...and so it goes?

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Marvin D. Denison February 4, 2016 In the confused and twisted political environment of 2016—and since we must avoid politics in this august body—I offer a few reflections on the state of Presidential elections. Not, of course, our current afflictions, but specifically about the tortured campaigns of the 1820s—not so much to refresh us about the vicious nature of campaigning, but as an object lesson in "you may think today is nasty—but it ain't nothing new!!

Our protagonists in this adventure: The oft quoted Andrew Jackson and his lesser quoted, but most worthy adversary-John Quincy Adams; our own Henry Clay; John C. Calhoun, and the lesser known, but potentially important, William H. Crawford. Dissecting their relationships and the state of politics in these years may lead us to reflect on more than those long gone campaigns.

Coming out of the War of 1812 and the general era of one party domination of elected offices, the candidates in 1824 presented a dilemma to the voters. All were essentially Monroe legacy Republicans, they presented no platform issues and differed on very little of substance. The only real organized idea for the future was Henry Clay's American System. This was a set of goals for the economic and infrastructure development of the "west". Please remember that Kentucky and surrounding areas were the westernmost states. The Louisiana territory was still largely undeveloped and was becoming populated by migrants from established States. The Public Land Act of 1820 had set the sale price at \$1.25 per acre. This allowed virtually anyone to move and establish themselves in the new

lands with very little initial investment. However, by 1824 the only States west of the Mississippi River were Missouri and Louisiana. The two-term tradition of leaving the Presidency was respected by James Monroe. His Vice-President, Daniel D. Tompkins, was not a factor in the coming campaign and in fact, died only 99 days after his term as Vice President ended in 1825.

As we approach the contest of 1824, the major players are all in government jobs:

John Quincy Adams is Secretary of State. Henry Clay is Speaker of the House. Andrew Jackson is across the Capitol in the Senate. John Calhoun is Secretary of War. Charles Crawford is Secretary of the Treasury.

All of these men had reason to strive for the White House. While the smart money was on John Quincy, (three of the five preceding Presidents had served as Sec. of State) this was by no means assured. The theory at the time was that the office "sought" the man rather than the man seeking the office, so campaigns had to be promoted by surrogates; direct campaigning by candidates was limited, both by tradition and the practicalities of early 19th century transportation. We were moving into a great time of transformation in both methods of election and the entire process of campaigning. Party caucus was the preferred method of nomination, but selection by State legislatures and even popular vote were also used. Much as today, each State uniquely determined its own method and the

Congressional delegation of most played a vital role in determining which candidates would be supported.

Alliances among men from the same region was thought to outweigh any disagreement over issues as James Monroe's second term neared its end. Strains focusing on the Southern "way of life" opposing the Northern and Eastern growing immigrant working classes were beginning to show as well as a growing sense of an oncoming rural/urban clash. However, in the coming 1824 presidential contest, those will pale under the weight of personalities.

John Quincy Adams was, in 1824, the most known worldwide of any of the candidates. His father had sent him throughout Europe, beginning as the secretary to the American envoy to Russia when he was still a teenager. Moving to be our Minister to the Netherlands in 1794; to Prussia, 1797-1801; United States Senator, 1803-08. He was in Russia from 1809-11 and as one of the Peace Commissioners at Treaty of Ghent in 1814.

He married Louisa, born in London to an English mother, Catherine Nuth Johnson. Her father was American--Joshua Johnson, of Maryland--and he had served as United States consul after 1790. The family moved to Washington in 1817 upon Adams' appointment as Secretary of State for James Monroe. It was in this position that both the Monroe Doctrine and the successful conclusion of the acquisition of Florida from Spain were accomplished.

Henry Clay was, in the summer of 1811, elected to the United States
House of Representatives. He was chosen Speaker of the House on the
first day of his first session, something never done before or since (except
for the first ever session of congress back in 1789). During the fourteen
years following his first election, he was re-elected five times to the House
and to the Speakership. He enhanced the position of Speaker and
essentially recreated the office as the power broker within the House.

Andrew Jackson's major accomplishments were all military of one nature or another. He had been a Congressman (1796-97), a Justice of the Tennessee Superior Court (1798-1804), the heralded hero of the Battle of New Orleans, the subduer of the Seminoles, and Governor of the Florida territory. Now he was in his second stint as a U.S. Senator from Tennessee.

On a personal basis, Jackson's wife of over 30 years, Rachel, will figure unhappily in our story tonight. At age seventeen Rachel Donelson from Tennessee married Lewis Robards, son of a prominent Harrodsburg, Kentucky family. The marriage was an unhappy one, with Rachel claiming physical abuse. In 1790 Rachel and Lewis separated and she returned to the Donelson family home. She believed that her husband would file a petition for divorce. To escape him, she fled to Natchez, Mississippi with a group of friends and relatives. Andrew Jackson, a friend of the family, escorted and protected their group as they traveled through the unfamiliar

territory. In 1791 Rachel Robards and Andrew Jackson married in Natchez. Upon their return to Tennessee that same year, the Jacksons and the Donelson family settled in Nashville.

In 1793 Andrew and Rachel Jackson learned that Lewis Robards had never obtained a divorce; he had merely been granted permission to file for one. On the grounds of Rachel's abandonment and adultery, Lewis Robards was granted a divorce in 1794. At about this same time, the legitimacy of the Jackson marriage was questioned because they were married in then-Spanish-controlled Natchez, Mississippi. The Jacksons were Protestants, and only Catholic marriages were recognized as legal unions in that territory. After the divorce was finally legalized in 1794, Andrew and Rachel wed again in a quiet ceremony at the Donelson home in Nashville.

William Crawford of Georgia had long government service both in the Congress and as a Presidential appointee. During the last of Jefferson's years in office, Crawford was President *pro tem* in the Senate. In 1813, President James Madison appointed Crawford as the U.S. minister to France and he held that post until 1815. Madison appointed him as Secretary of War, but he shifted to become Secretary of the Treasury in 1816. His tenure there would place him in both Madison's and Monroe's cabinet until President Monroe left office. He was in a good position to further his Presidential ambitions until a stroke left him greatly disabled for months during the crucial 1823 run-up to the election season.

Nevertheless, he had the support of both Jefferson and Madison.

John C. Calhoun of South Carolina was Secretary of War. His ringing defense of States' rights over federal authority would come much later. At this time, he was known for his work modernizing and making the workings of the military much more efficient. With the nation's military establishment in complete disarray after the War of 1812, reforming a badly managed department with over 45 million dollars in outstanding accounts (at a time when the government's annual budget amounted to less than 26 million) seemed to be a near-impossible task. But Calhoun believed that a strong defense establishment was essential to maintaining the nation's honor and security, and he welcomed the chance to reform the troubled department.

His efforts to advance to the Presidency in 1824, primarily to thwart Crawford's possibility of success, were doomed from the beginning. The result, however, did land him a near unanimous election as Vice-President. Technically, he appeared on both the Jackson and Adams ticket.

And now for the rest of the confusing details. The popular totals were clearly in Jackson's favor with 150,000 votes; Adams, 113,000; Crawford, 47,500; Clay, 41,000. Jackson even carried eleven counties in Kentucky!

These numbers are interesting, but in the Electoral College came the real problem. No candidate had the required majority, but the count was much closer—Jackson, 99; Adams, 84; Crawford, 41; Clay, 37. However, the decision was now in the hands of the House of Representatives—with each State having one, and only one equal vote. To further muddy the situation,

the Constitution required that the House make its choice from only the top three candidates. This removed Henry Clay from consideration!

Clay considered his options, threw his support to Adams, and in one motion continued the feud with Jackson and secured enough votes for Adams to win the electoral college. What happened with Kentucky's vote is instructive. The legislature had passed instructions to our Congressional delegation to vote for "the Western candidate". As that was obviously Henry Clay, and he was no longer an option, should Kentucky's vote go to Jackson? Clay was adamantly against supporting Jackson, and when the decision of our delegation was announced for Adams, it clearly showed Clay's influence. Despite the fact that not a single popular vote in Kentucky was recorded for Adams, Kentucky voted for Adams. He also brought along Illinois, Missouri, Ohio, and Louisiana!

(If you want to get into the details—see the maps of the 1824 vote compared to the 1825 Electoral College results.)

The deal making, promises and feuding with Jackson that preceding the vote could be another lengthy paper. Suffice to say tonight that Jackson and Clay, despite both being "westerners" shared little else. Clay was regarded by Jackson as a tool of the eastern monied elites and his American System proposal of Federally financed internal improvements only one example of his opposition to Clay. The personal animosity went both ways, however. Clay had opposed Jackson's military adventures in Florida and loudly denounced his actions in that Spanish territory.

Speaker Clay had accomplished his task—a first ballot victory for Adams. The House of Representatives had done its job in one quick afternoon's vote. When he then accepted the State Department job a few weeks later, it confirmed - in Jackson's mind at least - that a "corrupt bargain" had torpedoed his election and set up Clay for future Presidential office!

Jackson now proceeded to make Clay and Adams as miserable as possible for the next four years. He planned his next campaign to derail Adams' re-election and oust Clay from the State Department.

The partisan press and helpful releases of "private" letters make these next steps both possible and extremely personal for all involved.

The supporters of Andrew Jackson began spreading a rumor that Adams, while serving as American ambassador to Russia, had procured an American girl for the sexual services of the Russian Czar Alexander I. The attack was no doubt baseless, but the Jacksonians delighted in it, even calling Adams a "pimp" and claiming that procuring women explained his great success as a diplomat.

The response was quick and fierce. Charles Hammond, in his Cincinnati Gazette, asked: "Ought a convicted adulteress and her paramour husband be placed in the highest offices of this free and Christian land?"

Adams supporters attacked Jackson's family, calling his dead mother "a common prostitute, brought to this country by the British soldiers," after

whose service she "married a MULATTO MAN, with whom she had several children of which number General JACKSON IS ONE!!!" These charges, published and reprinted in various newspapers, had a cumulative effect.

One of Jackson's fiercest political enemies in the Tennessee legislature, Andrew Erwin, a land speculator (originally from VA) wrote several editorials in Nashville newspapers that entered the national press and were eventually compiled into pamphlets to be distributed to voters. His comments centered on Jackson's involvement in the immoral slave trade. "Traffic in human flesh," Erwin wrote, "seems now to be generally condemned by all the civilized nations under the sun." Even the slaveholding states of the American republic generally "prohibited" the "buying, selling and transferring of slaves as merchandize;" where it was permitted, it was "becoming exceedingly odious." The "humane slave holder . . . detests it as cruel and subversive of the dearest ties of domestic affection," while those who were not slave owners considered it "war with human rights, republican principles, and every feeling of the human heart." According to Erwin, Jackson's slave trading might have led others to bring a "reproach" on him as a "private citizen," but it demonstrated his "total disqualification and unfitness for office" as a public man.

Upon Jackson's candidacy: Samuel Clesson Allen (Congressman from MA) "There is more effrontery...in putting forward a man of his bad character-a man covered with crimes...than ever was attempted before upon an intelligent people."

(Allen to Samuel Lathrop—quoted by Schlesinger Jr. in *The Age of Jackson* p. 3)

I direct your attention to the cartoon by D.C. Johnson on back of the election maps.

I'm sorry the resolution isn't greater, but the intent should be clear. The quote under the smoking cauldron is from Act 5, scene 3 Richard III:

Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd Came to my tent
I particularly like the cannon forming the neck and the outstretched torso for his nose!

Adams was also attacked for having a billiard table in the White House and allegedly charging the government for it. It was true that Adams played billiards in the White House, but he paid for the table with his own funds.

John Quincy Adams supporters called Andrew Jackson a slave-trading, gambling, brawling murderer. (Though these slurs are pretty serious, they occupy a low place on the list because they were—being about a man who was shot several times in duels and bar fights—true.)

Jackson supporters accused Adams of having premarital sex with his wife.

I present next exactly as it appeared in print:

SIGNS OF THE TIMES, Albany, August 23,1828: Even though the next election is still months away, there already have been various personal attacks launched against both the Republican and

Democrat candidates for President. On page 3 of this issue is a report from the New York Enquirer about the Licentiousness of the Press which offers a taste of the personal attacks levied against Andrew Jackson. The report begins: "It will not, we believe, be contradicted, that the Adams presses generally professing to belong to the old federal party, and of course, to good society have, in the present contest, lost sight of every decent regard for public reputation and private feelings. The man, who, as Mr. Jefferson said, has filled the measure of his country's glory, has been the object of their unceasing and most slanderous attacks. He who achieved the greatest victory in modern times, and shed a lustre on the arms of his country has been called a murderer, a swindler, an adulterer and a traitor, because the people have selected him as their Candidate for President." The report continues with: "Not content with such vile falsehoods, their despair has driven them to greater extremities. In Charles Hammonds paper, a bosom friend of Clay, we find the following horrid and gross attack: General Jacksons mother was a COMMON PROSTITUTE, brought to this country by the British soldiers! She afterwards married a MULATTO MAN, with whom she had several children, of which number General JACKSON IS ONE!!!" The report closes with an interesting historical observation but in doing so it seems to make an attack upon the Adams as well as revealing its support of Jackson: "Is this enough to damn any cause? Has any Jackson Press ever degraded itself to such a level? But it is in character with the

dynasty. In 1800, John Adams denounced the illustrious Jefferson as a miserable debauchee--a cheat--a blackguard--a political renegado--a pensioner of the French Government, and a notorious paramour of his servant black Sall. The language held towards Gen. Jackson by the younger Adams, corresponds with the attacks on Jefferson under the elder. The triumph of the people will be the same in both cases. So let it be."

This historical perspective gives evidence to mudslinging being nothing new in politics.

Andrew Jackson's reputation as a national hero was based on his military career, hero of the Battle of New Orleans, the final action of the War of 1812. His military glory was turned against him when a Philadelphia printer named John Binns published the notorious "coffin handbill," a poster showing six black coffins and claiming the militiamen Jackson had ordered executed were essentially murdered.

From the flyer: two verses,

Low to the earth he bent, and pray'd

For pardon from his chief

But to his earnest prayer for life

Jackson, alas, was deaf

All six militia men were shot!
And O! it seems to me
A dreadful deed—a bloody set
Of needless cruelty.

Also from the flyer, the account of John Woods:

Poor John Woods; he was generous hearted, none fellow as ever lived. who has volunteered in the service of his country. He was on guard one day at Fort Strother—the officer of the guard had permitted him to go to his tent, and snatch a hasty breakfast; whilst disposing of his scanty meal. seated on the ground aside his skillet an upstart little officer, who was not Wood's qual at home, ordered him to pick up and carry off some bones that lay scattered about the place—Woods refused, and the little officer attempted to compel him. At this instant, Gen. Jackson, having heard and without knowing anything of the merits of the case, repeatedly vociferated -- "Shoot the damn'd rascal—Shoot the damn'd rascal." For this offense, the unfortunate, the gallant Woods, was tried, condemned and shot. Before his trial, Gen. Jackson used this language to the court-martial. "By the immortal God! if you find him guilty I will not pardon him!" And he kept his promise: though he did offer a pardon provided he would enlist in the regular service—Thus perished as noble a fellow as ever lived, for as trifling an offense as ever took the life of man!!!

Jackson's marriage on the frontier nearly 40 years earlier became a major issue in the 1828 campaign. He was accused of adultery and vilified for running off with another man's wife. And his wife was accused of bigamy.

As these scurrilous charges repeatedly appeared in the pages of partisan newspapers, John Quincy Adams reacted by refusing to get involved with the campaign tactics. He was so offended by what was happening that he even refused to write in the pages of his diary from August 1828 until after the election.

Jackson, on the other hand, was so furious about the attacks on himself and his wife that he got more involved. He wrote to newspaper editors giving them guidelines on how attacks should be countered and how their own attacks should proceed.

Jackson Won the Election of 1828 Electoral Vote: 178 to 83

Tennessee vote in 1828 Jackson 44,293 95.2% Adams 2,240 4.8%

Kentucky vote in 1828 Jackson 39,308 55.5% Adams 31,468 44.5%

Jackson's appeal to the "common folk" served him well and he handily won the popular vote and the electoral vote. It came at a price, however. His wife Rachel suffered a heart attack and died before the inauguration, and Jackson always blamed his political enemies for her death.

Jackson blamed Adams' vicious campaign practices, exclaiming at her funeral, "May God Almighty forgive her murderers as I know she forgave them. I never can."

Wearing the white dress she had purchased for her husband's inaugural ceremonies in March 1829, Rachel Donelson Jackson was buried in the garden at The Hermitage, her home near Nashville, Tennessee, on Christmas Eve in 1828. Lines from her epitaph--"A being so gentle and so virtuous slander might wound, but could not dishonor"--reflected his bitterness at campaign slurs that seemed to precipitate her death.

When Jackson arrived in Washington for his inauguration he refused to pay the customary courtesy call on the outgoing president. President John Quincy Adams reciprocated by refusing to attend the inauguration of Jackson.

Indeed, the bitterness of the elections of 1824 and 1828 resonated for years. For Clay his "corrupt bargain" gave him the State Department, yet all but guaranteed that his efforts to reach the Presidency would be opposed by Jackson and even by many in Kentucky for the way he had manipulated the Kentucky vote in 1824's House election of President Adams.

The campaigns had been bitter and personal, but would set the stage for future efforts that have grown and become even more widespread as the current contest is showing us



RICHARD III.

Some Account of some of the Bloody Deeds of GEN. JACKSON.

















