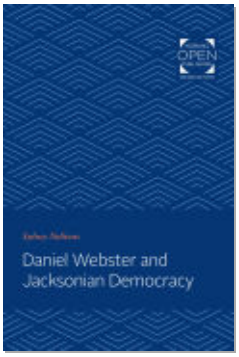
I: A Gentlemen's Opposition



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I

A GENTLEMEN'S OPPOSITION

WHETHER RENEWED PARTY STRIFE and Jacksonian party organization would become permanent features in American politics was uncertain in 1828. As they sought to understand the causes of their defeat in 1828 and to formulate a strategy for ensuring that Jackson would serve but a single term in the White House, National Republican leaders chose to see the Jackson menace as evanescent. Disappointed in defeat, Webster and Clay nonetheless felt that their loss was not shattering. They had borne the onus of a dour, unpopular president against a military hero. They thought the referendum was entirely personal;[1] issues had had little bearing on the outcome.[2] How Jackson would deal with any leading controversies—the protective tariff and internal improvements—was unknown. Few guessed what he would do with the patronage system; none thought even to question his views on the Bank of the United States. Though they feared the worst of Jackson, Webster and Clay shared the uncer-

[1] Clay to Francis P. Brooke, January 10, 1829, copy, Henry Clay Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as LC).

[2] Webster to Ezekiel Webster, February 5, 1829, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, ed. J. W. McIntyre, 18 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1903), 16:186–87 (hereafter cited as *Writings*); Clay to Webster, November, 1828, in George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1872), 1:335.

tainty of his backers as to how the president would stand on controversies.[3] But of one thing they were sure. The vagueness that had allowed Jackson to bring together his unlikely alliance of mutually hostile leaders could not last forever. When equivocation gave way before clarity, so too would the tenuous Jackson coalition.

National Republican strategy thus continued to be based on the traditional political code, developed in the quarter-century when coalitions of congressmen sought to dominate the government.[4] It looked to congressional leaders rather than directly to voters for political support; leaders presumably had local followings which they could guide as they desired. To achieve political victory, one clustered together leaders of sufficient weight to overawe a coalition of lesser weight. It was perfectly sensible to assume that Jackson's victory had come substantially through such a combination and to assume further that, once disillusioned, leaders would defect and bring themselves and their followings to the Nationals. Fissured at the top, the Jacksonian coalition would cleave to the bottom.[5]

The National Republicans waited for the foe to divide. The Jackson party would disintegrate of its own jealousies and contradictions;[6] there was no need for overt National Republican opposition. On the contrary, opposition would only, in Webster's words, "check discontent and schisms among our opponents."[7] Determined not to prolong the life of the enemy beyond its natural span, Webster, Clay, and other National Republicans concurred on a course of passive resistance.[8] Clay

[3]Webster to Ezekiel Webster, January 17, 1829, *Writings*, 17:467; Clay to Francis P. Brooke, December 25, 1828, *The Works of Henry Clay, Comprising His Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, ed. Calvin Colton, 10 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 4:215 (hereafter cited as *The Works of Henry Clay*).

[4]Lynn Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," *American Historical Review*, 72 (January, 1967): 445-68.

[5]Josiah S. Johnston to Clay, December 12, 1829, Thomas Jefferson Clay Papers, LC; Clay to Brooke, April 24, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:261-62. For a brilliant analysis of the limitations of government by congressional coalition, see James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 110-53.

[6]Clay to Josiah S. Johnston, July 18, 1829, Thomas Jefferson Clay Papers. For similar forecasts of factionalism by Democrats, see James C. Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841* (Lexington: The University of Kentucy Press, 1970), p. 27.

[7]Webster to Clay, May 29, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:275. See also Josiah S. Johnston to Frank Johnston, December 1, 1828, Josiah S. Johnston Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as HSP). Jacksonians had in fact counted on the opposition to oppose. "It is most fortunate for our party," regency Democrat Churchill C. Cambreleng wrote Vice-President-elect Martin Van Buren, "that we start with an opposition—it unites the main body of the old republican army and relieves us at once of a parcel of mere hangers on. . . . We . . . know our enemies and our motto should be those who are not for us are against us. We shall now have . . . a party administration . . . governed by party principles." Cambreleng to Van Buren, March 1, 1829, Martin Van Buren Papers, LC.

[8]Clay to Webster, November 30, 1828, in G. Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster*, 1:335-36.

left the capital in temporary "retirement," removing a frequent target for the Democrats. The opposition abandoned formal meetings. Publicly and privately the leaders passed the word: "the nation wants repose." They relied on the repentance of the "better part" of the Jackson party; the Nationals would "recall them to their duty by kindness."[9] Webster remained in Washington to guard against Jacksonian attacks on any "great interests."

I

Exactly as National Republicans hoped, Jackson disappointed many between 1829 and 1832. The opposition exploited Democratic "divisions and jealousies" with "insidious skill," complained Jackson's capital newspaper, by "appealing to the pride of independence among their individual opponents" and asking deceitfully, " 'Art thou in health my brother?' "[10] Yet, to the dismay of Webster, Clay, and other National Republican leaders, Jackson's coalition failed to dissolve.

Sooner than Webster expected, he was called on to obstruct a major effort to unify the president's followers in Congress. Curiously enough, Jacksonian congressmen sought to use the tariff—which seemed the dispute most likely to shatter Jackson's party[11]—as the issue to unite the coalition. For every Northerner who supported Jackson because of the tariff, there stood a Southerner who backed the General in 1828 only in the expectation that he would disavow the "Tariff of Abominations" and seek its reduction.[12]

To make Southern concern over the tariff clear, moreover, South Carolina revived the doctrine of "nullification"—the claim that a state had the right to void a federal law it judged unconstitutional—first used by Jefferson and Madison in 1799 against Federalist laws curbing free speech and press. After passage of the Tariff of 1828, John C. Calhoun secretly drafted a pamphlet which attacked the new law as unconstitutional and which invoked anew the remedy of state nullification of a law of Congress. Though the South Carolina legislature had Calhoun's *Exposition* on nullification circulated anonymously, the state took no

[9] Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *Henry Clay* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1937), pp. 230-32; Clay to H. H. Niles, November 25, 1828, Henry Clay Papers, LC; Clay to Brooke, May 12, 1829, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:233.

[10] *United States Telegraph*, November 18, 1829.

[11] Clay to Josiah S. Johnston, July 18, 1829, Thomas Jefferson Clay Papers.

[12] Robert V. Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963), pp. 172-80; William W. Freehling, *Preclude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 136-38.

further action in 1829.[13] Nevertheless, its threat was widely discussed and gave a menacing edge to the tariff dispute.

Webster, of course, fundamentally disagreed with the doctrine of nullification. It endangered the tariff and the interests of his section, but, equally important, it threatened the authority of the national government as he had increasingly come to defend that authority in the 1820s. Throughout that decade, before the Supreme Court and in Congress, Webster had become the leading exponent of a broad construction of the powers granted to the federal government by the Constitution and the foremost advocate of the absolute supremacy of federal law.

The leaders of South Carolina in fact looked on nullification as a last resort; they preferred to bring down the tariff through new federal legislation. When Jackson remained noncommittal on tariff reduction,[14] Southern and Western Jacksonians took the matter into their own hands and sounded out one another on the possibility of a sectional bargain. Westerners would cast their votes for a lower tariff; Southerners would give their support to efforts to reduce the price of public lands and ease the restrictions on Western settlement.[15]

The formal bid for alliance came late in 1829. In December, Senator Samuel Foot of Connecticut introduced a resolution to limit the sale of public lands. Whatever Foot's purpose, Thomas Hart Benton, the gargantuan and loquacious senator from Missouri, found in the resolution the seeds of an Eastern conspiracy. New England and other manufacturing states meant to choke off emigration to the West in order to keep labor abundant and cheap for Northern factories. The high tariff—for which Benton had voted in 1828—was part of the same plot to aid manufacturers at the expense of Northern workers, Southern taxpayers, and Western settlers. The West and South held common grievance against the Northeast; they should make common cause against the tariff. In reply, Senator Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina indicated that, in exchange for votes against the high tariff, the South would certainly support the right of Western states to survey, sell, and settle Western lands as they saw fit.[16]

At this point Webster intervened decisively to waylay the prospect of a Southern-Western alliance, which not only would have isolated New

[13] Those who wished the state actually to void the tariff were temporarily rebuffed. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 173–76.

[14] *Washington National Intelligencer*, December 4, 1829.

[15] Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 3 vols. (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1944–51), 3:53–66.

[16] *Ibid.*; *United States Telegraph*, January 23, 1830.

England politically and damaged its manufacturing interests but would have cemented a strong coalition of Jacksonian congressmen. Though it had been Benton and not Hayne who had leveled the assault on the East, Webster chose deliberately to "reply" to the South Carolinian. In the winter of 1829/30 the senator from Massachusetts defended the services of the East to the West and compared them favorably to the labors of the South. More important, Webster successfully shifted the debate from the issue of land policy and the tariff to the question of the South's loyalty to the Union. Provoking Hayne into a defense of nullification, Webster lured the South Carolinian away from his effort to win tariff redress through a Southern-Western majority in Congress and into a defense of his state's right to veto a federal law.[17]

Once Hayne accepted the challenge to vindicate nullification, Webster was able to drive a wedge between the nationalist West and the states'-rights South. Recapitulating the arguments Calhoun had formulated the previous year, Hayne asserted that sovereign states had created the Constitution and that, therefore, they had a sovereign right to interpret, and if need be nullify, a federal law. Webster countered that the people—not the states—had ratified the Constitution and that, therefore, only the tribunal of the people, the Supreme Court, could pass on the constitutionality of the laws. State nullification was tantamount to treason, and Webster appealed to the nation to rebuke the nullifiers and affirm the Union. To the "Union we owe our safety at home, and our . . . dignity abroad. It is to that Union that we are chiefly indebted for whatever makes us most proud of our country." In a stirring peroration, Webster called out to all patriots:

When my eyes shall be turned to behold, for the last time, the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched . . . in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance, rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the republic . . . blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land. . . . Liberty *and* Union, now and forever, one and inseparable![18]

Though the debate over Foot's resolution dragged on for four months and ended inconclusively, the South failed in 1830 to win a

[17]Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, pp. 183-86; Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 3:53-66; Edward Everett to Alexander H. Everett, March 11, 1830, Edward Everett Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston (hereafter cited as MHS). Hayne was led to abandon his original strategy, Everett believed, "by the ardor of debate, habitual scorn of the North, hatred of Webster, and a confused notion, that it is always a safe policy to abuse Eastern federalists."

[18]Daniel Webster, "Second Speech on Foot's Resolution," *Writings*, 6:74-75.

reduction of the tariff and, as it was soon to discover, had by its espousal of nullification incurred the wrath of Andrew Jackson himself.[19]

The debate with Hayne enormously enhanced Webster's prestige and he emerged from the Great Debate as the "Defender of the Constitution" and a hero of Unionists everywhere.[20] But, as was to happen repeatedly, success in dividing the Jacksonian congressional coalition did little to strengthen the National Republicans. Calhoun and others in the South deeply resented the president's refusal to help bring down the tariff, and within a year the vice-president openly broke with Jackson. But, though a bitter Calhoun thought that Jackson had "debased, distracted, and corrupted" the country,[21] he could not and did not transfer his loyalty to an opposition which overtly favored a high tariff and a strong national government. Through 1831 Clay and Webster also had little use for a "monstrous union" of nationalists and nullifiers, and Clay advised the opposition to "march onward, straight forward, with our principles uncompromised and untarnished."[22] Instead of defecting to the National Republicans, states'-rights men increasingly turned away from both parties and toward ever-growing reliance on the threat of nullification to change the tariff.[23]

The president not only frustrated important Southern members of his coalition, but disappointed many Western Jacksonians as well. Nonetheless, Jackson's firm hold on the party persisted. Many Westerners favored federally sponsored internal improvements for their section, but Jackson used his veto power to block several internal improvement bills passed by Congress. The first of the vetoes came in May, 1830,

[19] For Western dissent from nullification, see James Brown to Johnston, April 8, 1830, Josiah S. Johnston Papers, HSP; and Clay to Johnston, May 9, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 5:267. For Jackson's hostility to the nullifiers, see Robert Hayne to Levi Woodbury, July 30, 1831, Levi Woodbury Papers, LC; and Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 2:67–73. Webster even convinced some Southerners that nullification was revolution. See [John Campbell] to James [Campbell], April 23, [1830], David Campbell Papers, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.; Benjamin Watkins Leigh to William H. Crawford, January 16, 1831, William Crawford Papers, Duke; *Southern Patriot*, n.d., quoted in the *Washington National Intelligencer*, July 1, 1830.

[20] Warren Dutton to Webster, March 4, 1830, in George Jacob Abbott Papers, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.; Stephen White to Joseph Story, February 28, 1830, Story Family Papers, *Essex Institute Historical Collection*, 69 (January, 1933); Amos Lawrence to Webster, March 3, 1830, Daniel Webster Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord (hereafter cited as NHHS); *Boston Columbian Centinel*, March 6, 1830. New England friends saw to it that copies of Webster's speech spread freely throughout the country. Thomas Handasyd Perkins to Nathan Hale, February 27, 1830, Hale Family Papers, LC.

[21] Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun*, 2:86–99; Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, February 11, 1832, John C. Calhoun Papers, South Caroliniana Collection, University of South Carolina Library, Columbia.

[22] Clay to Thomas Speed, May 1, 1831, Henry Clay Papers, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.

[23] Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War*, 219–59.

when Jackson rejected a bill for federal aid to help build the Maysville Road, which ran from Lexington to Maysville in the heart of Clay's Kentucky. The veto, grounded on the constitutional argument that the proposed road would lie solely within the borders of a single state and therefore was not entitled to national aid, deeply angered Clay—and Clay and Webster believed it would anger and alienate the entire West as well.[24] But Jackson's subsequent approval of other internal improvement bills, together with the limited constituency affected by the Maysville bill, mitigated the impact of the veto in the West, and even Kentuckians proved indifferent to the affront.[25] Western congressional support of the president remained strong.

It was Jackson's use of patronage, however, which Webster and other National Republicans relied on most confidently to drive penitent statesmen back to their proper place in the gentleman's opposition. Jackson's "leading measure," Webster asserted in 1829, had been the creation of a party built on patronage. The president's appropriation of "all offices . . . for *his* use, and to reward *his* friends," made "all good men sick of the government." The appointment of "third-rate men," distinguished only by their slavish loyalty to Jackson, insulted and threatened every man of "independence and . . . character."[26] Many Democrats agreed, and privately complained that Jackson's appointments had "disgraced" the country. The "plebian" character[27] of the president's choices struck numerous gentlemen as an offense to "the moral sensibilities of the nation" and as an affront to "every man of honor and intelligence."[28] Jackson's insistence that in a democracy anyone was fit to hold office suggested to his contemporaries that the president meant to displace gentlemen officeholders with partisan functionaries of little status—and that office would be made a reward for party loyalty rather than for talent and virtue.[29] National Republican leaders fully expected senators to reject Jackson's "most objectionable" appointments.[30] Rejection would "break the charm" of Jackson's

[24]Webster to Clay, May 29, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:274–76; Webster to Jeremiah Mason, June 4, 1830, *Writings*, 16:204–5. The Maysville veto "seals the fate of Jackson in all the West," wrote Clay in June. Clay to Peter Porter, June 13, 1830, Peter B. Porter Papers, Buffalo Historical Society, Buffalo, N.Y.; Clay to Edward Everett, June 18, 1830, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

[25]Clay to Everett, August 14, 1830, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

[26]Webster's draft of an article on "Mr. Clay," subsequently published in 1829, in the Webster Papers, Dartmouth.

[27]Cambreleng to Van Buren, March 1, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC.

[28]John Campbell to David Campbell, February 20, March 26, 1829, Campbell Papers.

[29]Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," pp. 455–58.

[30]Clay to Johnston, April 6, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:257; Webster to Ezekiel Webster, February 23, 1829, Webster Papers, Dartmouth.

apparent invincibility, put the "mark" of senatorial rejection on the president and his choices, and "thereby dissolve the party."[31] Webster acknowledged that the "out-door popularity of General Jackson" deterred many congressmen from defeating his nominations, yet he remained confident that the "burning fire of discontent" must "some day break out. When men go so far as to speak warmly against things which they yet feel bound to vote for, we may hope that they will soon go a little further." But, though Jacksonian congressmen grumbled, they did not rebel, and they showed lamentably little "indignation" or "repentance."[32]

By the fall of 1831, the fact was that, despite intraparty rivalries, disquieting economic policies, and appointments unpopular with many congressmen, Jackson's coalition had remained largely intact and National Republican tactics had failed.[33] In part, Jackson had proved far more skillful as a sectional broker than leaders of the opposition cared to acknowledge or admit. In part, Jackson had held the allegiance of dissatisfied leaders because he had declared his intention to seek, and was likely once more to win, the presidency. As long as the president's party was likely to win, it was hard for a politician to desert. The discontented could only hope that Jackson's strength was his personal popularity, and that, once he vacated the presidency, men with talent and strong sectional support would again rule the nation.

II

National Republicans had assumed not only that Jackson's party would dissolve when its leaders divided, but that its disaffected leaders could in turn be united and could draw with them their local followings. But, as the fidelity of Jacksonians in the capital had challenged the hope that the disappointed would desert the president, so the experiences of Webster and Clay in their own localities challenged the assumption that strong sectional leaders could automatically command their local followings.

In Massachusetts, Webster's hegemony rested on the continued alliance of former Federalist and Republican leaders. Strong and influen-

[31] Everett to Levi Lincoln, February 17, 1830, Levi Lincoln Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.; Clay to Everett, August 20, 1831, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

[32] Webster to Warren Dutton, May 9, 1830, *Writings*, 16:500-501; Clay to J. B. Harrison, June 2, 1829, copy, Henry Clay Papers, LC.

[33] In the words of one Clay correspondent, "the quiescent policy, which it was deemed expedient for us to act upon during the last year, . . . is not fitted to make converts." Alexander H. Everett to Clay, October 29, 1830, Henry Clay Papers, LC.

tial personalities—former Republican Levi Lincoln in the governor's chair, Webster in the Senate, and Massachusetts' John Quincy Adams in the White House—attached their personal followers to the coalition, and the disparate group reinforced its authority with appeals to sectional pride. Jacksonians had flung "sneers, contumely, reproach . . . against New England," Webster told a Boston audience in the campaign of 1828. They must not be rewarded. "If there be one among ourselves who can be induced, by any motives, to join in this cry against New England, he disgraces the New England mother who bore him, the New England father who bred and nurtured him." As he would do repeatedly in the future, Webster admonished the voters of Massachusetts: " 'This above all,—to thine own self be true.' "[34] True to themselves, Bay Staters in 1828 gave the National Republicans a patriotic and resounding majority.[35]

The dispute over a protective tariff tested Webster's coalition in Massachusetts and saw the senator again exploit local patriotism to defeat a challenge. Webster, who had reversed his former opposition to protection and voted for the extremely high tariff of 1828,[36] had made his peace with most of Boston's merchants over his vote,[37] but important groups in the state and in the city remained dissatisfied. Dissenters included many shipowners, shipbuilders, and carpenters, and in 1830 they challenged the National Republican nomination of a manufacturer, Nathan Appleton, for congressman from Boston and Suffolk County.[38]

Antitariff men argued that the tariff benefited only the privileged and hurt the workingman. With equal vigor Webster and his colleagues

[34]For the origins of the fusion of Federalist and Republican leaders, see Arthur B. Darling, *Political Changes in Massachusetts, 1824-1848: A Study of Liberal Movements in Politics*, Yale Historical Publications, no. 15 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1925), pp. 41-47, 52-53. For Webster's appeal to New England patriotism, see his "Speech at Faneuil Hall, June 5, 1828," *Writings*, 2:22, 24.

[35]Richard McCormick discusses the general use and importance of sectional allegiances in the presidential contests of 1824-40 in *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 46, 91, 329-32. In 1828, Jacksonians had revived old animosities between Adams, who had deserted the Federalist party twenty years before, and the Federalist wing of the Massachusetts National Republicans. It had been all Webster could do to keep the ancient feud from dividing the party. With Adams' defeat, Webster and his state organization relied more than ever on local patriotism and the firm alliance of leaders to keep the state party united. Lynn W. Turner, *William Plumer of New Hampshire, 1759-1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 332.

[36]For statements of Webster's public positions on the tariff, see *Writings*, 13:5-21, 5:94-149, 228-48, and 2:11-24.

[37]*Ibid.*, 2:11-24.

[38]Darling, *Political Changes in Massachusetts*, pp. 143-46.

contended that all in Massachusetts were workers—"there is scarcely an idler among us"—and that all gained from the protection of the state's industry.[39] But Webster sought as well to shift the issue from the merits of the tariff to the implications of defeat of the tariff candidate. Defeat would be a triumph of "*Nullification.*" It would "show a want of attachment to the Constitution," he told a Boston audience on the eve of the election. Would Massachusetts "depart from N. England, & stand alone? . . . For myself, I shall hold on."[40] Pride and profit convinced the voters of Boston to give a close victory to Webster's hand-picked candidate.[41]

With his state coalition seemingly dependent on appeals to sectional pride, Webster was compelled to be exceedingly cautious in his public support of Henry Clay. Jacksonian partisans had pictured the Southwestern slaveholder as a duelist and profligate; in an anonymous article Webster sought to counter that portrait by depicting Clay as a gentleman and statesman.[42]

Watching carefully for signs of Clay's strength in the West in 1830 and 1831, Webster was repeatedly disappointed. He and Clay fully expected that Jackson's veto of the Maysville Road and other internal improvements projects would bring a resounding rebuke to the president in the Western state elections of 1830—and especially in the legislative contests in Kentucky. Instead, Clay's partisans barely escaped defeat by the Jacksonians. Though backed strenuously by Clay, men "of talent, & much local influence & connexion" won only "very small" majorities. Clay explained that "local causes [and] divisions" had rendered it impossible to make the veto and "the Presidential question every where bear on the election." But the slim victory and further setbacks in Kentucky left Webster "uneasy." "I am sorry to say it," Webster wrote his Massachusetts colleague Levi Lincoln, but "there seems to be . . . something hollow, in Mr. Clay's western support. It gives way, in the moment of trial."[43]

[39] *Boston Columbian Centinel*, October 30, 1830.

[40] Webster's address at Faneuil Hall in October, 1830, is not published in any collection of his speeches. Reports of the speech can be found in the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, November 2, 24, 1830. My quotations are taken from Webster's manuscript notes of the address, found in the Webster Papers, Dartmouth.

[41] Alexander Everett to Clay, October 29, 1830, Henry Clay Papers, LC.

[42] The draft manuscript of this article is in the Webster Papers, Dartmouth. Edward Everett reported publication of the article; see Everett to Clay, September 16, 1829, Edward Everett Letterbooks, MHS.

[43] Clay to Everett, August 14, 1830, Edward Everett Papers, MHS; Clay to Brooke, August 17, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:283; Webster to Levi Lincoln, December 25, 1830, Webster Folder, American Antiquarian Society.

The extent of Webster's public support for Clay in fact depended heavily on Clay's ability to rally the voters of his own section. If Clay demonstrated he could win votes in the West, then a greater commitment to him by the New Englander was worth the risk. If Clay's Western following was unreliable, lavish endorsement of him in parochial New England would burden Webster and Massachusetts National Republicans with the liabilities of a Westerner and a loser. Webster's doubts about Clay's credentials as a presidential candidate persisted, and for the better part of 1830 and 1831 the Massachusetts senator counseled caution when pressed to advance the Kentuckian's candidacy.

Clay, growing steadily more impatient, urged Webster and other opposition leaders to abandon passive resistance to Jackson and to enter his name as the National Republican candidate. Inaction blinded the country to the "incompetency of the President," and submission to Jackson's "most objectionable acts" made a mockery of congressional "dignity [and] independence." In mid-1830 Clay argued that "the time is now past" to "leave the other party to its own divisions." The opposition could no longer "conceal" itself; its friends were growing "uncertain"; "our flag should be unfurled."[44]

Webster responded to Clay's pressure with pleas for continued patience. In early 1830 it was Webster's "firm belief" that, "if we . . . let the Administration . . . have their way, and follow out their own principles, they would be so unpopular that the General could not possibly be re-elected." A formal nomination by Clay's friends in the capital "would not be popular enough in its character and origin, to do good" and "would excite jealousies . . . which are now fast dying away."[45] Webster advised his Massachusetts colleagues to turn away from "larger subjects" and to concentrate on uniting the party in New England.[46] When Clay's friends in Washington asked Webster to draft a formal "nominating document" in early 1831, he at first did "nothing." Only after lengthy prodding did he finally consent to draft a paper attacking Jackson and naming Clay the opposition's standard-bearer. Even then, so tepid and ambiguous was Webster's language—he made no

[44]Clay to Johnston, April 6, 30, 1830; Clay to Adam Beatty, July 19, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:257, 265, 281; Clay to Edward Everett, August 14, 1830, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

[45]Webster to Clay, April 18, May 29, 1830, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:259-60, 275; see also Webster to John Woods, April 24, 1830, Webster Papers, NHHS.

[46]Webster to Levi Lincoln, December 25, 1830, Lincoln Papers. Webster also blocked an attempted nomination of Clay by members of the Massachusetts National Republican party. Edward Everett to Alexander Everett, December 28, 1830, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

direct mention of Clay—that party stalwarts were in doubt about whom the manifesto had nominated.[47]

If Webster did indeed have doubts about Clay as the party nominee—as distinct from doubts about the timing of Clay's nomination—they seemed fully warranted by the outcome of the state elections of 1831. Again the opposition was beaten badly in the Western states; again the party suffered a close call in Clay's Kentucky. Clay himself was "mortified" by the result and concluded that his failure in the West made his "election . . . hopeless." He offered to withdraw, but was dissuaded by friends who argued that his abdication would shatter the party in critical states.[48]

In the fall of 1831, however, Webster abruptly asked Clay to reassume the parliamentary leadership of the opposition—and the Massachusetts senator seemed to recognize that Clay's return to Washington would clench his candidacy. Through intermediaries Webster quashed all talk that he himself wished to displace Clay as the candidate. The news of party setbacks in the West only rendered his zeal for Clay "*more decided* and open than . . . ever . . . before."[49] Whatever "regret was felt in this quarter, that [the Kentucky] results were not more strongly in our favor," Webster wrote Clay in October, 1831, was offset by the "debt of gratitude to the good men of Kentucky, for the firmness with which they have breasted" the Jacksonian "storm." Webster called on Clay to end his retirement and return to the capital. "I speak in unaffected sincerity and truth, when I say that I should rejoice, personally, to meet you in the Senate." It would be an "infinite gratification," Webster concluded, "to have . . . your lead."[50]

What prompted an end to Webster's hesitation and called forth his effusive plea for the Kentuckian's leadership was a new and ominous threat to New England interests. South Carolina had initiated steps to make good on its threat of nullification; Jacksonians had indicated they were ready to modify the "Tariff of Abominations," untouched since 1828. A "formidable" coalition, Webster reported to Clay, was preparing to assault not "only the Tariff, but the Constitution itself." "Every thing is to be debated, as if nothing had ever been settled."

[47]The document was published anonymously in the *Washington National Intelligencer*, March 5, 1831. See also Edward Everett to Alexander Everett, March 10, 1831, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

[48]Clay to Johnston, August 20, 1831, Henry Clay Papers, LC; Edward Everett to Alexander Everett, December 8, 1831, Edward Everett Papers, MHS.

[49]Edward Everett to Josiah S. Johnston, August 26, 1831, Johnston Papers; G. Eustis to Clay, September 12, 1831, Henry Clay Papers, LC; Alexander Everett to Henry Shaw, September 25, 1831, *ibid.*

[50]Webster to Clay, October 5, 1831, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:318.

Whatever the limits of Clay's authority in the West, Webster, New England, and the opposition needed his support and parliamentary mastery in the capital. Wrote Webster to Clay, "we need your arm in the fight."[51]

Clay returned to Washington in December, 1831, as the new senator from Kentucky, and, with his coming, passive resistance to Andrew Jackson formally ended. That tactic, in fact, had long since proved bankrupt. Whether Jackson's congressional coalition could survive the more active assault that Clay had long advocated, and that he now prepared to make, remained to be seen. At issue, too, were the consequences Clay's success might have. The experiences of both Webster and Clay had cast doubt on the premise that leaders could automatically command their local followings. As Clay worked skillfully to revive congressional independence and to detach congressional leaders from the Democratic coalition, he tested whether citizens would follow their leaders in defecting from Andrew Jackson.

III

In 1832 the National Republican coalition dissolved, and in all but name the Whig party emerged. The convictions of the National Republicans—a belief that talent should rule, a corollary that unfit men would rule poorly, and a conviction that national politics was the business of gentlemen leaders—transferred to the Whigs. The success of Andrew Jackson and his political party had challenged the validity of these beliefs and had undermined the power of those who shared them. Stressing new issues, which clarified the emergence of party rule and the growth of presidential power, the gentlemen of the opposition swelled their ranks and put to the country the question of the place and the power of traditional political leadership.

Leading members of the new coalition included Webster, Clay, and John C. Calhoun. The alliance of the two patrons of high tariff and internal improvements with the antitariff nullifier of South Carolina was not wholly anticipated and was never comfortable. Mutual hostility to executive encroachment on congressional authority made cooperation desirable, and the temporary resolution of the tariff dispute made the tenuous alliance possible.

Cooperation between the nationalists and the nullifier first came in early 1832. Since the moment of Jackson's inauguration, his vice-president, John C. Calhoun, and his secretary of state, Martin Van

[51] *Ibid.*

Buren of New York, had been rivals for his favor and for the right to succeed him. Calhoun had lost the contest, but lingering bitterness had plagued the party and the cabinet, and, to end the anomosity, Van Buren had persuaded Jackson in the spring of 1831 to accept his resignation and to reorganize the cabinet. Jackson had named a new cabinet thoroughly hostile to Calhoun and had appointed Van Buren minister to England.[52] Van Buren's nomination came before the Senate for its approval in January, 1832, and Webster, Clay, and Calhoun joined to oppose the appointment. The reasons for rejection were dubious, but they brightly illuminated the opposition's strategy for the year ahead. Webster and others asserted that, while secretary of state, Van Buren had instructed the previous minister to England to disregard the position of the preceeding administration on a commercial dispute with Britain. The minister was to inform the British that the American public had repudiated the "late administration" and had brought to power a new government free to act differently in the controversy. Webster declared that Van Buren's instructions had sacrified "true patriotism and sound American feeling . . . to mere party"; the appointment was therefore not a "fit and proper nomination." What was at issue, however, was more than a single appointment. Van Buren was the symbol of the new breed of politician who promoted "the interests of his party at the expense of those of his country." He was the representative of all the manipulators who had driven "statesmanship" and "dignity" and "elevated regard for country" from the citadel of power. The man and all he stood for required public "rebuke."[53] The Senate vote was a tie, and, as vice-president, Calhoun cast the deciding nay vote; he exulted that Van Buren's defeat "will kill him, sir, kill him dead." In fact, however, Van Buren's rejection made him a party martyr and insured his nomination as the Democratic candidate for vice-president. The opposition was delighted nonetheless. To place the status of statesmen before "every independent freeman in the United States" was "exactly the point."[54]

For cooperation among opposition senators to continue in 1832, however, the tariff dispute had to be settled somehow. South Carolina's threat to nullify the highly protective Tariff of 1828 and the unavoidable specter of rebellion implicit in that threat brought the issue to a head. Almost all agreed that the earlier "Tariff of Abominations" was a

[52] J. Curtis, *Martin Van Buren*, pp. 34–37.

[53] Daniel Webster, "Remarks . . . on the Nomination of Mr. Van Buren as Minister to Great Britain, January 24, 1832," *Writings*, 6:89–96.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 96; Clay to Francis Brooke, February 21, 1832, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:326.

"monster" and that duties must be reduced.[55] Even Webster and the New England manufacturers favored "conciliation," provided that the "principle of protection" was preserved.[56]

Exactly who would lead the movement for tariff cuts and how deep the reductions would be was uncertain in 1832. Calhoun, who had resigned from the vice-presidency and had returned to the Senate in 1832 to speak for South Carolina, had hoped that Jackson would take the lead in arranging a compromise. Jackson's secretary of the treasury did in fact recommend a general reduction of duties that would very nearly have vitiated protection, but the absence of direct presidential leadership led Calhoun to condemn Jackson for an "ignominious and criminal silence."[57] Clay meanwhile sought to save protection by proposing cuts in duties on goods marginal to manufacturers; he tried to persuade the South that such a tariff would reduce its burdens while aiding the factories of the North and bringing in revenue for internal improvements of the West.[58]

Ultimately, a more genuine compromise emerged which, though it fully satisfied neither protectionists nor nullifiers, effectively quieted the tariff question for most of 1832. The compromise measures, arranged largely through the efforts of Jacksonian leaders, won the backing of protectionist congressmen, whose negative votes might otherwise have killed the bill, as well as the support of many Southerners who feared that the lack of any tariff law at all would throw all the Southern states into the arms of the nullifiers. The result of this improbable coalition was a "most unexpected & astonishing" two-to-one majority for the tariff compromise in both the House and the Senate.[59]

With the tariff controversy temporarily settled, Webster and Clay were able to focus on a new issue, the issue they thought would most likely accomplish the long-sought goal of disrupting Jackson's coalition. No institution was more sacred or central in the established circles of politics and finance than the Bank of the United States. Its operations were coextensive with the Union, it lent liberally to men of character

[55]Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, July 31, 1831, deCoppett Collection, Princeton, University, Princeton, N.J.; Louis McLane to Gulian V. Verplanck, November 6, 1831, Gulian V. Verplanck Papers, New York Historical Society, N.Y., N.Y.; Clay to Brooke, October 4, 1831, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:314; Jackson to Van Buren, December 6, 1831, Van Buren Papers, LC.

[56]Nathan Appleton to Harrison Gray Otis, January 11, 1832; and Webster to Otis, [July 7, 1832]; Harrison Gray Otis Papers, MHS.

[57]Calhoun to Ingham, January 13, 1832, Calhoun Papers, South Caroliniana Collection.

[58]Van Deusen, *Henry Clay*, pp. 251-53.

[59]Edward Everett to Alexander Everett, July 1, 1832, Edward Everett Papers, MHS; Webster to Otis, [July 7, 1832], Otis Papers.

and promise, and it had found uncommon favor among both parties in both halls of Congress.[60] In the West and the South especially, where the cause of the tariff and of internal improvements had brought disappointing results, the Bank had made extensive investments[61] and presumably could count on extensive support among those interested in its credit. Jackson, in successive annual messages to Congress, had indicated his hostility to the Bank and had called for reform of the Bank's "abuses" before its charter came up for renewal in 1836. There was every reason to think that, if the Bank applied for early recharter, Democratic friends of the Bank would combine with the opposition to pass the bill. There was equal reason to calculate that the president, given his earlier attacks on the Bank, would veto a recharter and thus allow the opposition to make both the Bank and his expected veto the major issues in the coming presidential campaign.

Having anticipated a Jackson veto, most National Republican leaders now welcomed it. A veto would allow them to draw into the vortex of politics thousands who had a vested interest in the loans and the stability made possible by a national bank. It would allow the National Republicans to tap the energies of hundreds of men of business and talent who hitherto had been indifferent to politics and untroubled by Jackson. It would, thought Webster, surely anger voters in the crucial state of Pennsylvania, where the Bank was located.[62] It would likewise alienate "Jackson members from the West . . . sensible to the benefits" the Bank brought "their Constituents."[63] The Bank, Webster judged, had an "inherent popularity that will and must carry it through."[64]

Yet, though he sensed the advantages the Bank issues would bring the opposition, Webster seemed far less sanguine than his colleagues over the "bright" prospect[65] of a presidential veto. He was fully aware that a veto would permit the opposition publicly to expose the changes that Andrew Jackson had wrought in American politics. But he remained privately uncertain whether the opposition should make Jackson's revolution the central issue of the 1832 campaign.

Personally, Webster believed that Jackson had brought "excessive party spirit"—the "greatest danger . . . of our time"—into government.

[60] See Jean Alexander Wilburn, *Biddle's Bank: The Crucial Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967).

[61] For a report on the sectional distribution of Bank funds, see U.S., Congress, *Senate Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., 1832, S. Doc. 27 ("Report of the Secretary of the Treasury").

[62] Webster to Harrison Gray Otis, June 8, 1832, Otis Papers.

[63] Joseph Kent to Richard Smith, January 14, 1832, Etting Papers, HSP.

[64] Webster to Stephen White, June 28, 1832, *Writings*, 17:520.

[65] Clay to Hezekiah C. Niles, July 8, 1832, Henry Clay Papers, LC.

The president and his "sinister and selfish" partisans had taken the country far from the ideal form of leadership, where independent men, unafraid of being "outnumbered, or outvoted, or outmanaged, or outclamored," acted "honestly for universal good."[66] Webster knew all too well that Jackson and his party had undermined the bases of authority of leaders like himself. The president had used the veto power to deny legislative rewards to the constituents of congressional leaders; Jackson's followers had used the press to assassinate the character and standing of gentlemen opposed to him.[67] Appointments of "*third-rate men*" loyal only to the president had helped sustain the party organization and the network of newspapers that had brought Jackson to power.[68] It was fully possible, Webster knew, that Jackson had found a way to maintain a political alliance that dispensed with the support of men of talent and of powerful sectional leaders. Webster might hope that Jackson's party would collapse when the popular Old Hero retired in 1836, but there was the ultimate danger that the president's machine would survive him.[69] Some less popular man, bereft of talent but deft at political management, might use the Jacksonian organization to prevent the rightful resurgence of gentlemen leaders.

Exactly how to combat the Jacksonian challenge seemed still to trouble Webster. Everything in his experience as a Federalist suggested that opposition only fed partisanship. He had urged for a decade that balm, not strife, would soften party lines. Perhaps such doubts accounted for the fact that, while Webster's comrades felt a Bank veto would "finish" the president[70] and welcomed it exultingly, Webster confined himself to conjecture over whether Jackson would challenge Congress and so powerful an institution as the Bank of the United States.[71]

With the aid of Democratic congressmen the bill for the Bank's recharter passed on July 4 and within a week, as expected, Jackson vetoed the bill. His veto message exceeded all the expectations of the opposition. It boldly asserted the president's right to override the judgment of Congress and even that of the Supreme Court in determining

[66] Daniel Webster, "The Character of Washington, February 22, 1832," *Writings*, 2:75, 79.

[67] For Webster's views of the Jacksonian press as the villifier and traducer of "character," see articles he wrote for the *Washington National Intelligencer*, August 2, 7, 11, 1832; and his "Speech at Worcester, October 12, 1832," *Writings*, 2:114.

[68] *United States Telegraph*, December 4, 1829.

[69] See the series of editorials written for the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, cited in the *Washington National Intelligencer*, October 20, 1832.

[70] Clay to Niles, July 8, 1832, Henry Clay Papers, LC.

[71] Webster to Biddle, May 14, 1832, Nicholas Biddle Papers, LC; Webster to James W. Paige, June 5, 1832, James W. Paige Papers, MHS.

the constitutionality and utility of laws. It suggested that the congressmen who had voted for the bill meant to perpetuate a monopoly and to give unfair advantages to the privileged over the poor. It appealed over the heads of congressmen to the people to sustain the president.[72] Jackson's message, gloated the president of the Bank, had the ring of a "manifesto" to a "mob." It would end "the domination of these miserable people."[73]

Indignantly, Webster replied to Jackson's veto in the Senate. The president had demonstrated his contempt for Congress and had sought to inflame the people against their representatives. Jackson's logic and constitutional arguments were unworthy of notice by "respectable" men.[74] The president's message, Webster warned, "calls us to the contemplation of a future which little resembles the past." It "extends the grasp of executive pretension over every power of the government." The message denied "the authority of the Supreme Court to decide on the constitutional questions"; it "denied to Congress the authority of judging what powers may be constitutionally conferred on a bank." But this was "not all." The veto

> manifestly seeks to inflame the poor against the rich; it wantonly attacks whole classes of people, for the purpose of turning against them the prejudices and the resentments of other classes.

Though a "state paper," the veto found "no topic too exciting for its use, no passion too inflamable for its address and solicitation."[75] The question before Congress and the country was now whether "the people of the United States are mere . . . man-worshippers."[76]

Though seemingly content that the issue was now joined, Webster privately was alarmed at the extent to which Jackson had coddled the "prejudice" and "passion" of the voters. He could handle Jackson's constitutional argument, though it was "such miserable stuff" that he hated to "condescend to give it respectful notice." Yet, as Webster drafted and redrafted his reply to the veto for distribution to the country, he was "not satisifed." He wondered if as propaganda his

[72] James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789–1905*, 11 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1907), 2:577–78, 582, 590–91; Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," pp. 448–49.

[73] Biddle to Clay, August 1, 1832, *The Works of Henry Clay*, 4:341.

[74] Daniel Webster, "The Presidential Veto of the United States Bank Bill, July 11, 1832," *Writings*, 6:180.

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 179–80. For Webster's reiteration of these objections during the campaign of 1832, see his "Speech at Worcester," *ibid.*, 2:98, 106–7, 112.

[76] Webster, "The Presidential Veto," *ibid.*, 6:155.

address was "too *forensic*, too much in the manner of legal argument, for general reading, or extensive usefulness."[77]

Well might Webster and his colleagues have wondered further to what extent their provocation of the president had helped fulfill their worst premonitions. How far had they forced Jackson toward a strategy of "exciting the multitude"? How much had they compelled the president to seek the aid of the people in order "that he might be in a situation to despise the leaders"?[78] Before the issue of recharter was forced in 1832, the president had regarded the Bank and the leaders of Congress with ambivalent suspicion. It was challenge that crystallized his hostility and hastened his orientation to the voters alone. It "seems to me," Jackson wrote a trusted friend ten days after the veto, "that providence has had a hand in bringing forward the subject at this time to preserve the republic from [the Bank's] thraldom and corrupting influence."[79]

Victory in 1832 went to the General, and in retrospect the results of Jackson's second triumph seem clear. The contest fixed the Bank and executive encroachment of the power of Congress as paramount issues for a decade. In turn, those issues crystallized party premises about who should govern. The National Republican crusade for the Bank and the prerogatives of Congress exposed the bond between the opposition and the established leaders of politics and finance. That strategy deepened Jackson's suspicion of the wealthy and the wise, spurred him to call on the people to save him and themselves from the privileged, and sped the change of Democratic orientation from leaders to voters. Jackson succeeded, and left the opposition disabled by its own strengths. Its appeal attracted the very men who were least fit for the new politics—those who were unwilling to blemish honor by making demeaning pleas to the voter, those who were reluctant to yield command for the good of organization. The election allied and antiquated a whole breed of politicians.

[77]Webster to Biddle, August 25, September 24, 1832, Biddle Papers, LC.

[78]Martin Van Buren, "Notes on Conversations with Jackson," n.d., Van Buren Papers, LC.

[79]Jackson to Amos Kendall, July 23, 1832, Andrew Jackson Papers, LC; Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," pp. 458–59.