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Political Realignments

JAMES MONROE'S Presidency brought a deceptive calm to American politics. The old party rivalries between Federalists and Jeffersonians had largely died out after the former's disgrace at Hartford, and the victors were free to pick and choose among Hamilton's policies with little fear that they would be resurrecting his party in the process. Given this apparent unity, there seemed to be little need to maintain party organization. Hostility to the very idea of parties persisted, an extension of the eighteenth-century concept that public servants held office out of devotion to civic virtue—much like Plato's philosopher-kings. Monroe encouraged the idea. He entered the Presidency declaring that the American system of government had approached "perfection" and spent most of his eight years in the office in a cautious attempt to preserve harmony. By the end of his first term, most Americans assumed that an age of cooperation and collective purpose—an "Era of Good Feelings," as one Boston paper rejoiced—had dawned.

The calm did not last. By 1820 the forces of modernization and social change had accelerated, intensifying the strains on American unity. The Panic of 1819 introduced Americans to the cyclical fluctuations of a modernizing economy, and technological and business innovations multiplied the opportunities available to the ambitious. Territorial expansion made harder the task of unifying a diverse republic. Concomitant with territorial growth was the critical problem raised by the expansion of slavery. As both the complexity of the issues and the number of different interests demanding to be served multiplied, new mechanisms of political control were needed.

Slowly the postwar generation turned back to the political party. The parties that emerged during the 1820s and 1830s were new, and they operated in a political climate that had vastly changed since 1800. The electorate, for example, had expanded dramatically. The old freehold restrictions, which dictated that a white male must own a certain minimum amount of taxable property in order to vote, had been steadily disappearing since the middle of the eighteenth century. By the early 1800s, these rules were seldom enforced; by the 1820s, they were gone altogether in most states. In 1824, only six states still chose Presidential electors in the state legislature; eight years later, the only state to do so was South Carolina. Despite the fact that voter turnout was low during the 1820s, the potential number, combined with the startling increase in population, gave the common man power that could not be overlooked.

As voting restrictions relaxed, so did the grip of deferential politics. Well into the 1830s, enough politicians still conceived of parties as groups of constituents clustered around—and obedient to—the "best men" to suggest that the old habits were not dead. But even during Jefferson's two terms there were signs that the Federalists, who personified the deferential system, had recognized that political power was not inherited but had to be won. That meant active campaigning and organization. Young Federalists such as Harrison Gray Otis accepted the need for parties. More particularly, they accepted the fact that they had to join, campaign, and prove themselves worthy of selection, rather than assume that power would flow to them naturally. Federalists were not necessarily less elitist; they had simply begun to realize that their elitism must rest on new foundations.

Deference fell not because the need for leaders had disappeared but because the foundations of leadership had changed. The right to rule no longer rested on birth but on a strict adherence to a constitutional system. To deny that was to deny the Revolutionary attack on privilege and monarchy. Men now exercised power only insofar as they served the people, championed their needs, and reflected their aspirations. The Constitution had indeed produced a second revolution—in the mind.

The extent of this change was aided by the expansion and growing prosperity of the young nation. The move west, the demand for wealth, and the possibility of more movement west and more wealth, all served to emphasize the focus on individual and collective opportu-

nity. The struggles over the American System and the grinding effects of the Panic were proof that this expansiveness would force its way into national politics. A local leader could not hope to have a voice in determining national policy unless he joined with other men. Here he faced a sobering fact: the Founders had done their work well. Without first forming broad coalitions, no one could possibly penetrate the tangle of competing powers within the federal government—and between the federal government and the states.

So new and different parties began to emerge, with new and different functions. These new parties had to be broad and elastic, capable of mediating among countless groups and factions, and they had to be structured so that the common voter was included systematically in the process of decisionmaking. One other factor affected them. Since control of the national government was vital to the life of any party, they must respond to—even create, if necessary—national issues, while at the same time gingerly avoiding ones that would irritate sectional hostilities.

PARTY development began in the states. It could not have been otherwise, for the party leaders were grappling with new organizational forms and new needs, and the sophistication and experience necessary for broad national parties were simply not there. The states, being smaller political entities, were easier to organize and manage. Moreover, most legislation, particularly on economic matters, was decided in the states and not in Washington. And as each state developed economically at a speed different from its neighbors, as each state had different traditions of leadership and participation, so did state parties emerge at different rates.

New York set the pattern. Once finely balanced between Hamilton's Federalists and the Jeffersonian opposition, it had become a Republican stronghold by Madison's first term. Yet, even then, New York politics was a family business. Dutch patroons such as Stephen Van Rensselaer and wealthy landowners such as William Cooper—father of James Fenimore Cooper—were vigorous embodiments of the deferential system. To them, politics was the obligation of gentlemen, who debated policy and made decisions among themselves. Democracy was good in that it gave public favor—and hence legitimacy—to wise decisions and withdrew support from bad ones. By 1815 the living example of this attitude was De Witt Clinton, a born aristocrat

with an ego as large as his holdings. Clinton's attitude toward his party was patriarchal. His followers existed to approve his actions, not direct them. To give control of the party to saloonkeepers, he thought, would have been a dangerous step toward mobocracy.

Yet saloonkeepers—or at least their sons—were precisely the ones who wanted control. Martin Van Buren, who began life by sweeping floors and polishing glasses in his father's tavern, was everything that Clinton was not. Short, unpretentious, and initially poor, Van Buren made politics a career, serving in turn as a county judge, state senator, and attorney general. By 1815, he had gathered others of like mind around him, men such as Silas Wright who shared his humble origins and his devotion to Jefferson. These men scorned the paternalism of Clinton. If leadership were to remain the province of the gentry, there was little hope that Van Buren or any of his allies would ever gain high office. They would remain surrogates and errand boys even as their ambitions led them to Albany or Washington. Equally important, Van Buren and his followers had been born after the Revolution. They had no memories or roots in the colonial system; their early political diet consisted of broadsides against John Adams. Partisanship was natural to their concept of democratic politics. Deference had little hold on them.

Clinton's autocratic use of patronage brought about their inevitable battle, from which a new form of party emerged. As governor, Clinton favored friends and associates, even Federalists, when filling key positions within the state government. At first, the Bucktails—as Van Buren's faction was called—did not openly resist. Clinton held his office by the grace of a caucus nomination. Yet the caucus was the very point at which Clinton could be attacked. A caucus nomination presumably reflected the will of the people. Therefore, so long as Clinton won the nomination, his power rested on a popular mandate and was thus worthy of support. But if Clinton lost favor with the majority, he was bound by the party decision to step aside. Swearing allegiance to the Republican Party above all else, the Bucktails slowly and quietly undercut Clinton's power in the caucus until, in 1820, they removed him as the party leader.

Their success was more than simply good strategy, for it implied an entirely new way of approaching politics. The party, not the man, was the agent of the people. It had a life that transcended the talents and ambitions of any individual. Men, personalities, might come and

go; parties remained. Since the party was presumably open to all who believed, and since party leadership was presumably open to those who reflected the popular will, to attack the party was to strike directly at democracy. Parties had become not the "baneful influence" Washington feared, but the orderly means by which democratic sentiments found expression.

Unknowingly, the Bucktails were reacting to more than raw greed for office, shrouded in bombastic demagoguery. Their cherished organization was a response to real needs left by the collapse of deferential politics. An expanding population with ready access to the ballot box, money in their pockets, and seemingly limitless opportunities demanded effective leadership. Parties rationalized and made systematic the means of political participation, while providing leadership at the same time. Nothing else could make republicanism workable in a country that was growing so fast.

Parties not only organized the electorate; they articulated ideals. Van Buren, for example, honestly believed that destroying aristocracies was a noble cause as well as an effective means to political power. His disciple William Leggett wrote during the 1830s, at the height of the crisis over the national bank, that plain people had both the right and the duty to organize in order to resist all manifestations of aristocracy. "Have they not the right," he asked, "to act in concert when their opponents act in concert? Nay, is it not their bounden duty to combine" against monopoly and vested interest? Thus were party combinations and the attack on European traditions of aristocracy melded into one, producing political forms and national goals that were uniquely American.

The divisions that appeared during the 1820s and 1830s were less between aristocrats and democrats than between those who saw the future glory of the nation coming from a vigorous use of the government in Washington and those who wanted to see the power of government restrained. Not surprisingly, the tariff, the debate over internal improvements, and the United States Bank became focal points for party appeals. A certain amount of self-interest was always present when one man chose to support or attack these issues, but beyond that there was simply a difference in outlook. Everyone believed in progress and in the sanctity of the democratic experiment. The difference lay in the means by which the former was promoted and the latter enhanced.

Fortunately, the divisions were not strictly sectional, although the South usually favored a reduction in the power of the national government. Van Buren recognized this fact early in the 1820s and attempted to base the new political alignments on grounds similar to those that separated Federalists and Jeffersonians. "We must always have party distinctions," he wrote, "and the old ones are the best. . . . Political combinations between the inhabitants of the different states are unavoidable and the most natural and beneficial to the country is that between the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North." Southern proponents of states' rights would thus join hands with ordinary people in the North, who also wanted nothing more than to be left alone. Still, there were enough people in the South who believed that a judicious use of the federal government could promote the interests of all sections to create the probability that an opposition party would develop there. So long as the slavery issue was avoided, a genuinely national two-party system was possible.

IN 1820 Van Buren's party in New York was a prototype, not a norm. Its principles and its form spread slowly, and a national two-party system was not in full operation until 1840. Moreover, the type of leadership that Van Buren provided at the state level was absent in Washington, where the apparent unity among Jeffersonian Republicans was badly decayed. In part, this was due to the weakness of Jefferson's two successors in the White House. Neither Madison nor Monroe possessed the political toughness or the charismatic persuasiveness of Jefferson. Each was by nature cautious when dealing with problems that might encourage conflict or disunity. Monroe was particularly weak. Except for the articulation of the Monroe Doctrine—which was largely Adams's work—Monroe seemed incapable of anticipating and dealing vigorously with knotty issues such as the mismanagement of the United States Bank. His inclination, rather, was to wait, proceed cautiously, and hope that the problems would prove transitory.

Moreover, Madison and Monroe were handicapped in both the means and the extent of influence they could exert on Congress and the nation. While Jefferson used patronage to enforce discipline and loyalty to his programs, Madison and particularly Monroe did not. Monroe lacked Jefferson's immense personal popularity and thus could not appeal directly to the people for support of a controversial

policy—as Jefferson had done, for example, in defending the embargo. Had he wanted to go to the people, Monroe still lacked means of mass communication. By contrast, later Presidents, especially Andrew Jackson, could rely on their own prestige and an extensive network of party newspapers and pamphleteers to persuade the public that their actions were proper and just.

Power was fragmented within Washington itself. Monroe often found himself undermined by members of his own Cabinet who used their posts to advance their political careers. It was not uncommon for a Cabinet head to disagree openly with the President's policies if sectional or political interests were at stake. It was assumed, moreover, that the Cabinet was a springboard to the Presidency, as Madison's and then Monroe's success had demonstrated. Departmental heads dealt directly with Congress; each recruited the friendship and loyalty of a clique, which—if large enough—could become instrumental in securing the traditional caucus nomination. These rivalries produced an atmosphere of distrust and intrigue that hampered every effort to develop policies and provide effective leadership.

Even if the executive establishment had been perfectly united, leadership would have remained difficult, because power was so minutely divided on Capitol Hill. Congress during the Jeffersonian era had neither the attitudes nor the institutional arrangements necessary for unified action. Congressmen were zealously defensive of their role as legislators; as the direct representatives of their constituents, they neither wanted nor accepted Presidential direction. To do so, they feared, would create a potential for centralized—and possibly monarchical—power.

This attitude, the natural offspring of ideas formed during the Revolution, was magnified by the nature of the community in which Congress worked. Washington during the Jeffersonian era was a city of transients. Of the senators and representatives who came to the capital at the beginning of any session, little more than half returned two years later. Nor did they spend much time in the city. Except in times of crisis, Congress met only during the winter months; during the rest of the year, Washington was nearly deserted. Moreover, on arrival in the city, a congressman allied himself with one of the several boardinghouses (or "messes") that lined Capitol Hill and served as legislative fraternities. Here members took their meals, slept, played cards, and talked politics. Like any social club, these fraternities were

selective and encouraged a certain uniformity among their members. The residents of a mess were almost invariably from the same region; they represented basically the same galaxy of economic, cultural, and sectional interests. In this respect, the sectional character of each mess tended to remain constant from session to session. Once a boardinghouse became identified with Southerners, Yankees, or whatever, it stayed that way.

Although the fraternities were superficially models of informality—with congressmen stepping around spittoons in their stocking feet—discipline within each was tight. There was little privacy, for example; even in the larger messes, few had their own rooms. Visitors, therefore, were infrequent and had to be entertained in the common room downstairs. It was impossible for a member of another boardinghouse to discuss a delicate political matter in secrecy. This situation continued when congressmen entered the Capitol building, for messmates took desks near one another, within earshot of their colleagues. Not surprisingly, bloc voting was the rule on any issue from the most trivial to the most sensitive. In this greenhouse atmosphere—where ideas and policies took root selectively around the same interests—little else could be expected.

The fragmentation encouraged by the numerous boardinghouses was encouraged by the committee system. Committees were convenient means of handling legislation quickly and thoroughly, and theoretically they gave the leader of the House or the Senate extraordinary power since he determined their membership. But the committee system was in fact one more block to the effective use of power. Speaker Henry Clay, for example, carefully allocated appointments to House committees so that each would contain one or two members of every congressional mess. Chairmanships were similarly divided. While this was a good tactic in Clay's ongoing effort to make himself popular, it produced the same fragmentation and clannishness that characterized the boardinghouses. Committee chairmen fought among each other in an effort to defend their congruent sectional and fraternal interests; similar battles raged within committees. The confusion was made worse by the fact that each committee generally dealt with business that required the attention—at the next higher level—of a member of the Cabinet. This strengthened the political ties between department heads and Congress, but not between departments or with the President. Thus was the legislative process complicated

and slow, and thus was the President further restrained from exercising leadership.

FRAGMENTATION among the Republican leadership in Washington and the simultaneous emergence of new political parties in the states meant that the choice of Monroe's successor would not be easy and routine. During his second term, competition for the Presidency was intense. The logical candidate was William Crawford of Georgia, Monroe's Secretary of the Treasury. Crawford had narrowly missed becoming President in 1816, yet he accepted his defeat cheerfully and spent the next eight years in faithful, hard work for both the President and his party. He carefully recruited the support of powerful Republicans in Congress and shrewdly curried the favor of Van Buren—the one man who could bring him support outside his native South. In 1824 the Republican caucus endorsed him overwhelmingly.

It was a pyrrhic victory. Crawford had suffered an untimely stroke in the fall of 1823 which nearly killed him and left him in precarious health. Moreover, Crawford played the game by rules which no longer applied. The caucus had lost its power to dictate candidates. Its actions were not binding even on the senators and representatives who participated in it, and in 1824 barely a third of those eligible were present. With Crawford sick and unable to use his tremendous influence to protect himself, the internecine warfare that raged within Washington erupted into open hostilities.

The chief rivals were John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Andrew Jackson. All except the last represented, not surprisingly, a particular section. After Crawford, the logical choice was Adams. He was a man of remarkable integrity and undeniable intelligence, a latter-day John Winthrop with a Puritan's capacity for exhausting work and selfless dedication. Like Winthrop, however, he was often brittle, detached, and cold. He seemed to defy the world to love him. His diary, scratched out by the light of a solitary candle in the early-morning hours, was a seventy-year record of personal agony. He had few, if any, close friends, but his political assets were formidable: he came from New England, a section that had not been represented in the White House during the long reign of the Virginia dynasty. He was Secretary of State, and had used that post vigorously to advocate American expansionism and hemispheric preeminence. The Monroe Doctrine was largely Adams's creation, and it was a

shrewd tactic in his effort to broaden his political base. It weakened charges that he was an Anglophile and demonstrated that he could move beyond his New England heritage to a strong defense of nationalism.

Clay and Calhoun were also nationalists, yet the latter was even more remote, more brittle, and more detached than Adams. Calhoun's support was concentrated almost wholly in his native state of South Carolina, and he was never a serious contender for the Presidency. Clay, on the other hand, enjoyed immense popularity and represented the aspirations of the emerging West. Clay had been born in Virginia and later moved to Lexington, Kentucky, where he built up a profitable law career supported by extensive holdings in real estate. In many ways he personified the new West. Tall and slim, he loved poker, politics, and horse racing, in no particular order. He was also the chief architect of the American System. Clay's keen awareness of the growing isolation of the West made him eager to develop the kind of economic and cultural ties that would bind the region to the rest of the nation. To this end, he was a major contributor to Lexington's status as a center for arts and education—the "Athens of the West"—and a strong proponent of internal improvements and a sound currency. Clay's economic nationalism, moreover, served the same political purpose as Adams's diplomatic nationalism: it helped broaden his appeal beyond the confines of a particular section.

Standing apart, and somehow aloof, from these candidates was Andrew Jackson, a figure so towering that he gave his name to the age. Jackson was at once the most loved and hated man in America. His fame rested entirely on his military exploits, and many saw him as a kind of homegrown Napoleon—imperious, adventuresome, and often cruel. He took orders reluctantly; he spelled badly; he dueled. He called himself a man of the people yet lived in a splendid mansion in Tennessee circled by the cabins of slaves. He gambled. He insisted on wearing his uniform where ordinary clothes would do. Most damaging, his politics were vague. He had spent most of his life either in the saddle or tending his plantation; his political career was spotty and undistinguished.

These peculiarities told only part of the story. Jackson was a complex man who embodied the hopes and fears of a complex nation. Many saw his imperiousness not as arrogance but as the mark of a man chosen by God to fulfill a special destiny. He was an American version of the Byronesque hero: cruder, more impetuous, certainly not

a man of letters, but a faithful patriot to the land he served. He belonged to that land in a special way. The fact that he spelled so poorly, while his successes were so great, suggested that his tutor was nature, not books. The connection to nature was vital to his popularity and impact. America existed amid a staggering display of natural resources. To a country schooled in the natural laws extolled by the Enlightenment and fast moving toward the natural mysticism of the Romantics, Jackson seemed more representative of the energetic young republic than did the erudite Adams or the parliamentarian Clay. He was the right man at the right time, the raw material for a monument.

Once the myths are cleared away, Jackson becomes more human. He was not the headstrong tyrant that some believed him to be. He sought advice from his counselors when he was unsure of his course, as he often was. Nor was he the rigid ideologue that his later wars with the Bank of the United States suggested. In the Senate in 1824, for example, he favored both the protective tariff and bills for internal improvements. He had been outspoken enough in his denunciations of banks to endear himself to victims of the depression, yet he was vague enough to avoid alarming investors—to whom he was closely allied. He was against the caucus system, yet his nomination had first been made by a caucus of the Tennessee legislature. Unhampered by political promises, untroubled by consistency, untainted by old partisan associations, Jackson could be and was all things to all people.

These traits served him well in the election of 1824, for when the votes were counted, Jackson's ninety-nine electoral ballots cut sharply across sectional lines. The others were not so lucky. Adams had eighty-four from New York and New England; Clay, thirty-seven from the West; Crawford, forty-one from the Southeast. But Jackson was thirty-two short of the necessary majority. As provided by the Constitution, the three who had polled the highest number of votes were placed before the House of Representatives; each state cast one ballot determined by a majority of the delegation. Clay, out of the running, threw his strength to Adams. The three additional votes needed to give Adams a majority came from Maryland, Louisiana, and Illinois—all states in which Adams had run second to Jackson at the polls. The politicians were still reluctant to accept a popular hero.

Adams's appointment of Clay as Secretary of State gave rise to the charge that the two had made an unseemly deal, although it is difficult to see how Clay could have supported either of the other candidates

and still have remained consistent with his own views. Nor is it easy to see where Adams could have found anyone else so well qualified for the State Department. The cry of "corrupt bargain" nonetheless became a rallying point for the opposition and helped prepare the ground for the restoration of the two-party system. Still, the most important aspect of the election was the distribution of the vote. The breadth—as well as the depth—of Jackson's support signaled both his own strength as a candidate and the fact that, thereafter, a successful nominee would have to transcend sectional lines and appeal to all elements of the electorate.

So John Quincy Adams became President, ready to face the four worst years of his life. Adams's Presidency was marked by the best of intentions and the worst of tactics. His first message to Congress in 1825 reflected the pattern. He had prepared the address with more than his usual intense care, for he hoped that it would set the stage for a vigorous and successful Administration. Instead, it doomed him to stalemate.

Adams was a nationalist, and his speech was perhaps the best elaboration of a particular strain of nationalism that was crystallizing during the 1820s. Naturally, he drew heavily on the programs of his father and Alexander Hamilton, stressing the need for tariffs and internal improvements to facilitate commerce and industry. Naturally, he wanted a stable currency and banking system for the same reasons. But Adams went beyond these three traditional points of the American System. They were vital projects, he said, but others were equally important and equally the province of legislation. "Moral, political, intellectual improvement are duties assigned by the Author of our Existence to social no less than to individual man," he stated, calling for endeavors that would uplift the whole society; these efforts, being expensive, would require the aid of government. A national university, coastal and interior surveys, scientific research, and a national observatory—the "light-house of the skies" of which Europe had many and America none—were all projects worthy of national support. "The spirit of improvement is abroad upon the earth," Adams concluded. It was incumbent upon Americans to do their part.

These proposals were not simply the creations of a remote, slightly aristocratic dilettante. They represented, rather, an ambitious sense of nationalism that was shared by a substantial number of Jeffersonians

who would later emerge, first as National Republicans, then as Whigs. Adams genuinely believed that the true foundations of national glory lay in the creativity and moral commitment of its citizens. Being a follower of Jefferson, he also believed that all should participate and share in molding and strengthening the culture. To confine the benefits of education and science, as well as commerce and industry, to an elite few would produce nothing. The great mass of people would remain base and depraved; the rest would be incapable of progress. If, on the other hand, everyone prospered and all improved, each individual's happiness would be enhanced.

It was not the ends of Adams's nationalism that troubled his detractors; it was the means. Adams was not at all intimidated or frightened by government. He had been brought up in its highest councils and inner sanctums. He was from Massachusetts, with its Puritan tradition of assigning leaders the responsibility of watching over the moral and economic state of its citizens. He instinctively projected the same function onto the national government. "The great object of the institution of civil government," he preached, "is the improvement of the condition of those who are parties to the social compact . . ." To do so, he continued, "governments are invested with power, and to the attainment of the end—the progressive improvement of the condition of the governed—the exercise of delegated powers is a duty as sacred and indispensable as the usurpation of powers not granted is criminal and odious." He was saying nothing new. The same impulse drove cities to build bridges and states to establish universities. He was simply carrying the role of government to new heights and endowing it with a moral purpose.

What Adams—and his Whig descendants—did not fully realize was the complex tangle of fears that an overzealous or callous use of power could create in the American mind. The nation was new. It hoped for a bright future yet worried that the aristocratic past might return. Not being a party man, Adams failed to comprehend that voters needed at least the appearance of consultation and participation in making decisions. In a disastrous conclusion to his first address, Adams showed his utter ignorance of the currents swirling about him. "While foreign nations . . . are advancing with gigantic strides in the career of public improvement, were we to slumber in indolence or fold up our arms and proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not be to cast away

the bounties of Providence and doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority?" "Palsied by the will of our constituents." The tone was paternalistic and more than a little condescending. It reeked of deference. The irony was that Adams and men like him, who fed on progress and wanted to use institutional machinery to advance it, became outcasts at precisely the time when Martin Van Buren was creating his own institutional machinery for entirely different purposes.

Adams's vision for the new nation remained even as his power dwindled. The outrage and catcalls occasioned by his message to Congress soon found other, more tangible targets. In 1825 he proposed that the United States send emissaries to the Panama Congress, which had been called by Simón Bolívar to discuss hemispheric attitudes toward commerce and Europe. The President's intentions were, as usual, pure, and the meeting would have little binding force. Moreover, the Monroe Doctrine suggested that American policy toward Latin America could be helped by encouraging such conferences. But Adams ignored the probability that some of the delegates from the Caribbean would be blacks. Southern congressmen were alarmed and very nearly killed the mission. Commissioners to attend the Congress were finally chosen and confirmed in March 1826, but not without a disruptive battle in Congress. The Panama Mission was the first and last congressional victory for Adams, and one that gained nothing. One commissioner refused to go during the fever season; the other, less prudent, did go, caught the fever, and died en route.

The off-year elections of 1826 clearly sounded the death knell of Adams's future hopes. The opposition had little trouble in finding issues with which to flail him mercilessly. The Panama Mission crystallized the antagonism to Adams in the South; elsewhere, rivals had only to mock the President's message or, more easily, denounce him as the choice of the politicians and not the people. The real issues dividing the voters, however, were state and local. In Ohio, for example, the aftermath of the depression still weighed heavily in the voters' minds. Those who had been hurt by the closing of the United States Bank branch office in 1820 shied away from Adams and Clay and tended to endorse Jackson's supporters. In Kentucky, a battle over debtor relief raged, with each side perfecting its party machinery. In New York, Pennsylvania, and New England, economic issues were beginning to be matched by the growing hysteria over the alleged subversive power of the Masonic Order. Whatever the local issues, the

result of the elections was a stunning defeat for the Administration. The opposition won control of both houses of Congress and of a majority of the state governments.

ADAMS'S troubles signaled the final collapse of the old Jeffersonian coalition. Regardless of the President's personal mistakes—and they were many—the new nation was becoming too large and too diverse to respond well to the informal rules of deferential politics that had served previous generations. An expanding population, territorial growth, and increasing sectional variances all demanded new forms of political machinery. In one respect Adams played a critical role in this realignment: his policies were so far removed from those of Jefferson and his political blunderings so unforgivable that he became a hated symbol against which the opposition could rally. Perceptive observers, especially Van Buren, sensed that the time was right to create a new national party.

What was needed to perfect the coalition was a leader, someone who would be all that Adams was not. Jackson was the man. The elasticity of his political convictions made him acceptable to several factions that otherwise might hate each other. This flexibility was crucial because of the sectional cleavages that plagued every attempt to formulate a unified economic policy. A national bank and federal roads were not pressing problems in New England, which had its own good roads and banks; there the tariff was paramount. Neither tariffs nor banks were indispensable in the West, which needed roads. The South was growing suspicious of any vigorous use of federal power, which could threaten states' rights and possibly slavery. But only by combining these elements into one party could an intersectional alliance be formed.

Because there was so little ideological unity among these disparate elements of the emerging coalition, Jackson served an important symbolic function. His iron will, his patriotism, his identification with the soil and the common man were all transcendent ideals that could be used to inspire devotion to the man and—coincidentally—his party. Van Buren, with his usual perspicacity, saw clearly that modern political parties needed moral symbols, rallying points for the faithful. "I have long been satisfied," he wrote, "that we can only get rid of the present, and restore a better state of things, by combining Genl. Jackson's personal popularity with the portion of old party feeling yet

remaining." If that could be done, the new coalition would have not merely Jackson at its head but also the memory of Thomas Jefferson. Thus would two powerful images be fused: Jefferson, the rationalist architect of the Revolution, and Jackson, the energetic, domineering spirit of the expanding republic. Van Buren's intent here was not to deify the man, but to identify him with an organization. The electorate, having voted initially for Jackson, would later vote for the party of Jackson. To encourage loyalty to the organization would "greatly improve the condition of the Republicans of the North and Middle States by substituting *party principle* for *personal preference* as one of the leading points in the contest." The deferential system would be dealt a final, crippling blow.

The first step in implementing this strategy was to make certain that Jackson had a reliable organization. Van Buren easily turned his own political machine in New York to the General's support; other states followed suit. Nationally, the well-oiled Crawford machine became, between 1826 and 1828, the Jackson machine. Its power had declined, of course, but it still provided a useful network of partisans eager for a change of Adminstration. That Crawford's machine had remained in working order was largely Adams's fault, for like Monroe he had failed to see the President's role as party leader. Adams not only refused to remove political opponents from office, he even reappointed most of those who served fixed terms. Yet these same officeholders, most important of whom were the collectors of customs, were Crawford partisans and key figures in state organizations. Their services to Jackson were invaluable.

Recruiting the ordinary voter required more innovative tactics; here newspapers played an essential role. By the 1820s newspapers had proliferated in the United States, providing a cheap, accessible means of mass communications. Most were short-lived and poorly edited, but the best were outlets for literature, politics, factual information, and advertising. As newspapers grew, so did the influence of publishers and editors. Some of the best of these became persuasive spokesmen for the emerging Jacksonian coalition. In the North were Isaac Hill's *New Hampshire Patriot* and Mordecai Noah's New York *Enquirer,* which later merged with James Watson Webb's New York *Courier.* In the West and South, Amos Kendall of Kentucky turned the potent *Argus of Western America* from Clay to Jackson; Thomas Ritchie made the Richmond *Enquirer* into the most influential paper

in the South; Duff Green gave up the St. Louis *Enquirer* to edit the new *United States Telegraph* in Washington. The loyalties of these editors reflected the diverse nature of the coalition. In broad terms, Noah and Webb represented the Van Buren wing of the party, Ritchie the Crawford faction, and Green the Calhoun interest. Hill and Kendall gave their undivided allegiance to Jackson.

DESPITE these links, the intersectional nature of the coalition created severe difficulties. The President-makers, especially Van Buren, were determined to center their campaign efforts on the symbolic nationalistic qualities of Jackson's personality, not on real and divisive political issues. Yet issues, particularly the tariff, were unavoidable. Since 1816, when the first protective tariff had been instituted, American manufacturers had regularly pressed for a steady increase, which had reached unprecedented highs in 1824. Still unsatisfied, these interests assembled a convention at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in the summer of 1827 to call for even higher duties. At the same time, Southern cotton had fallen to a new low of nine cents a pound—down two-thirds in less than two years. Relentlessly pressured by rising debts and falling income, Southerners viewed protectionism as an open plot by which men of other sections could reduce the South to economic and cultural ruin.

But Jackson needed votes in the North and West as well as in the South. His supporters correctly assumed that Adams would seek a second term and that few Southerners would endorse him, so they concentrated on winning the affections of Northern and Western protectionists. When Congress met in December 1827, Jackson's partisans offered a bill that went so far beyond the proposals of the Harrisburg Convention that New England, too, would likely be hurt by the duties. Tariffs on uncarded wool and other raw materials—on which Northern factories depended—were excessive. Seasoned observers sensed that the bill was a political tactic more than an effort to institute economic policy and focused their attentions on the men behind it. Since the bill was offered by Silas Wright—who would do nothing without first consulting Van Buren—it must have had the latter's approval.

Van Buren's exact intentions remain unclear. Assuming that the South was safe for Jackson and that New England was securely behind Adams, it is possible that the bill was drafted so that it would

fail. New England and the South would defeat it, yet Jackson could be put forward as a man of protectionist sympathies. The twisted logic here was that the South, not actually having to endure the torments of the bill, would not be unduly alarmed—particularly since only Jackson's supporters, but not the man himself, put forward the act. It is also possible that Van Buren and his cronies were genuinely behind the bill. It was necessary to win the West and mid-Atlantic states; disaffection in the South would not be enough to overcome that section's distrust of Adams.

Whatever the intent, the tariff did pass the House of Representatives. The West and middle states supported it, as did a crucial portion of New Englanders—who felt that their factories were strong enough to absorb higher costs for raw materials. When the bill reached the more conservative Senate, however, its provisions were reduced, but the level was still substantially higher than existing duties. The reaction in the South was ominous. To Southerners the rates were outrageously high; it was a "Tariff of Abominations." In South Carolina especially, there were those who greeted its passage with demands for forcible resistance, and only the prospect of Jackson's election prevented rebellion.

The convoluted history of this tariff reflected the delicate interplay of political, economic, and sectional forces that were to plague every Administration for the succeeding generation. There was no overriding economic policy in the bill. It was a patchwork assembly of local needs, intense lobbying, and shifting alliances with no internal logic of its own. Certainly Adams would have constructed a more rational, far-seeing law, but Adams was not in control. Nor was anyone else. Presidential power was at its nadir in 1828, political loyalties were shifting and regrouping, and sectional cleavages were becoming daily more apparent. The only fixed goal in anyone's mind was the upcoming Presidential election, and that—more than any economic or social need—provided the focus of organized effort among the lawmakers of the new nation.

THE campaign was one of unparalleled bitterness that left its mark on all concerned. In a contest notable for fraud and dirt, both sides were guilty of misrepresentation, scandalmongering, and outright slander. Friends of Adams dredged up the fact that Jackson and his wife had married before her divorce to her previous husband had become final.

It was an oversight on Jackson's part, but no matter. "Ought a convicted adultress and her paramour husband to be placed in the highest offices of this free and christian land?" asked one pamphlet. Similar trash concerning Jackson's dueling followed. Partisans of Jackson, not to be outdone, portrayed Adams as a snobbish aristocrat who, they incorrectly charged, had fitted the East Room of the White House with a billiard table and an ivory chess set at the public expense. The fact that Adams had paid for these luxuries himself was ignored. More substantive questions were raised concerning the tariff, where Adams was vulnerable and Jackson was vague, but the overall tone of the campaign was strident and intemperate.

Jackson won, though not overwhelmingly. In the electoral college his margin was handsome; Adams carried only New England, New Jersey, and Delaware, and the two split the vote of New York and Maryland. The popular vote was much closer, but still a substantial victory for Jackson. He won about 56 percent of the total. To consider the aggregate vote alone, however, is misleading. The two candidates were approximately equal in only seven states out of twenty-four: New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. But in the rest the vote was lopsided. Moreover, although the total number of votes cast was much greater than in 1824, the percentage of qualified voters participating was generally less than that of the Jefferson era and in many cases less than that cast in state races. The common man, whatever his preferences, remained somewhat indifferent to Presidential elections.

Several conclusions may be drawn from these results. One is that Jackson had not, in 1828, become the demigod of the common man. A healthy support for Adams and the issues he represented remained. But that support was as yet weak and ill organized; a unified opposition to the Jacksonians did not exist. Since the Democrats demolished Adams in nine states, organized opposition to Jackson and the Democrats could hardly be termed national. Hence, the two-party system was not reborn in the campaign of 1828; it awaited later developments in each state.

The campaign did, however, presage many of the characteristics of the emerging two-party system. It must be remembered that Jackson won partly because Adams lost. There is no reliable way of telling how many of the General's votes came from men who were more dissatisfied with Adams than enamored of Jackson, but the latter's am-

bivalence on the issues, his ability to be all things to all men in heroic form, certainly did not hurt his chances. Sectional preferences also helped. Jackson was from Tennessee, which was far enough West to appeal to Westerners, and far enough South to win votes there. The implications were clear: to be successful, a party must nominate men who were flexible on the issues and attractive to all sections. Finally, they must not, in any way, appear to be aristocrats.

While Adams's party was unorganized and disconnected, the Democrats were only a little less so. Van Buren had been correct; the party needed Jackson's name to get started. But, as Van Buren also knew, Jackson's election would spur the opposition to systematize their efforts, which in turn would help weld the diverse elements of the Democracy together. Nothing was quite so effective in creating tightly knit parties as a close contest and a good brawl.

So the Jacksonians came to power with many tacit promises but no commitments, high hopes but an infant organization. The coalition was, in its first victory, too large to be manageable and its purposes too diverse to be encompassed within a single organization. The South had voted for Jackson in the belief that he would use his influence to reduce the tariff. The middle states had voted for him for the opposite reason. The West expected cheap credit and land reform. The direction the party would take would be determined by Jackson himself. He represented the majority, and he would carry out what he conceived to be its will.

6
The Age of Jackson

NO one who was at Washington at the time of General Jackson's inauguration is likely to forget that period to the day of his death," commented one observer. Thousands crowded into the city to see their hero take the oath and to celebrate the beginning of what they hoped would be a new age for the republic. Their enthusiasm was boundless. The throng cheered Jackson through his speech, then followed him to a reception at the White House, where they horrified dignitaries and servants alike by upsetting punch bowls, snatching away ice cream before it could be properly served, and overturning furniture. Some even stood on damask chairs to catch a glimpse of the new President. "I never saw such a crowd here," sighed Daniel Webster, "and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger." The almost revivalistic outpouring of enthusiasm puzzled him, for—apart from devotion to Jackson—there seemed to be nothing by which this crowd could be distinguished from an ordinary brawl. They "have no common principle," he noted, "—they are held together by no common ties."

Webster's bewilderment was typical. Those who knew Jackson—whether they liked him or not—were certain that he would bring a new style to the White House. They expected him to be a strong President, to reverse the decline in executive leadership that had plagued his three predecessors. But no one really knew what policies Jackson would pursue. His inaugural address was short and dull: he seemed to be on every side of the few issues he raised. This vagueness was a little frightening, for the new President was known to be controversial and unpredictable. But the crowds worshipped him; they