri the right to establish a state government prior to its admission to the Union.¹¹ The whole fracas began when New York Congressman James Tallmadge, Jr. put forward an amendment to this bill that would prohibit slavery in Missouri. As a couple of anti-slavery

⁹ George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, (1952).

¹⁰ Dangerfield, 179.

¹¹ James G. Blaine, "The Missouri Compromise (1820)," <http://www.historycentral.com/documents/Miscompromise.html>.

Northerners decried the utter baseness of slavery, a chorus of Southern congressmen rose to its defense, thus, beginning a moral debate over slavery that would have a profound impact on American history for many years to come.¹² In the short term though, cooler heads prevailed, and Speaker Clay facilitated a compromise by which Maine would be admitted as a free state, Missouri would be admitted as a slave state, and slavery would from thereon be permitted in territories south of the 36° 30' line.¹³ Regardless, the following year another crisis over Missouri's statehood came to light when the Missouri state constitution was submitted for congressional approval; an uproar ensued because the constitution prohibited free blacks from settling within its borders.¹⁴ Clay stepped in once more and worked out a compromise, which dictated that a 'fundamental condition' of Missouri's admission to the Union was that the members of the state legislature publicly declare their intention not to use this portion of the state constitution to pass any laws in violation of the United States Constitution.¹⁵ Accordingly, sectional tensions had been sequestered for the moment.

As various party leaders tried to fulfill their respective visions for the future of the country, the differences between them were borne out in congressional floor debates over the role of the federal government, slavery, and economic policy among other issues. President James Monroe's Cabinet was also a testament to these divisions since his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts; his Secretary of the Treasury, William Crawford of Georgia; and his Secretary of War, John Calhoun of South Carolina, all had presidential aspirations and continued to grapple against each other for influence as President Monroe's

¹² Dangerfield, 200.

¹³ Dangerfield, 228.

¹⁴ Dangerfield, 232.

¹⁵ Dangerfield, 242.

second term came to a close.¹⁶ They were joined in their bid for the presidency by Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky. Each represented a particular faction of Republicans that had distinct ideas about the direction in which the country should head. Speaker Clay was an avid nationalist who championed the American System, a legislative program that sought to strengthen the United States through such policies as a protective tariff, a national bank, and federal support of internal improvements projects.¹⁷ Quincy Adams and Calhoun were also nationalists whose ideologies varied in accordance with their sectional ties, while Crawford was a 'Radical Republican' of Jeffersonian ilk who feared the trappings of a sizeable federal government.¹⁸ Crawford had considered making a challenge to then-Secretary of State Monroe in 1816 but deferred, in hopes that Monroe would choose him as his successor in 1824.

When the time came though, President Monroe refused to endorse a candidate.¹⁹ Ironically enough, in September 1823, Crawford's candidacy was weakened by a debilitating stroke,²⁰ and Calhoun's presidential aspirations were extinguished a few months later when the Pennsylvania Republican convention chose General Jackson as its nominee for the Presidency instead of him although Calhoun was selected as Jackson's running mate.²¹ In the aftermath of that event, four other states followed suit.²² JQA's supporters, who had been banking on the possibility of General Jackson being their candidate's vice presidential nominee then used a series of state conventions to select Calhoun as their vice presidential nominee, too, creating

¹⁶ John Niven, "Chapter VI: Panic, Politics, and Personality," *John C. Calhoun and the Price of the Union: A Biography* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, (1988).

¹⁷ Daniel Walker Howe, "Henry Clay," *World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia* (2005).

¹⁸ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* New York: Knopf, (1956), 13-15.

¹⁹ Robert V. Remini, *John Quincy Adams* Read by Ira Claffey, North Kingston, RI: Audio Renaissance, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

²⁰ Bemis, (1956), 16.

²¹ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

²² Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom* New York: HarperCollins, (1981), 65.

what would be one of the strangest occurrences in the history of American presidential politics.²³ All of this would be terribly fitting given the events that were to come surrounding the election of 1824.

Amidst this politicking, Henry Clay selected Nathon Sanford of New York to be his running mate while William Crawford's running mate was Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina.²⁴ When the vote totals came in, the results were inconclusive with each man winning support according to his sectional ties without being able to claim victory. Jackson finished first with 99 electoral votes and a popular vote total of 151,363; Quincy Adams finished second with 84 electoral votes and a popular vote total of 113,142; Crawford finished third with 41 electoral votes and a popular vote total of 41,032; and Clay finished fourth with 37 electoral votes and a popular vote total of 47,545. The popular vote of six states was not tabulated since the electors from those states (viz. Vermont, New York, Delaware, Georgia, South Carolina, and Louisiana) had been selected by their respective state legislatures; within the next four years, only Delaware and South Carolina would retain this practice.²⁵

As a result of the totals, the election was sent to the House of Representatives to be contested among the top three candidates in accordance with the Twelfth Amendment.²⁶ The House vote was held on February 9, 1825, and in the meantime, surrogates of the candidates each stumped for their man while making pledges to influential members in the hopes of swinging the result in their favor. The contest was over after the first ballot with John Quincy Adams being elected President with the support of thirteen states' delegations, Andrew Jackson

²³ Bemis, (1956), 27-28.

²⁴ "1824 Presidential Election," *Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections*. www.uselectionatlas.org (Accessed September 15, 2007).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

placing second with the support of seven states' delegations, and William Crawford picking up the support of four states' delegations. In the Senate's election of the Vice President, John Calhoun won handily over the other candidates.²⁷ These events, coupled with key circumstances that were to come in the not-too-distant future, would eventually pit the forces of John Quincy Adams against those of Andrew Jackson in the weeks and months leading up to the presidential election of 1828.

Section 2: The Protagonists

Like any good story, the account of this era in American politics comes with a pair of riveting protagonists, John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. The winds of change were at work within the country as the previous section demonstrates, and both of these men are remembered as being at the head of the second party system's development although their supporters did the lion's share of the work. Regardless, each man's vision for the future of the country in tandem with his previous life experiences shaped the nature of the battle from which Jackson would emerge victorious. Born on the frontier between North and South Carolina in 1767, Andrew Jackson was orphaned at the age of fourteen as a result of the war but moved to Tennessee soon thereafter and established himself as a successful lawyer and landowner.²⁸ Even so, an economic panic that hit the region in 1797 left Jackson's finances in ruin while making him wary of uninhibited land speculation and feeling vindictive towards the First Bank of the United States.²⁹ Such loathing was part and parcel of Jackson's infamous temper and made him a passionate supporter of Jefferson's Republican Party. Selected for the United States Senate by

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ James C. Curtis. "Andrew Jackson," *World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia* (2005).

²⁹ Grier Sellers, 53.

the Tennessee legislature in 1797, he made a splash almost immediately when he and two other congressmen refused to support 'a glowing tribute' that had been crafted by Congress in response to President Washington's Farewell Address. Unimpressed by Washington's support of the Jay Treaty and his failure to adequately address Indian conflicts facing Western settlers, Jackson portrayed himself as a Jeffersonian partisan who was a strict constitutional constructionist and an advocate for a limited federal government.³⁰

After having served in state and national politics while also being elected to lead the Tennessee militia, Jackson was made a general in the United States army during the War of 1812.³¹ He won decisive battles against American Indian tribes in the Southeast yet became nationally famous when he commanded American forces at New Orleans to a stunning defeat of the British. Though the battle itself took place after the Treaty of Ghent (i.e. the treaty to end the War of 1812), the American victory at New Orleans solidified the legitimacy of the new republic in the eyes of the rest of the world and catapulted General Jackson to the national stage. Then in 1817, President Monroe enlisted Jackson's help in making a claim on Spanish Florida. The General's tactics were controversial and his temper legendary, but Jackson's strategy created a key bargaining chip for the United States in its negotiations with Spain.³² Once the Adams-Onis Treaty was signed and ratified by the Senate, President Monroe named Jackson governor of the territory, though the General despised the job and only lasted four months in this position.³³ In the coming months, he became a common topic of conversation as a candidate for President in 1824.

³⁰ Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* HarperCollins (2001), 36.

³¹ "Andrew Jackson," 2007 *Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia* Microsoft Corporation: 2007. <http://encarta.msn.com> (Accessed November 10, 2007).

³² Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

³³ Curtis, *World Book*.

There is no doubt that Jackson's friends played an instrumental role in building the General's credibility as a presidential candidate³⁴ since in early American politics, potential candidates refrained from seeking the office themselves lest they be seen as too ambitious. As a result, historians examining the time period differ more candidly with regard to the motives of General Jackson himself. For instance, Richard Hofstadter, author of *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It*, writes:

Democrat and aristocrat, failure and success, debtor and creditor, he had a varied and uneven history, which made it possible for him to see public questions from more than one perspective. He was a simple, emotional, and unreflective man with a strong sense of loyalty to his friends and political supporters; he swung to the democratic camp when the democratic camp swung to him.³⁵

Clearly, Hofstadter is skeptical of Jackson's rise to fame and his analysis provides an intriguing contrast to that of a colleague. Offering an alternative perspective, Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., provides a stirring rebuttal of Thomas P. Abernethy's claim that Jackson lacked a political philosophy.³⁶ Grier Sellers suggests that Abernethy did not acknowledge the dynamics of Tennessee politics, which impacted Jackson in an era shaped by a transition from politics of personality to that of parties and issues. More specifically, Grier Sellers notes that in the beginning of his political career, Jackson allied himself with the Overton faction of merchants and bankers in large part because his personal enemies were members of the rival Erwin faction. Despite this alliance with banking interests, Grier Sellers establishes Jackson's consistency in

³⁴ Richard Hofstadter, "Andrew Jackson and the Rise of Liberal Capitalism," In *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* New York: Random House, (1989), 69-70.

³⁵ Hofstadter, 71.

³⁶ Grier Sellers, 53-56.

being opposed to the national bank throughout his political career, a stance that would only become famous later in his life.³⁷

In another capacity, John Quincy Adams provides an intriguing contrast to his contemporary. Born in the same year as his rival, JQA found out early in life that his family name came with a great burden. Like Jackson, he was a child of the American Revolution, and from a very young age, John and Abigail Adams sought to impress upon their son the importance of public service and the need to carry on the family legacy.³⁸ He traveled abroad with his family when his father was a negotiator for the Americans at the Treaty of Paris and returned to Europe as an envoy to the Netherlands for President Washington and minister to Prussia for his father. After being recalled by President Adams in the wake of the Republican Party's victory in the presidential election of 1800, JQA won a seat in the Massachusetts Assembly in 1802. While JQA had reverence for the career path his father had chosen and was an able legislator, he despised partisan bickering and sometimes idealized himself as better suited to be a professor or an artist.³⁹ Nevertheless, he was drawn to public life and also sought to fulfill the expectations of the Adams' family legacy so JQA rationalized his situation by saying that he could be a statesman and not a politician tainted by partisanship.⁴⁰

The following year, he was chosen by the Massachusetts legislature to serve in the United States Senate; JQA's time there showed an independence that came to define his career as a public servant. Even so, Quincy Adams' political mantra failed to impress his Federalist colleagues in the Senate who were often up in arms about his unwillingness to tow the party

³⁷ Grier Sellers, 54-55

³⁸ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

³⁹ Paul C. Nagel, *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life* New York: Knopf, (1997), 134-135.

⁴⁰ Nagel, 132.

line.⁴¹ In fact, JQA often had a way of positioning himself politically such that he would make all sides upset with him. Nowhere was this more evident than in his actions surrounding the vote to establish the Louisiana Territory. Though he supported the Louisiana Purchase, he voted against the bill because he thought the Constitution should be amended to give the whole transaction legitimacy. Because of this stance, Federalists criticized him for supporting the Purchase, which they contended was unconstitutional, and Republicans blasted him for voting against the bill.⁴² Neither was the Federalist-controlled Massachusetts Assembly content with Senator Quincy Adams.⁴³ This entity of course was relevant because in American history prior to the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment in 1913, United States Senators were chosen by their respective state legislatures.

Such circumstances came to a head in 1807 alongside a naval dispute with the United Kingdom in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars. Regardless, President Jefferson remained adamant about retaining the United States' neutrality, but this did not stop the *HMS Leonard* from attacking the *USS Chesapeake* in July 1807 off Norfolk, Virginia. Many Republicans were furious and demanded retribution from the British whereas some Federalists (viz. prominent Federalist across the Northeast with the strong ties to New England shipping and industry, which relied heavily on trade with Great Britain) defended the British.⁴⁴ Being the nationalist that he was, JQA first attempted to organize a protest meeting of Federalists; his colleagues would hear nothing of it so he attended a Boston Republican protest meeting and was actively involved as a member of the meeting's resolution committee.⁴⁵ His Federalist colleagues were livid and quick

⁴¹ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁴² Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁴³ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁴⁴ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁴⁵ John Quincy Adams. *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from*

to label him a traitor. Even so, when legislation to impose an embargo on British goods came through the Senate, JQA stood his ground and voted with the Republicans in favor of the measure.⁴⁶ Once it became clear that he was no longer welcome in the Federalist camp, Quincy Adams switched parties. During the months that would follow, the embargo began to take its toll on the economy of New England, and JQA resigned his Senate seat in the face of widespread criticism back home so as to avoid the embarrassment of being refused another term in office.⁴⁷

JQA's retirement from politics offered him an opportunity to devote more time to a professorship at Harvard College, but this hiatus did not last long since in 1809, President Madison appointed him minister to Russia. After a time serving as a diplomat abroad in Russia, as a negotiator at the Treaty of Ghent meetings to end the War of 1812, and as minister to Great Britain, JQA returned to the United States to serve as Secretary of State under the new President, James Monroe. Many historians, not the least of which Samuel Flagg Bemis, have come to consider JQA one of the most effective Secretary of State in United States' history because he laid the groundwork for American expansion in the coming decades through skillful negotiation.⁴⁸ As Secretary of State, Quincy Adams acquired Florida from Spain, secured an American stake in the Oregon country, and established the country's northern border with Canada in tandem with an agreement on fishing rights and commerce.⁴⁹ An especially lasting achievement for JQA came through his encouragement of the President to give the Monroe

1795-1848. Edited by Charles Francis Adams. Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969.

⁴⁶ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁴⁷ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁴⁸ Bemis, Samuel Flagg, "John Quincy Adams," *The American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, v. 3-4 New York: Pageant Book Co., (1958).

⁴⁹ "John Quincy Adams," 2007 *Microsoft Encarta*, <http://encarta.msn.com> (Accessed December 11, 2007).

Doctrine, which asserted American relevance in the Western Hemisphere and still plays a critical role today in United States foreign policy.

Amidst his successes at home and abroad, much of JQA's experience reinforced for him that partisan politics were an exasperating endeavor, which should be avoided. In the aftermath of the *Leopard* incident, JQA wrote in his diary, "My sense of duty shall never yield to the pleasure of party."⁵⁰ This assertion would be a pivotal consideration within the context of his presidency. Through his essay "John Quincy Adams: Virtue and the Tragedy of the Statesman," historian Greg Russell seeks to dig deeper into JQA's persona via comparative study of earlier analyses done by Brooks Adams and Henry Adams on their grandfather. Brooks Adams chose to portray JQA as an idealistic philosopher⁵¹ while his cousin Henry Adams described JQA as a political man, actuated by ordinary political feelings.⁵² Russell's essay seeks to connect the two, using JQA's experiences to show that neither assessment is accurate if taken to an extreme. Instead, he builds a case for seeing Quincy Adams' personality as both tragic and optimistic. Such an assessment is a welcome change from the picture of a dour, disgruntled man that has all too often become the standard description of JQA in the chronicle of American history that we have come to know. Within the context of his argument, Russell quotes Reinhold Niebuhr:

A consistent pessimism in regard to man's rational capacity for justice leads to absolutistic political theories; for they prompt the conviction that only preponderant power can coerce the various vitalities of a community into a working harmony. But a too consistent optimism in regard to man's ability and inclination to grant justice to his fellows obscures the perils of chaos which perennially confront every society, including a free society.⁵³

⁵⁰ Robert V. Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

⁵¹ Greg Russell, "John Quincy Adams: Virtue and the Tragedy of the Statesman," *The New England Quarterly* 69, no.1 (March 1996), 56.

⁵² Russell, 57.

⁵³ Russell, 73-74.

Indeed, Niebuhr's 'perils of chaos' would come during JQA's presidential administration in the form of partisan politics, obscure his view toward a practical plan for his policies, and leave his failed administration as a mere footnote in the history books. Ever the resilient statesman, JQA would overcome these perils on the floor of the House of Representatives from 1830 to his death in 1848 as he fought for what he believed to be right.

The example of another contemporary shows that JQA did not necessarily have to betray his convictions while he was President in order to be an effective leader. The lessons that Quincy Adams could consider were by no means alien to the politics of his time and come to light through the example of a possible alter-ego in the person of Horatio Seymour. A United States Senator from Vermont (not to be confused with the 1868 Democratic presidential candidate who was in his teens during the 1820's), Seymour resembled his contemporary with regard to his view of politics as a whole. Describing the Senator's demeanor, Kenneth A. Degree writes:

A careful man, he shunned political conflict and was troubled by partisan squabbling. . . . Seymour's demeanor may explain his reluctance to jump into any of the vicious political squabbles of the era. Although nominally a Republican, he joined party politics only with great reluctance, refusing to be a rabid partisan. Therefore, his counsel was generally held in high regard on both sides of the aisle and he avoided making political enemies.⁵⁴

Seymour's example shows both that JQA's attitude toward politics was not anomalous and that such an attitude could fit within a changing political environment. Quincy Adams had shown his worth as an adept leader in a number of different contexts. Like it or not, he would need to call upon his leadership experience and adjust to the forces of partisanship at work within the country in order to remain relevant when reelection came around in four years.

⁵⁴ Kenneth A. Degree, "The Watershed Election: Cornelius Peter Van Ness, Horatio Seymour, and the United States Senate Campaign of 1826," 163.

Section 3: Uncertain Beginnings to JQA's Administration

In the days following the February 5th House election that had made him President, JQA was beset with two momentous tasks. On one hand, he would need to bring together the various factions of the Republican Party within his own administration since he lacked any sort of popular mandate. In another capacity, he would seek to present a legislative program of internal improvements that would aid the growth of the whole nation and make him a man of all the people. Though he was conscious of the need to accomplish both tasks, JQA failed to make the critical connection between the two. In other words, the President's strong aversion to partisanship blinded him to the necessity of using the various political assets available to him in the government to accomplish his legislative goals. Accordingly, the President's efforts to create balance within the administration coupled with other resources he had at his disposal (e.g. congressmen favorable to the aims of the administration) provided JQA with the apparatus to move some form of his legislative program through Congress, and a shrewd observer of the political environment of the time would note that John Quincy Adams would need to abide by a specific strategy in order to succeed as a minority president.

The President's men in the executive branch would also need to play a key role in supporting and guiding the President. This would be a particularly crucial element because the Panic of 1819 and the controversy over the Missouri Compromise had reignited sectional tensions within the country. The Cabinet, which would be composed of men from all three sections, could help keep JQA from advancing an overly ambitious policy agenda that might deepen the mistrust Southern and Western states had for a Northerner president, much less one who was perceived by many to have stolen the election. Accordingly, the administration would have to sell the American System to the American people by first building a coalition in

Congress of those who felt the federal government had some legitimate role in making appropriations for internal improvements and do this in such a way that would not alienate the South because of expansion of the federal government or high tariffs. As John Quincy Adams' father had discovered two decades earlier, this was something he could ill afford to do if he wished to be a viable candidate for reelection in 1828.

Quincy Adams had his father's characteristic independence but a complicated web of circumstances left him lacking in political aptitude. He was forever in the shadow of his family's legacy. Though he idealized the life of an artist, his parents envisioned for him a career path not unlike that of his father. At a young age, experiences in politics while abroad acquainted him with the addictive drug, which is public life. Quincy Adams returned to politics intermittently throughout his life, with the weight of the Adams name on his shoulders and convinced that he could handle the responsibility if only on his own terms. John Quincy's experience as a United States Senator at the dawn of the nineteenth century had disavowed him to the merits of partisan squabbling. Any political pursuits from then on would have to be as a statesman, a representative called to serve on behalf of his country who would stay above the party politics of the time.⁵⁵ Even so, this attitude toward governance blinded him to the circumstances of the time in which strong party factions would need to be acknowledged so as to ensure the success of his policy agenda. What this meant for his Presidency was that JQA held a distinct vision for the future of the country that was best expressed through Henry Clay's American system, yet because he failed to come to grips with the great force of partisanship that was taking hold of the nation, his presidency was doomed as it began.

⁵⁵ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 2.

The President's efforts in putting together a Cabinet in the wake of the controversial House vote that had made him chief executive needed to bring a sense of credibility to his administration. In this respect, he would attempt to incorporate members of the different opposing party factions as department heads. The President's first Cabinet selection was Speaker of the House Henry Clay of Kentucky. Though he was a logical choice for the position, balanced the administration geographically as a Westerner, and brought a plethora of useful experience to the table, to the casual observer, the situation reeked of political back scratching. The very thought of Clay giving his support to JQA in exchange for the position of Secretary of State (in those days, the stepping stone to the presidency) made for a good story and made Jackson and his supporters that much more convinced that a shady backroom deal had been cut between Clay and Adams.⁵⁶ Clay was a seasoned diplomat and had shown incredible prowess as a legislator most notably on the Missouri Compromise, but friends and enemies alike knew that the Speaker was ambitious to a fault.⁵⁷

No one was more angered by the circumstances than General Jackson, whose rage over the 'Corrupt Bargain' came to bear on Henry Clay at least in part because Clay wrote in a letter to Francis Brooke that he could not support a 'military chieftain' (viz. Andrew Jackson) for president.⁵⁸ The animosities between the two set off a vicious feud that would persist for the next two decades and only end with Jackson's death in 1845. Stirring up crowds with all the skill of a modern-day Washington outsider running for president, Jackson would tell his audiences, "There is no other corrective of these abuses...but the suffrages of the people." If the electorate "calmly and judiciously [apply] this corrective, they may preserve and perpetuate the liberty of our happy

⁵⁶ Remini, "Chapter Three: The Theft of the Presidency," (1981).

⁵⁷ Robert V. Remini, "Chapter Ten: The Party Disrupter," (1991).

⁵⁸ Remini, (1981), 104.

country. If they do not, in less than 25 years, we will become the slaves, not of a 'military chieftain,' but of such ambitious demagogues as Henry Clay."⁵⁹ For the duration of the Quincy Adams administration (and for the rest of his life), Clay sought with great vehemence to absolve himself of the charges against him, yet these efforts only succeeded in reminding people once more of the questionable circumstances surrounding the election of 1824.⁶⁰

No credible evidence exists to bolster the claims of Jackson's supporters that a 'Corrupt Bargain' had been made by the two men. In another capacity, evidence referenced by Mary Hargreaves in her book *The Presidency of John Quincy Adams* suggests that prior to the release of the election results, Clay had decided to support Quincy Adams in the event that he placed fourth in the electoral vote tally.⁶¹ That being said, a Clay-Adams alliance made sense because both men were Republicans who envisioned a distinct role for the federal government in supporting national programs like internal improvements legislation while the other two, Crawford and Jackson, were champions of a limited role for the federal government and states' rights. In this respect, it would make sense for JQA to choose in his top advisor someone who shared a similar ideological vision for the country and had such an impressive diplomatic and legislative resume. Moreover, it seemed that Quincy Adams wished to make overtures to the different factions by incorporating his three election opponents in his Cabinet with Crawford at Treasury and Jackson at War to complement his selection of Clay to be Secretary of State.⁶²

⁵⁹ Robert V. Remini, (1991), 269.

⁶⁰ Robert V. Remini, (1991), 269.

⁶¹ Mary W.M. Hargreaves, *The Presidency of John Quincy Adams* Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, (1985), 46.

⁶² Hargreaves, 48.

However, Crawford refused the appointment and Jackson was never offered the position since communications through a third-party indicated that Jackson would refuse if asked.⁶³ As a result, Quincy Adams selected a fellow proponent of the American System, Richard Rush of Pennsylvania (President Monroe's minister to England), for the post at Treasury after having been refused by Albert Gallatin, former Treasury Secretary under Presidents Jefferson and Madison who instead had desired the position of Secretary of State.⁶⁴ JQA then selected James Barbour of Virginia, a Crawford man and supporter of states' rights, for the War Department. Lastly, Quincy Adams retained three department heads from President Monroe's Cabinet: William Wirt of Virginia as Attorney General, Samuel Southard of New Jersey as Secretary of the Navy, and John McLean of Kentucky as Postmaster General.⁶⁵ While the position of Postmaster General was not a Cabinet-level office in 1825⁶⁶, McLean would play a decisive role in the administration, for better or worse.

On the outset, JQA's administrative team appeared to be a formidable one with three leading nationalists (i.e. President Quincy Adams, Vice President Calhoun, and Secretary Clay) at its head alongside a Cabinet that was both geographically and politically balanced. Regardless, Vice President Calhoun was far from pleased with the makeup of the Cabinet. He had submitted to JQA his recommendations for Cabinet posts in the midst of the decision-making process and felt duped when none of his men were selected to fill the main positions of influence in the State, Treasury, and War Departments.⁶⁷ Furthermore, his avowed enemy Henry Clay had been appointed Secretary of State. While Calhoun was unsure about the General's credibility and

⁶³ Hargreaves, 49.

⁶⁴ Bemis, (1956), 59.

⁶⁵ Hargreaves, 49.

⁶⁶ Hargreaves, 239.

⁶⁷ Calhoun, John. *The Papers of John C. Calhoun*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press for the South Carolina Society, (1959), lx.

would not formally move into the Jackson camp until the following summer, the Vice President had become especially receptive to the General's claims of a 'Corrupt Bargain' between Clay and Adams.⁶⁸ Since the President felt content that Vice President Calhoun would be satisfied by having Southard, Wirt, and McLean as allies in the Cabinet and did nothing more to reach out to Calhoun, for Quincy Adams feared that Calhoun's leanings toward Jackson would threaten his own power as President if he were to give the Vice President more influence in the administration.⁶⁹ Animositities aside, the two men had worked together for eight years on President Monroe's Cabinet, and both expressed respect for the other in private⁷⁰, yet their feelings of mutual distrust would win out. As a result, JQA would gradually lose the confidence of a potential ally that he could ill-afford to have join Jackson's ranks. After all, Calhoun was uneasy about the threat of a hidden Northern agenda that would interfere with Southern priorities like slavery, but he was a nationalist nonetheless and would only reluctantly join the opposition's crusade once his trust in the administration had faltered.⁷¹

In preparation for the President's first message to Congress to be sent on December 5, 1826, President Quincy Adams and his Cabinet met to discuss the President's proposed agenda. Simply put, JQA wanted to be a man of all the people, and the means to this end that he envisioned was an extensive program of internal improvements legislation and public works programs that would unite the country and provide the necessary physical and social infrastructure to propel the United States into the future.⁷² That being said, he failed to grasp the political realities that confronted him and this much was evident from Cabinet discussions about

⁶⁸ Niven, 109.

⁶⁹ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

⁷⁰ Niven, 109.

⁷¹ Niven, "Chapter VII: Vice-President."

⁷² Bemis, 60-62.

his message. Things began to unravel as soon as the Cabinet assembled to review a draft of the President's First Message to Congress in late November 1825. While a few of the department heads had yet to arrive in Washington, those who were present at the meeting were thunderstruck by the President's section on internal improvements. The bulk of the message received only minor revisions, but important members of Quincy Adams' Cabinet had significant reservations about his proposals for internal improvements and public works programs. Accordingly, JQA sought to establish that the federal government needed to use its limited powers to help perpetuate the country's rapid growth through such initiatives as a national university, a national observatory, and a sweeping program of internal improvements.⁷³

The suggestions may not seem so outlandish in today's context (or even thirty-five years later in the stead of the Morrill Land Grant Act and other such programs), but states' rights Republicans in the Cabinet like Secretary Barbour were especially flabbergasted at the amount of proposed growth of the federal government. In addition, Secretary Clay warned that such grand proposals would find little support in Congress.⁷⁴ While Secretary Rush stood behind the whole of JQA's message, Clay and Barbour were steadfast in their criticisms. Describing the situation, JQA wrote in his diary:

Governor Barbour expressed the wish that the whole of the concluding part, respecting internal improvements, should be suppressed....Mr. Clay was for recommending nothing, which from its unpopularity would be unlikely to succeed; Governor Barbour nothing so popular that it may be carried without recommendation.⁷⁵

Undoubtedly, Barbour and Clay provided sound political advice that would help some sort of internal improvements package get through Congress and ease fears of strict constructionists, but

⁷³ Bemis, (1956), 75-76.

⁷⁴ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

⁷⁵ John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs: v. VII*, 61.

JQA remained undeterred. A few days later, Attorney General William Wirt returned to Washington from travels about Virginia. Quincy Adams notes their encounter in his diary:

I read to him the concluding part respecting internal improvements, which he thought excessively bold. He said there was not a line in it that he did not approve; but it would give strong hold to the party in Virginia who represent me as grasping for power....He had found the Administration was gaining strength and friends there. But this subject was a source of great clamor. Patrick Henry's prophecy would be said to have come to pass: that we wanted a great, magnificent Government. It was a noble, spirited thing, but he dreaded its effects upon my popularity in Virginia.⁷⁶

Wirt's words would be a portent of things to come. The Attorney General's advice was particularly poignant because it suggested that the President was gaining credibility in the South but that such credibility could be lost if Virginians (and their fellow Southern brethren) in turn were given the impression that JQA sought to impose upon their way of life (viz. by threatening the institution of slavery) via increased power to the federal government and high tariffs. Yet once again, JQA failed to heed the advice of his chosen advisors for the first of many times and proceeded with the message that was in its initial form with the exception of a few minor changes.

Section 4: Errors in Judgment Become Manifest

The beginnings of President John Quincy Adams' administration were beset with a number of bad omens, but once the President tried his hand at governance, the situation quickly devolved far beyond the administration's control. The congressional elections of 1824 had given friends of the administration a majority in the House whereas the opposition held a majority in the Senate.⁷⁷ The day before JQA sent his first message to Congress, the House of

⁷⁶ John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs v. VII*, 64.

⁷⁷ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

Representatives elected New York Representative John W. Taylor, an ally of the President, to be Speaker of the House. William Brobson, a notable figure in Delaware politics, notes this during a visit to Washington at the beginning of the legislative session:

The election of a Speaker is a matter of great importance and produces no little excitement; more so now than formerly. The power vested in him of appointing all the committees, the power which appoints them may said to control the proceedings of the House....Mr. Taylor was considered the administration candidate, and his election is regarded as a proof of its strength in the representative body.⁷⁸

From Brobson's vantage point, Representative Taylor's election to the speakership would seem to be a victory for the administration, but what he failed to recognize was that since the Missouri controversy, many Southern legislators were much more wary of their Northern counterparts. Taylor's election would undoubtedly put Southern congressmen on their guard on a day when allies of the President had succeeded in electing an antislavery man.⁷⁹ That being said, Representative Taylor was no ordinary antislavery man but instead, the man who had seconded the Tallmadge Amendment and had given a caustic speech on the House floor a year later in opposition to slavery during continued debate on the Missouri Enabling Bill.⁸⁰ These considerations did not bode well for JQA's standing among congressmen from the South and were only exacerbated the next day when the President sent his infamous first message to Congress.

As predicted by members of his Cabinet, President Quincy Adams' first message to Congress, which was sent December 6, 1825, caused a great pandemonium in Congress.⁸¹ Strict constructionist Republicans railed against the great expansion of federal internal improvements

⁷⁸ William Brobson, "William P. Brobson Diary, 1825-1828." Edited by George Gibson. *Delaware History* 15, no. 2 (1972), 140.

⁷⁹ Bemis, (1956), 72.

⁸⁰ Dangerfield, 222.

⁸¹ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

programs JQA proposed, talking of Patrick Henry's warning about 'a great and magnificent Government' in much the same way that Barbour and Wirt had suggested would happen.⁸² In another capacity, Jackson and his supporters viewed the speech as further proof of election fraud and of just how much the President was out of touch with his fellow Americans. In addition, one particular part of the speech that had not been discussed much in Cabinet meetings, having to do with sending American delegates to attend a conference of newly independent Latin American nations caused as much concern among the factions opposing the administration, as did the section on internal improvements. The Napoleonic Wars had brought Spain under a brief period of French control, and in the process, the vast majority of Spanish colonies in the Western Hemisphere, except for Cuba and Puerto Rico, succeeded in winning their independence.⁸³ Out of an effort to legitimize their existence, leaders of these nations sought to convene a conference in which they would make alliances with each other and the United States.

While the President had no intention of making alliances with the new Latin American countries, which were to attend the conference, he thought it appropriate for the United States to have a place at the table.⁸⁴ Former followers of Crawford objected to this and any other sort of interventionist foreign policy as unconstitutional; Southern leaders (e.g. Vice President Calhoun) were especially uneasy about the thought of giving credibility to a conference that included former slave colonies. The whole matter came to the forefront because President Quincy Adams lacked a strategy whereby his friends in Congress would put forward the various programs that he had proposed.⁸⁵ As a result, the first action of JQA's administration was to send the Panama

⁸² Bemis, (1956), 69-70.

⁸³ "Latin American Independence," 2007 *Microsoft Encarta*, encarta.msn.com (Accessed December 10, 2007).

⁸⁴ Dangerfield, 362.

⁸⁵ Bemis, (1956), 76.

Congress proposal to the Senate for approval.⁸⁶ In turn, he further distanced a powerful ally in Vice President Calhoun, who shared the reservations that his Southern colleagues had about the Panama Congress. What made matters worse was that the cause of the newly independent Latin American nations had been the cause of Secretary Clay for more than a decade.⁸⁷ Though the characteristic independence that JQA exhibited throughout his career suggests that if JQA had objections to having American representation at the Panama Congress, he would have dismissed the proposal as he did previous advice from members of his Cabinet. Regardless, Calhoun had to shudder at the thought of Secretary Clay pulling the strings of the administration. Due to this combination of concerns as well as the mistrust that had come to characterize Quincy Adams and Calhoun's relationship, the Vice President asserted hesitant opposition to the administration in a meeting with Senator Van Buren during the first weeks of the legislative session such that he (i.e. Calhoun) assigned committee chairmanships in the Senate to the most vocal opponents of the administration.⁸⁸ Even though Calhoun would not break from the administration officially until June 4, 1826 in a letter to Andrew Jackson⁸⁹, the die had been cast.

The vitriolic reactions to the President's first message to Congress would continue to perpetuate talk of a 'Corrupt Bargain.' Though an official coalition that united Crawfordites, Jacksonians, and Calhounites through the candidacy of Andrew Jackson was a year in the making, key players who saw a significant threat in the Clay-Adams alliance began to organize and align themselves. The administration's Panama Congress proposal spurred this opposition to begin to coalesce more firmly under the leadership of New York Senator Martin Van Buren. Nicknamed the "Little Magician," Van Buren was a successful and crafty legislator whose skill

⁸⁶ Bemis, (1956), 76.

⁸⁷ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

⁸⁸ Niven, 114.

⁸⁹ Niven, 118.

at canvassing for Secretary William Crawford in the months following Crawford's debilitating stroke had helped push his candidate past Clay and into a three-man race in the House of Representatives.⁹⁰ These events thus set in motion Quincy Adams' election in the House. In the aftermath of the election, Van Buren sought a position by which he could influence the circumstances of the time in lieu of the new Clay-Adams alliance; the first step in this course of action was his meeting with Vice President Calhoun concerning the United States' participation in the Panama Congress. Brief mention of Martin Van Buren's political roots help make sense of such considerations:

Cornelius Peter Van Ness [a new type of Republican who was beginning to make it big in Vermont politics] had been weaned on the byzantine New York style of politics and brought the art with him to the Green Mountains. During his youth, he learned the technique of building an interest. Men like Van Ness and Martin Van Buren had been taught to erect a coalition quickly around a significant, even if fleeting, issue in hopes of garnering a victory.⁹¹

Van Buren would find success in this strategy thanks to the Panama Congress for which the Quincy Adams' administration sent confirmation of the event's ministers on December 26, 1825.

On December 26, 1825, President Quincy Adams sent to the Senate for confirmation the names of Richard Anderson of Kentucky and John Sergeant of Pennsylvania, his ministers plenipotentiary and extraordinary to the Panama Congress, along with an explanation of his rationale for sending representatives to the meeting.⁹² Various Senators, led by Senator Van Buren, responded by passing resolutions asking the President to open the confidential dialogue between the Senate and the administration to the public. President Quincy Adams noted his reply in his diary:

⁹⁰ Remini, (1981), 80-81.

⁹¹ Kenneth A. Degree, *The Watershed Election: Cornelius Peter Van Ness, Horatio Seymour, and the United States Senate Campaign of 1826*, 158.

⁹² Hargreaves, 149-150.

I answered the resolutions of the Senate by a message, stating that all the communications I had made to the Senate on this subject had been confidential; and that, believing it important for the public interest that the confidence between the Executive and the Senate should continued unimpaired, I should leave to themselves the determination of a question upon the motives for which, not being informed of them, I was not competent to decide.⁹³

Simply put, JQA's reply lacked tact⁹⁴ and set the wrong tone for the legislative session. Instead of building the relationships and trust that would be needed for a productive session, the President picked the wrong battle to fight and gave Van Buren the advantage in the political tug of war that was about to commence. Such a curt reply that questioned the Senate's motives would only serve to aid Senator Van Buren's efforts to renew the New York-Virginia axis among Southern planters and plain Republicans of the North.⁹⁵ In the face of the President's obstinacy, the "Little Magician" began to line up those who were in some way dissatisfied with the administration's legislative priorities.

Although the administration would gain confirmation of its ministers to the Panama Congress in a couple of months' time, the end result was a Pyrrhic victory. Because appropriations for the mission were held up in Congress for two more months, the ministers were unable to attend the initial negotiating sessions; en route, Richard Anderson died of tropical fever. A second set of meetings was supposed to be held in Mexico, but disagreements and distrust among participant nations prevented said meetings from taking place.⁹⁶ Accordingly, the events surrounding the Panama Congress provided what Senator Van Buren required to continue constructing his coalition without providing any benefit to the administration. The Panama

⁹³ *The Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845* Edited by Allan Nevins New York: Longmans, Green and Co., (1928), 356.

⁹⁴ Dangerfield, 362.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 362.

⁹⁶ Hargreaves, 158.

debacle was followed by additional failures on the part of the administration. On the subject of internal improvements, the administration was only able to get a piecemeal collection of projects through Congress that was largely based on members' desire for funding of projects in their home states.⁹⁷ Regardless, the lack of a broad initiative of internal improvements was miniscule in comparison to two significant defeats the President encountered, one on foreign policy and the other on domestic policy.

An unresolved trade row with Great Britain dealt a significant blow to a President with an resume of foreign policy experience that was unrivaled by anyone else in the country. Another setback to the administration came in its attempts to mediate between Creek Indians and the state of Georgia over a land dispute. In both instances, the President asserted the authority of the federal government when initially responding to the circumstances and then, sought advice from Congress on appropriate solutions. Inevitably, the House and Senate passed distinctly different legislation that could not be reconciled in a conference committee or approved in the other chamber. JQA had failed to acknowledge the forces of partisanship at work in Congress, and it cost him dearly. With respect to the British trade dispute, he was forced to reinstate previous law, which was an embargo of British goods. Accordingly, a lack of decisive action on the President's part with regard to Indian affairs made him look weak in the eyes of many Southerners and Westerners who desired the land American Indian tribes occupied for their own purposes.⁹⁸

As the administration experienced disappointment after disappointment, another aspect of the President's lack of perceptiveness with regard to the political environment of the time was his failure to fire executive branch administrators on the basis of partisanship. Though this may have been a noble endeavor on JQA's part, it did little to aid the efforts of his supporters within

⁹⁷ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 3.

⁹⁸ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 4.

the administration to put forward Quincy Adams' agenda. By making only twelve replacements within the federal government during his term in office,⁹⁹ JQA neglected to provide a unified front in his administration such that much time was spent fighting amongst fellow administrators instead of fighting for the President's programs. This would especially come to light through the example of JQA's refusal to dismiss his Postmaster General John McLean. Mary Hargreaves, writes:

By careful attention to accounts and greatly expanded routing, postal revenues under McLean's administration were increased from \$1,114,344 in 1823 to \$1,598,134 in 1828. Adams reported to Congress in 1825 that for the first time in many years, the revenues of the department exceeded its expenditures. That trend continued over the next two years but fell in 1828, as the president explained, largely because of marked expansion of the range of service. The increased income permitted, and provided justification for, the elevation of McLean's salary to the level of a cabinet officer in 1827.¹⁰⁰

Through Hargreaves' account, we see that McLean was a top-notch administrator, but as Secretary Clay and other were apt to point out, McLean, regularly used his office to further General Jackson's candidacy. Yet JQA once again chose to look past the political reality and kept McLean on staff because of the Postmaster General's competence as a department head.¹⁰¹

Concluding Thoughts

The plethora of failures attributed to President Quincy Adams' administration were reaffirmed in the midterm elections of 1826 when Van Buren's opposition coalition secured control of both houses of Congress. Having lost all legislative collateral, JQA's administration was powerless in the face of a hostile Congress as General Jackson's campaign continued to gain

⁹⁹ Bemis, (1956), 136.

¹⁰⁰ Hargreaves, 239.

¹⁰¹ Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 4.

momentum. Determined not to go down without a fight, Clay and Secretary Rush, who would serve as JQA's vice presidential candidate) rallied supporters of the administration for the President's reelection bid in what is often remembered as one of the dirtiest campaigns in American history.¹⁰² Even so, the campaign against presidential candidate Andrew Jackson and vice presidential candidate John C. Calhoun of the newly formed Democratic Party was for all intents and purposes irrelevant because the important battles had already been fought and lost by allies of the administration. This much was evident from the election totals as General Jackson garnered a decisive 178 electoral votes to President Quincy Adams' 83 electoral votes. Jackson swept the South and West while also taking Pennsylvania and twenty of New York's electoral votes. By contrast, Quincy Adams won Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, the New England states, and sixteen of New York's electoral votes.¹⁰³

The events of the previous decade had played a significant role in shaping the political environment of the 1820's. While the controversy surrounding the Compensation Act of 1816 came with the new republic's first lesson in electoral accountability, the Panic of 1819 and the Missouri Compromise debates brought sectional issues to the forefront. Amidst these changing dynamics, various factions of Jefferson's Republican Party grappled for control of the White House so as to lead the party via their group's vision for the country. When the dust had settled, John Quincy Adams was President, yet his administration was soon bogged down in Niebuhr's 'perils of chaos' as he tried to implement his vision for the future of the country. JQA's inability to ameliorate sectional ties and deal with the forces of partisanship at work in Congress allowed a strong opposition coalition to unite against him. Much of the West leaned heavily toward

¹⁰² Remini, (2002), Compact Disc 4.

¹⁰³ "1828 Presidential Election," *Dave Leip's Atlas of Presidential Elections* www.uselectionatlas.org (Accessed September 15, 2007).

Jackson in the first years of JQA's administration as a result of the hero's cry for vindication, and Secretary Clay's perceived infidelity to his constituents. The failures of an experienced administrative team in addressing foreign and domestic matters only added legitimacy to popular gossip. In essence, the real referendum on JQA's administration had come with the loss of control of the House in 1826. The presidential election results which came in later that year only served to amplify the inadequacies of the Quincy Adams administration and usher in the Jacksonian democracy on the coattails of a doomed presidency.

**The Rest of the Story: John Quincy Adams' Doomed Presidency
and the Election of 1828; A Bibliography**

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